

COMMON REACTIONS to A CRITICAL INCIDENT

You have been exposed to a traumatic event known as a critical incident. Here are some common signs and signals that others have reported when they have been exposed to such an incident. These are typical reactions to a traumatic event that can be experienced immediately, during, and/or following the event. These signs and symptoms usually appear in combination and may also be related to other stressors as well. This list is certainly not inclusive of all types of stress reactions but it is generally representative of the signs and symptoms typically associated with traumatic events. This list of common reactions is simply being offered here as a starting point for you to become more familiar with some of your own reactions to this particular incident. It should also be emphasized that no two people are likely to experience the exact same combination of reactions to any given stressor(s). Again, these are typical reactions and should be considered as normal responses by normal people when exposed to abnormal events. Additional support is available to help speed up your recovery.

Here are some common signs and signals of a stress reaction:

<u>Physical</u>	<u>Cognitive</u>	<u>Emotional</u>	<u>Behavioral</u>
chills	confusion	fear	withdrawal
thirst	nightmares	guilt	antisocial acts
fatigue	uncertainty	grief	inability to rest
nausea	hyper-vigilance	panic	intensified pacing
fainting	suspiciousness	denial	erratic movements
diarrhea	persistent intrusive images	crying	changes in social activity
vomiting	blaming someone	sadness	change in speech patterns
dizziness	poor problem solving	irritability	loss or increase of appetite
weakness	poor abstract thinking	depression	hyper-alert to environment
chest pain	poor attention/decisions	intense anger	increased alcohol consumption
headaches	poor concentration/memory	apprehension	change in usual communications
elevated BP	disorientation of time, place person	emotional shock	change in usual habits
rapid heart rate	difficulty identifying objects or people	extreme agitation	etc...
muscle tremors	heightened or lowered alertness	feeling overwhelmed	
shock symptoms	increased or decreased awareness of surroundings	loss of emotional control	
grinding teeth	etc...	inappropriate emotional responses	
visual difficulties		extreme helplessness	
profuse sweating		etc...	
difficulty breathing			
etc...			

- *Any of these symptoms may indicate the need for medical evaluation. When in doubt, contact a physician.*

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Note: If you find that these symptoms persist in such a way as to interfere with your ability to function at work, at school, and/or at home, you are strongly encouraged to contact a qualified healthcare professional for assistance.

CRITICAL INCIDENT STRESS INFORMATION SHEET

THINGS TO TRY:

- WITHIN THE FIRST HOURS and DAYS periods of strenuous exercise, alternated with relaxation will alleviate some of the physical reactions.
- Structure some of your time - keep fairly busy but not too busy.
- You are a normal person who has experienced an abnormal event so don't label yourself as crazy.
- Be aware of the tendency to numb the pain with the overuse of drugs or alcohol, you don't need to complicate this with a substance abuse problem.
- Reach out - most people really do care.
- Maintain as normal a schedule as possible.
- Spend time with others.
- Help your co-workers as much as possible by sharing your own feelings and checking out how they're doing as well.
- Give yourself permission to feel rotten.
- Keep a journal, write your way through those sleepless hours.
- Do things that feel good to you - spend more time in recreation than performing large-scale chores.
- Realize that those around you are probably under stress as well.
- 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're not sure.
- Get plenty of rest.
- Recurring 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).

FOR FAMILY MEMBERS AND FRIENDS:

- Listen carefully.
- Spend time with the traumatized person.
- Offer your assistance and a listening ear even 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 the 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 these statements. Instead, tell them that you are sorry such an event has occurred and that you want to understand and assist them.

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Following School Violence: What to Say to Students

Talk with students and validate their feelings. Let their questions guide what and how much information to provide, be open to opportunities to talk when they are ready, be honest about your own feelings related to violence, and emphasize the positive things that child/family/school can do to stay safe. Be patient. Children and youth do not always talk about their feelings readily. Watch for clues that they may want to talk, such as hovering around while you do the dishes or yard work. Some children prefer writing, playing music, or doing an art project as an outlet. Young children may need concrete activities (such as drawing, looking at picture books, or imaginative play) to help them identify and express their feelings.

Be aware of signs that a student might be in distress, e.g., changes in behavior, anxiety, sleep problems, acting out, problems at school or with academic work. Also be conscious of media exposure and what you say about the event. Limit television viewing (be aware if the television is on in common areas).

