



## Critical Incident Stress Symptoms and After Care:

Definition of a critical incident: Any event that has a stressful impact significant enough as to overwhelm the usually effective coping skills of an individual.

Critical incidents are abrupt, powerful events that fall outside the range of ordinary human experiences.

Examples: Evacuation/relocation, robbery, mob violence, traffic accident, death of a loved one, being held at gunpoint, sexual assault or threat of sexual assault.

### Symptoms of usual coping mechanisms being overwhelmed:

- **Physical:**
  - Change in sleep habits-inability to sleep/wanting to sleep all the time
  - Easily or frequently ill
  - Indigestion
  - Change in eating habits- more or less
  - Lack of energy
  - Nervous movements-Tremors of hands, foot tapping
  - Chronic headaches
  - Chest pain and high blood pressure
  - Accident prone
- **Mental**
  - Diminished ability to make decisions-tunnel vision
  - Struggles with simple or mundane tasks
  - Zoning out- middle of conversation or important work
  - Forgetfulness
  - Sudden change in mental priority-normally detailed person becomes forgetful
  - High anxiety or worry
- **Interpersonal**
  - Increased conflict
  - Slow work performance
  - Feeling abandoned/rejected
  - Social withdrawal
  - Alienation
  - Distrust or suspicion
  - Blaming
  - Over-protectiveness
- **Emotional**
  - Inappropriate emotional response-anger or tears over a minor issue, laughing excessively
  - Depression
  - Nervousness
  - Guilt or Blame
  - Helplessness
  - Despair
  - Grief or sadness
  - Fear or terror
  - Irritability
- **Spiritual**
  - Spiritual disconnection
  - Questioning faith, confusion in faith
  - Anger
  - Withdrawing from faith community
  - Increased awareness of morality
  - Guilt for feelings or emotion: anger, hate, revenge, relief

### Ways to help or actions to encourage:

- **Physical**
  - Healthy eating habits
  - Time off of work
  - Rest
  - Avoid caffeine/alcohol
  - Avoid unnecessary medication
  - Exercise
  - Rescue breathing
- **Mental**
  - Time off of work
  - Peer to peer support
  - Opportunity to share story/debrief
  - Validate symptoms
  - Encourage involvement in different tasks/celebrate completion of task
- **Interpersonal**
  - Consistent communication with team
  - Encourage group activities
  - Support and encourage conflict resolution
- **Emotional**
  - Validate reality of feelings
  - Peer to peer support
  - Family support
  - Watch for and avoid isolation
  - Encourage service to others
- **Spiritual**
  - Validate struggle
  - Peer to peer support
  - Prayer for and with
  - Consistent reaching out
  - Integrating spiritual disciplines
  - Spiritual formation coaching
  - Walk in grace
  - Set good boundaries

