

## CRITICAL INCIDENT INFORMATION SHEET



You or someone you care about has been through an extremely difficult situation. An **acute stress reaction** is frequently related to a specific traumatic event or serious loss (death of a loved one, experiencing and/or witnessing a traumatic incident, etc.).

A stress reaction is an important signal – it is your body’s way of coping with the temporary state of being overwhelmed by a situation. The duration of the symptoms (hours, days, weeks, or months) depends on your personal circumstances. However, once properly addressed, most acute stress reactions will significantly lessen within 24 – 72 hours and a thoughtful combination of information, support, and resources can significantly lessen the overall long-term impact.

Some common signs and symptoms of an acute stress reaction are:

<u>Physical</u>	<u>Cognitive</u>	<u>Emotional</u>	<u>Behavioral</u>
Rapid heart rate Elevated blood pressure Increased breathing rate Profuse sweating Nausea Dizziness Muscle tremors Twitches Head aches Thirst Chills Fatigue Muscle weakness Grinding of teeth Visual difficulties Vomiting Voiding of GI track Fainting *Chest pain *Difficulty breathing *Shock symptoms, etc.  *Needs immediate medical evaluation.	Poor &/or Impaired: ▶ Concentration ▶ Problem solving ▶ Attention ▶ Decision making ▶ Abstract thinking Memory problems Confusion Heightened awareness &/or sensitivity Heightened &/or lowered alertness Difficulty identifying familiar objects or people Loss of time, place, or person orientation Disturbed thinking Morbid thinking Nightmares Intrusive images, etc.	Shocked, numb Indifference/cut off Denial Feeling overwhelmed “Inappropriate” emotional response Indecisiveness Loss of control Intense anger/rage Blame (self &/or other) Guilt Hate Irritability Agitation Anxiety Apprehension Fear Grief Extreme sadness Depression Relief, etc.	Increased &/or Decreased: ▶ Appetite ▶ Sleep ▶ Sex drive ▶ Drug/alcohol cravings ▶ Energy level Change in activity Change in speech Change in usual communications Emotional outbursts Withdrawal Crying Non-specific bodily complaints Somatization, body aches Internalizing Intensified Startle Reflex Hyper alert to environment Inability to rest Pacing Erratic movements Anti-social acts Suspiciousness, etc.

Any of the symptoms above may indicate the need for a medical evaluation. **When in doubt, contact a physician.** However, most of the above symptoms can be common reactions to extremely difficult circumstances, and with proper support, they will quickly stabilize and significantly diminish over time.

Remember, you are a **NORMAL** person, having **COMMON** reactions to an extremely difficult situation.

### CHIRON CENTER, INC.’S CRISIS RESPONSE TEAM (CRT)

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**Potential Ways to Reduce a Stress Reaction:**

- ▶ Four natural physiological stress relievers are: **laughing, crying, exercise, and touch**. The more you can include these in your life, the greater the potential for reduced stress levels.
- ▶ Especially within the first 24 – 48 hours (if possible), include periods of 20 – 30 minutes of strenuous physical exercise alternated with relaxation to alleviate some of the physical reactions.
- ▶ Drink lots and lots and lots of **water**.
- ▶ Eat well-balanced and regular meals (even if you do not feel like it).
- ▶ Get plenty of rest.
- ▶ Be aware of wanting to alter yourself with caffeine, nicotine, drugs, or alcohol. These chemicals tend to intensify the physiological stress reactions you are already experiencing.
- ▶ Do things that feel good to you: read, write, pray/meditate, listen to music, walk, sit quietly, cook, watch a movie, take a hot shower/bath, get a massage, do progressive relaxation & deep breathing exercises, etc.
- ▶ Talk and spend time with others – many find that talking is the most healing medicine.
- ▶ Realize those around you may also be under stress.
- ▶ Allow yourself some down time to just relax and temporarily do nothing. However...
- ▶ Maintain as normal schedule as possible – structure your time and keep busy.
- ▶ Make as many daily decisions as you can. This will give you a sense of control over your life (i.e. if someone asks you what you want to eat – give an answer even if you are not sure).
- ▶ Postpone *major* life decisions (moving, leaving the job, ending a relationship, making major financial investments, etc.) for a minimum of 30 days.
- ▶ Recurring thoughts, dreams, or flashbacks are normal. Typically they are just signals that your body needs to further process the details of the event(s). Find constructive ways to understand and integrate these details (talk, write, draw, pray, meditate, etc.).
- ▶ If you get “stuck,” consider getting additional support from friends, family, a trauma specialist, a support group, clergy, and/or your physician – let the helpers do their job to serve you. It can make a significant difference.

**How Can I Help My Loved One:**

- ▶ There is no “right” thing to say. **Listening** is often the best thing to do.
- ▶ Remember, the healing process is very dynamic and there is a wide range of normal reactions. Some individuals will want to share specific details, others will prefer a quiet, compassionate presence – most will want a combination of support. Remain flexible to his/her needs rather than “expect” certain reactions.
- ▶ Spend time with the affected individual – offer your assistance and a listening ear even if he/she has not asked for help.
- ▶ Assist with practical things like cooking, cleaning, caring for the children, grocery shopping, etc.
- ▶ Give him/her some private time.
- ▶ Don’t take anger or other feelings directed at you personally.
- ▶ Don’t tell him/her that they are “lucky it was not worse” – trauma survivors are not consoled by these statements. Instead, tell them that you are sorry that such an event has occurred and you want to understand and assist them.
- ▶ **Take care of yourself.** You will not be able to help anyone if you do not first care for yourself.

Additional Plans/Referrals/Resources: \_\_\_\_\_  
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