



Critical Incidents / Trauma

You have recently experienced a traumatic or critical incident. In these situations, it is normal and even necessary for you to put aside your own feelings and reactions in order to function effectively in an emergency. Afterwards, you may experience minor reactions to the event, or a variety of physical, emotional, and behavioral reactions, which are disturbing.

When an event is overwhelming, reality is difficult to accept or make sense of. You may find it difficult to stop thinking or talking about the incident. You may also experience sleep disturbances, appetite change, or withdraw from people.

Common Physical / Behavioral reactions:

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| * Restlessness | * Fatigue | * Muscle/Body Tension |
| * Sleep Disturbances | * Headaches | * Nightmares or Flashbacks |
| * Nausea | * Dizziness | * Eating Problems |
| * Tremors / Shaking | * Sexual Problems | * Increased Blood Pressure |

Significant trauma is usually followed by one or more emotional or social reactions that may vary in intensity. They may include:

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| * Anxiety | * Avoiding reminders of the situation |
| * Sadness / Depression | * Feeling lost or abandonment |
| * Guilt | * Moodiness or irritability |
| * Feeling Numb | * Reliving the incident over and over |
| * Anger or feelings of rage | * Desire to withdraw from family and friends |
| * Memory Problems | * Difficulty with concentration |

Your beliefs or spirituality may also be challenged. This may include:

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| * Emptiness | * Doubt | * Loss of Meaning |
| * Unforgiving | * Martyrdom | * Loss of Direction |
| * Cynicism and apathy | * Loss of Faith | * Needing to prove self |

It is best during the first few days of the traumatic incident to focus on managing stress symptoms, rather than trying to eliminate them. Remember, the stress symptoms are *“normal during this initial period of time”*. Your reactions are not so uncommon in response to such a terrible event. You are not crazy. **You are just experiencing common reactions to an abnormal event.** It's okay to feel rotten. Give yourself permission to feel it. It's also okay to feel good, and to share both of these feelings with others.

Ways to manage stress:

- Keep to your normal routine. Don't make drastic changes in your life. Keep yourself occupied.
- Take time to relax (listen to music, read a book) and alternate with periods of physical activities. These activities will help ease your physical reactions.
- Avoid the use of alcohol or drugs. Mind-altering substances will only complicate life for you. Drink lots of water, fruit juices, etc, but avoid caffeine.
- Eat sensibly and regularly. Stay away from junk foods and sugars. Pasta and other carbohydrates are especially beneficial.
- Sit quietly in a comfortable chair. Close your eyes and take a few deep breaths. Picture yourself at a peaceful beach or country setting. Allow yourself 10-20 minutes to relax in this directed relaxation.