



Common Stress Reactions from Critical Incidents

“Critical Incident defined: Any situation faced by emergency personnel that causes them to experience unusually strong emotional reactions which have the ability to interfere with their ability to function or perform duties effectively. These are normal reactions that normal people have to abnormal events.”

Physical Reactions

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|------------------------------|---------------------|-------------------|
| Gastro-intestinal discomfort | Fatigue | Rapid heart beat |
| Cramps | Headaches | Nausea |
| Breathing problems | Chills | Dizziness |
| Sweating | Increased illnesses | Chest pain |
| Impaired immune system | Shock | Tingling in limbs |

Emotional Reactions

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| Disturbed thought | Grief | Guilt |
| Denial | Fear | Panic |
| Depression | Apprehension | Anxiety |
| Powerlessness | Anger/rage | Survivor guilt |
| Sadness | Helplessness | Overly sensitive |

Cognitive Reactions

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| Lowered concentration | Orientation | Decision making |
| Memory | Hyper-alertness | Sleep problems |
| Nightmares | Intrusive images | Problem solving |
| Preoccupation with trauma or event | Apathy | Perfectionism |
| Thoughts of self-harm or harm to others | | |

Behavioral Reactions

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| Startle easy | Speech | Restlessness |
| Avoidance | Alcohol | Outbursts |
| Appetite changes | Withdrawal | Hygiene |
| Blaming | Irritability | Moody |
| Accident proneness | Nightmares | |

Spiritual Reactions

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| Questioning faith | Anger | Disassociation |
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Be aware of any of the above signs & symptoms. Continue to talk to others involved in the incident about your reactions; it will aid you and your co-worker. The debriefing/-fusing is merely the initial step in the process, providing “emotional first aid” to the emergency worker. If there is a need for further debriefing sessions, one-on-one peer meetings, or employee assistance intervention, please let your immediate supervisor know and the CISM team will follow up with you.