Following are some suggested general key points when talking to students:

- Schools are safe places. Our school staff works with local police and fire departments, emergency responders, and hospitals to keep you safe.
- Our school is safe because...
- We all play a role in the school safety. Be observant and let an adult know if you see or hear something that makes you feel uncomfortable, nervous or frightened.
- There is a difference between reporting, tattling or gossiping. You can provide important information that may prevent harm either directly or anonymously by telling a trusted adult what you know or hear.
- Although there is no absolute guarantee that something bad will never happen, it is important to understand the difference between the *possibility* of something happening and *probability* that it will affect you or our school.
- Senseless violence is hard for everyone to understand. Doing things that you enjoy, sticking to your normal routine, and being with friends and family help make us feel better and keep us from worrying about the event.
- Sometimes people do bad things that hurt others. They may be unable to handle their anger, under the influence of drugs or alcohol, or suffering from mental illness. Adults (parents, teachers, police officers, doctors, faith leaders) work very hard to get those people help and keep them from hurting others. It is important for all of us to know how to get help if we feel really upset or angry and to stay away from drugs and alcohol.
- Stay away from guns and other weapons. Tell an adult if you know someone has a gun. Access to guns is one of the leading risk factors for deadly violence.
- Violence is never a solution to personal problems. Students can be part of the positive solution by participating in anti-violence programs at school, learning conflict mediation skills, and seeking help from an adult if they or a peer is struggling with anger, depression, or other emotions they cannot control.

NASP School Safety and Crisis Response Committee. (2015). *Responding to School Violence Prevention: Guidelines for School Administrators and Crisis Teams*. Bethesda, MD: National Association of School Psychologists.

CRISIS INTERVENTION: WHAT IS NOT HELPFUL

1. INUNDATING THEM WITH INFORMATION: People in crisis have a limited capacity to assimilate information. After they have reached their limit, giving them too much information only serves to be confusing and overwhelming.

2. GIVING THEM TASKS THEY ARE NOT READY FOR: People in crisis can usually only do one thing at a time. They need to be validated and praised authentically for accomplishing even the smallest of productive tasks.

3. SAYING, "I KNOW HOW YOU FEEL" or "I UNDERSTAND" WHEN YOU MAY NOT KNOW AT ALL HOW THEY FEEL. Reactions and feelings are unique to each individual and personal to them. Even if you have experienced a trauma, you never really fully understand another person's feelings. Victims may find these statements insensitive, even though they are meant with good intentions.

4. INTERRUPTING: Often times victims need to vent or ramble to clear their Thoughts and begin to re-establish some sense of control before they can move on to more structured conversations.

5. SPECULATING ABOUT THINGS YOU ARE NOT SURE ABOUT: People In crisis hear what you say as "fact". Erroneous information may lead to secondary traumatization. This is especially true if there is a criminal investigation or the medical condition of a loved one has not been completely determined yet. Be very careful about what information you impart. Do not give false hope.

6. PROLONGING DEPENDENCE ON YOU: As soon as possible, help Victims and survivors transfer their interactions to those people who are near them in the future. Remember that any assistance you offer should be to facilitate their independence. This can be very difficult, especially if you as a responder feel attached to the victim. Emotions – yours and theirs – run high during a crisis. It can be very difficult to separate your needs from those of the victim. However, it is vital that your focus stays on their needs solely. Your emotional needs have to be met as well, but this needs to be done by you obtaining support from others.

7. DISCOURAGING ANY EMOTIONS, ESPECIALLY IF THEY ARE UNUSUAL OR FRIGHTENING TO YOU: People in crisis demonstrate a broad array of emotions and behaviors that may be unfamiliar to you. As long as they are not engaging in dangerous behaviors towards themselves and/or others, allow their emotions to take their natural course.

8. INSISTING THAT THEY TALK TO YOU: Sometimes people just do not want to talk with a counselor, or they are not ready to do so. You must respect this. They may be ready later. If they need to be alone, allow them the space to do so safely. Make sure they have referrals in case they change their mind.

Counseling Referrals

Hart District has academic counselors, school psychologists, and therapists on every campus. There will be crisis counseling and support provided on each campus. For more specific counseling support, please contact your student's academic counselor. Here are additional community supports:

- Child and Family Center 661-259- 9439
21545 Centre Pointe Pkwy., Santa Clarita, CA 91350

- Children's Bureau 661-949-0131
27200 Tourney Rd., Ste. 175, Santa Clarita, CA 91355

- Santa Clarita Mental Health 661-288- 4800
23501 Cinema Dr, Santa Clarita, CA 91355

- Samuel Dixon Health Center 661-291- 1777
23772 Newhall Avenue, Newhall, CA 91321

- Call or text Teen Line
 - Call 800-852-8336 (800-TLC-TEEN)
 - Anytime
 - Text the word "TEEN" to 839863
 - Peer counselors are available from 6pm-9pm every day
 - Teen Talk App
 - Download the app and get support from trained teens 6-10pm

Additional Emergency contact information:

In case of emergency talk to parent immediately (or another trusted adult)

In case of life-threatening emergency call 911

Child and Family Center Crisis Line: 661-259-9439

Teen Line: 800-852-8336

Suicide Prevention Lifeline 800-273-8255

California Youth Crisis Line: 800-843-5200

Trevor Line (crisis line for LGBTQ+ youth): 800-850-8078

Olive View Mental Health Urgent Care (crisis): 818-485-0888

Childhelp National Child Abuse Hotline (24 hour): 800-422-4453

Henry Mayo ER (crisis)

Emergency (crisis): 911

Resources for youth in crisis: <https://www.connectsafely.org/resources-for-youth-in-crisis/>