

CRITICAL INCIDENT INFORMATION SHEET

DEFINITION

Critical incidents are traumatic events, causing unusually strong emotional feelings and reactions that affect a person's normal coping abilities, either at the time of the incident or later. An example of a critical incident is witnessing a severe workplace injury or fatality.

It is very common, in fact quite normal, for people to experience emotional aftershocks when they have experienced a traumatic event. Sometimes these emotional aftershocks (or stress reactions) appear immediately after the event. Sometimes they appear hours or days later and may last a few days, weeks, months, or longer.

Common signs and symptoms of an emotional aftershock or stress reaction may include the following: chills or profuse sweating; nausea and vomiting; dizziness and fainting; headaches; confusion; nightmares; insomnia; guilt; grief; irritability; agitation; intense anger; loss; or, increase in appetite.

THINGS TO TRY

- After a critical incident in a workplace, participate in any debriefing services that are offered.
- Do not hesitate to consult with various resources available through your employer's Employee Assistance Program, your local community mental health services or pastoral services.
- Within the first 24-48 hours, periods of appropriate physical exercise, alternated with relaxation, will alleviate some of the physical reactions.
- Structure your time and keep busy.
- You're normal and having normal reactions. Don't label yourself as crazy or weak.
- Talk to people. Reach out. People do care.
- Maintain as normal a schedule as possible.

- Spend time with others, don't isolate yourself.
- 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.
- Do things that feel good to you.
- Realize that those around you may also be experiencing stress.
- Don't make any big life changes, but do make as many daily decisions as possible that will give you a feeling of control over your life.
- Get plenty of rest.
- Don't try to fight recurring thoughts, dreams or flashbacks – they are normal and will decrease over time and become less painful.
- Eat well-balanced and regular meals (even if you don't feel like it).

CONCLUSION

The majority of individuals experiencing acute stress disorder recover completely. If the disorder lasts more than four weeks, you should consult a physician as you may be at risk of developing post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

Should a psychiatrist or a psychologist diagnose you with PTSD, you may be eligible for compensation benefits. For further information regarding a claim, contact WorkSafeNB at 1 800 222-9775.