

# After a Critical Incident

What to expect, what helps, and when to reach for more support.

## 01 Immediate Reactions

Symptoms may appear immediately after a critical incident, or a few hours or even a few days later. The symptoms of a stress reaction may last a few days or a few weeks.

Common symptoms include

- **Tension.** Physical and emotional tension, muscle tremors or twitches, unable to sit still.
- **Fatigue.** Decreased energy, insomnia, or a desire to sleep continuously.
- **Sleep disturbances.** Insomnia, bad dreams, nightmares, or waking up too early.
- **Diet.** Change in eating or drinking habits, increased or decreased intake.
- **Cognitive.** Recurring images or memories, confusion, poor problem solving, poor concentration, intrusive thoughts, uncertainty.
- **Negative feelings.** Feelings that may come without warning: profound sadness, helplessness, fear, anxiety, anger, rage, discouragement, frustration, vulnerability, depression, self-blame, guilt.
- **Behavioral.** Increased impulsive behavior, risk taking, working more, poor hygiene.
- **Interpersonal.** Increased irritability, insensitivity, blaming others, withdrawal, hyperalertness, emotional outbursts, anger at God.
- **Physical.** Elevated blood pressure, headaches, dizziness, fast heart rate, chest pain, nausea, queasiness, vomiting, other gastrointestinal problems.

## 02 Stress Management Techniques

- Eat nutritious foods and a balanced diet
- Get plenty of physical exercise to reduce the physical and psychological effects of stress
- Moderate your intake of caffeine
- Avoid alcohol or other depressants
- Keep rested. Remain on a schedule for sleep and other relaxing activities
- Avoid changes in your daily routine
- Find a friend or a support source to talk to about the incident
- Do not make any significant life-altering decisions for at least 30 days
- Find time, even an hour, to do something that you enjoy

## 03 Other Things to Remember

Have grace with yourself. Even though the event may be over, it is normal to experience continued symptoms. Occasionally the critical incident is so painful that professional assistance may be necessary. This does not mean mental instability or weakness. It means that particular event was too powerful for the person to manage on their own.

## 04 Signs It May Be Time for Additional Support

- Persistent anger or explosive outbursts
- Significant withdrawal from family
- Heavy increase in alcohol use
- Talking about hopelessness
- Emotional numbness lasting weeks
- Statements like "I should have done more," "I can't shut it off," or "I don't care anymore."