



Critical Incident: *“Any situation faced by any person that causes them to experience unusually strong reactions which have the potential to interfere with their lives.”* Jeffrey T. Mitchell, Ph.D.

Common Signs & Symptoms of Critical Incident Stress:

- High level of anxiety
- Irritability
- Increased absenteeism
- Depression
- Feeling of apathy
- Guilt
- Sleep disturbances
- Headaches
- Gastrointestinal problems
- Poor appetite
- Excessive sweating
- Feeling overwhelmed
- Feeling of isolation
- Poor communication skills
- Poor concentration
- Indecisiveness
- Confused thinking
- Anger
- Increase of alcohol use
- Fatigue
- Increased relational conflict
- Spiritual disconnection
- Decreased libido
- Grief or sadness
- Memory impairment
- Hyperstartle response
- Flashbacks

Things to Try:

- Physical exercise alternated with relaxation.
- Talk to people when you're ready — talk is powerful healing medicine.
- Be cautious about numbing the pain with overuse of drugs or alcohol.
- Reach out — people do care.
- Maintain as normal a schedule as possible.
- Meditate, pray, read spiritual or other comforting literature.
- Listen to or create music that comforts you.
- Help others who experienced the incident by asking how they're doing.
- Keep a journal to help you process your feelings.
- Do things that feel good to you.
- Don't make any big life changes.
- Make decisions that give you a feeling of control over your life (e.g., if someone asks you what you want to eat, make a choice even if you don't have a preference).
- Get plenty of rest.
- Don't fight recurring thoughts, dreams or flashbacks. They'll likely decrease over time and become less painful.
- Eat well-balanced and regular meals.
- Seek a support group, counseling, or therapy if you don't begin to feel better over time.

For Family Members and Friends:

- Listen more than you speak. Your calm presence matters.
- Offer your assistance and listening ear even if they have not asked for help, then follow their lead.
- Reassure them that they are safe.
- Without asking for assignments, help with cooking, cleaning, caring for the family, pet care, and driving.
- Give them some private time.
- Don't take their anger or other negative feelings personally.
- Don't say, "You're lucky it wasn't worse" or "Everything will be okay" or "It's over; no need to worry." Instead, say that you are sorry the event happened, and you are available to listen and help.
- Observe whether their behavior, moods, or attitudes change. Encourage them to seek counseling, therapy, or a support group if necessary.

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