

**You have experienced a traumatic event or a critical incident**

*Any incident that causes emergency service personnel to experience unusually strong emotional reactions which may interfere with their ability to function either at the scene or later.*

Even though the event may be over, you may now be experiencing or may experience later, some strong emotional or physical reactions. It is very common, in fact quite *normal*, for people to experience emotional aftershocks when they have passed through a horrible event.

Sometimes the emotional after-shocks (or stress reactions) appear immediately after the traumatic event and sometimes they may appear later. In some cases weeks or months may pass before the stress reactions appear.

The signs and symptoms of a stress reaction may last a few days, a few weeks or a few months and occasionally longer depending on the severity of the traumatic event.

**With understanding and the support of loved ones the stress reactions usually pass more quickly. Occasionally, the traumatic event is so painful that professional assistance from a counselor may be necessary. This does not imply craziness or weakness. It simply indicates that the particular event was just too powerful for the person to manage by themselves.**

**The following are common reactions to a critical incident:**

**Spiritual**

Anger at God, questioning of basic beliefs, loss of meaning and purpose, uncharacteristic religious involvement, sense of isolation from God, anger at clergy

**Physical - may require medical intervention**

Nausea/vomiting  
Chills  
Profuse sweating  
Thirst  
Muscle tremors  
Dizziness  
Fainting  
Headaches  
Elevated BP  
Difficult breathing  
Chest pains

**Behavioral**

Impulsive behaviors  
Change in activity  
Change in appetite  
Increased alcohol, smoking, drugs  
Pacing  
Stuttering, rapid speech  
Inability to rest  
Withdrawal from others  
Antisocial acts  
Change in sexual behavior  
Hypervigilance

**Cognitive**

Confusion  
Inability to concentrate  
Intrusive images/flashbacks  
Poor decisions  
Memory problems  
Blaming others  
Nightmares  
Uncertain of time/date/place

**Emotional**

Fear, anxiety, panic  
Guilt  
Grief  
Denial  
Agitation  
Uncertainty  
Irritability  
Anger, rage  
Numbing  
Mood swings  
Unexplained weeping

You may or may not experience these symptoms. Reactions to a critical incident are “normal reactions to an abnormal event”. Most people react differently from one another. Your reaction may depend on your personality, your life outside of work, and other stress you have experienced in the past. Stress can be cumulative resulting in more intense reactions to those who have had other critical incidents.

**Critical Incident Stress Management [CISM] can help to prevent or lessen reactions.**

Critical Incident interventions may be done individually or in groups. Critical Incident Stress Debriefing is done in a confidential group setting. Debriefing enables those involved in the incident to help their co-workers deal with the event and to support each other.

**The Carroll County CISM team consists of trained volunteers committed to supporting Carroll County fire and emergency medical services personnel.**

The Carroll CISM team has fire, police, EMS and dispatch peers who understand the challenge of emergency work and mental health professionals who assist the team.

**The responders to this incident were:**

Please contact the team at 410 386 2260 if we can be of further assistance.

## How to Help Yourself

- ✓ WITHIN THE FIRST 24 - 48 HOURS, periods of appropriate physical exercise, alternated with relaxation will alleviate some of the physical reactions.
- ✓ Structure your time - keep busy.
- ✓ You're normal and having normal reactions - don't label yourself crazy.
- ✓ Talk to people - talk is the most healing medicine.
- ✓ Beware of *numbing* the pain with overuse of drugs or alcohol, you don't need to complicate this with a substance abuse problem.
- ✓ Reach out - people do care.
- ✓ Maintain as normal a schedule as possible.
- ✓ Spend time with others.
- ✓ Help your co-workers as much as possible by sharing feelings and checking out how they are doing.
- ✓ Give yourself permission to feel rotten and share your feelings with others.
- ✓ Keep a journal, write your way through those sleepless hours.
- ✓ Do healthy things that feel good to you.
- ✓ Realize that those around you may also be under stress.
- ✓ Don't make any big life changes.
- ✓ Do make as many daily decisions as possible which will give you a feeling of control over your life, i.e.,

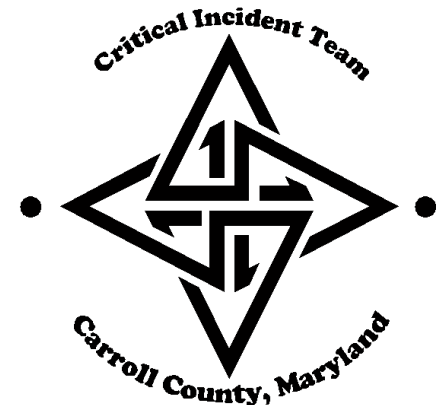
if someone asks you what you want to eat - answer them even if you are not sure.

- ✓ Get plenty of rest.
- ✓ Reoccurring thoughts, dreams or flashbacks are normal - don't try to fight them - they'll decrease over time and become less painful.
- ✓ Eat well-balanced and regular meals (even if you don't feel like it). Drink extra healthy fluids, especially water.

## How Family and Friends Can Help

- ✓ Listen carefully.
- ✓ Spend time with the traumatized person.
- ✓ Offer your assistance and a listening ear if they have not asked for help.
- ✓ Reassure them that they are safe.
- ✓ Help them with everyday tasks like cleaning, cooking, caring for the family, minding children.
- ✓ Give them some private time.
- ✓ Don't take their anger or other feelings personally.
- ✓ Don't tell them that they are "lucky it wasn't worse" - traumatized people are not consoled by those statements. Instead, tell them that you are sorry such an event has occurred and you want to understand and assist them.

## The Carroll County Critical Incident Stress Management Team



## Helping Yourself And Others After A Critical Incident