

Common Stress Reactions From Critical Incidents



DRAN
Disaster Responder
Assets Network

Common Stress Reactions from Critical Incidents

“Critical Incident defined: Any situation faced by emergency personnel that causes them to experience unusually strong emotional reactions which have the ability to interfere with their ability to function or perform duties effectively. These are normal reactions that normal people have to abnormal events.”

Physical Reactions

Gastro-intestinal discomfort	Fatigue	Rapid heart beat
Cramps	Headaches	Nausea
Breathing problems	Chills	Dizziness
Sweating	Increased illnesses	Chest pain
Impaired immune system	Shock	Tingling in limbs

Emotional Reactions

Disturbed thought	Grief	Guilt
Denial	Fear	Panic
Depression	Apprehension	Anxiety
Powerlessness	Anger/rage	Survivor guilt
Sadness	Helplessness	Overly sensitive

Cognitive Reactions

Lowered concentration	Orientation	Decision making
Memory	Hyper-alertness	Sleep problems
Nightmares	Intrusive images	Problem solving
Preoccupation with trauma or event		Apathy
Thoughts of self-harm or harm to others		Perfectionism

Behavioral Reactions

Startle easy	Speech	Restlessness
Avoidance	Alcohol	Outbursts
Appetite changes	Withdrawal	Hygiene
Blaming	Irritability	Moody
Accident proneness	Nightmares	

Spiritual Reactions

Questioning faith	Anger	Disassociation
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Be aware of any of the above signs & symptoms. Continue to talk to others involved in the incident about your reactions; it will aid you and your co-worker. The debriefing/fusing is merely the initial step in the process, providing “emotional first aid” to the emergency worker. If there is a need for further debriefing sessions, one-on-one peer meetings, or employee assistance intervention, please let your immediate supervisor know and the CISM team will follow up with you.