



Sask  
C|I|S|M  
Network

## Critical Incident Stress Information

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When individuals experience a traumatic event or critical incident, it can cause unusually strong reactions that have the potential for interfering with their ability to function normally. Although the event may be over, it is not uncommon for people to experience some of the following critical incident stress reactions within hours, days, weeks and in some cases months after the incident. It is important to remember these reactions are quite common and can differ from one person to the next. Reactions should never be considered a sign of weakness. Anyone is subject to critical incident stress if the traumatic event is significant enough for them.

Reactions can last a few days, weeks or sometimes longer depending on the severity of the traumatic event. First, it's important to recognize the symptoms and then understand there are steps that can be taken to promote recovery. Occasionally the traumatic experience is greater than the capacity to cope and professional services may be necessary to support recovery. Critical incident stress management teams are here to support those recovery efforts.

### COMMON SIGNS OF CRITICAL INCIDENT STRESS

#### PHYSICAL

Chills  
 Fatigue  
 Nausea/vomiting  
 Grinding teeth  
 Muscle tremors  
 Digestive issues  
 Weakness  
 Persistent headache  
 Rapid/slow pulse  
 Elevated blood pressure  
 Chest pain

#### PSYCHOLOGICAL

Confusion  
 Nightmares  
 Uncertainty  
 Hypervigilance  
 Intrusive thoughts  
 Blaming  
 Poor problem solving  
 Poor abstract thinking  
 Poor memory  
 Poor attention  
 Disorientation

#### EMOTIONAL

Fear/anxiety  
 Guilt  
 Grief  
 Panic  
 Irritability  
 Depression  
 Agitation  
 Intense anger  
 Emotional shock  
 Uncontrolled emotions  
 Emotional outbursts

#### BEHAVIOURAL

Withdrawal  
 Inability to rest  
 Change in social activity  
 Change in appetite  
 Hyper-alert to environment  
 Self-medication  
 Change in usual routine  
 Erratic movements  
 Isolation  
 Avoidance  
 Antisocial behaviour

Physical signs of distress may indicate a need for a medical evaluation. Please have the individual evaluated by medical staff if you are in doubt. Critical incidents can bring on a medical emergency, so always take proper precautions.

#### SPIRITUAL

Spiritual signs of distress may be influenced by the culture of the individual or group who have shared the traumatic experience. Each individual is unique in their beliefs and how they practice their faith. Commonly reported signs of spiritual distress include:

Anger at God/Creator	Questioning faith or spiritual beliefs
Withdrawal from place of worship	Crisis of faith
Faith practices and rituals seem empty now	Uncharacteristic religious involvement
Delusions/hallucinations	Loss of sense of self/self-identify is now in question
Loss of inner strength and self-efficacy or purpose	Uncertainty of how to move forward in life
Inability to see beyond this experience	

For further questions or concerns, please contact SASK CISM Network: 306.731.7954 or [patty@saskcism.ca](mailto:patty@saskcism.ca)

## THINGS YOU CAN DO TO HELP YOURSELF

*The following suggestions may differ according to the culture (working, religious, ethnic, community or otherwise) of the group affected by the traumatic event.*

### **It's OK to...**

- Remember it's common to have reactions after a traumatic event. It's also normal not to be affected by the trauma. Each individual is unique in how they perceive the event and the reactions they have afterwards.
- Allow yourself the time now to experience the reactions and be open to the support of others as you recover.
- Unwanted intrusive thoughts, dreams or flashbacks are common too. They should decrease over time.

### **Stay in touch with others...**

- Don't isolate yourself
- Surround yourself with a good network of supportive people.
- Talk it out with people you trust. Putting words to your experience helps the healing process.
- If you have questions or feel you need to speak with someone, don't put it off. Teams are there to help.
- Family and friends can be great support. Tell them what you need most right now.
- Eat well balanced nutritious meals and snacks to refuel your body.
- Drink lots of water and juice over the next few days/weeks to flush the system of the chemical by-products of the stress reaction.
- Avoid over use of alcohol, caffeine or other substances that can slow recovery from this experience.
- Exercise daily for at least 30 minutes over the next couple of weeks. It will help you feel better sooner.
- If you have strong religious or spiritual beliefs, you may find prayer or meditation helpful.
- Get plenty of rest. Sleep disturbances are common, but pass over time.
- Delay making any major life decisions until your stress levels decrease significantly.
- Do healthy activities that you've enjoyed in the past.
- Don't fight recurring dreams or flashbacks. They are normal and decrease over time.
- If you're having a bad day, ask for support from others. If your day is going well, it may be your turn to support someone else who is struggling a bit.
- Allow yourself the time to recover now. Delaying or ignoring the process can have a cumulative effect.

### **What others can do for you...**

- LISTEN. Be sensitive to the individual circumstances and differing points of view.
- ACKNOWLEDGE that feelings are common for anyone who has experienced an event like this.
- SPEND TIME with the individual. Sometimes a supportive presence is the best company.
- REASSURE him/her that they are safe now.
- HELP with everyday tasks, such as cleaning, cooking, family support.
- RESPECT private time as well. Some people find it helpful to be alone occasionally to process the experience.
- SUPPORT the person or group in the choices necessary to promote positive change and healing from this experience.
- BE PATIENT. All of this takes time. Everyone heals at their own rate, in their own way. Be a beneficial presence in their lives as they make their way through this process.

Please remember these are guidelines in promoting healthy choices and good coping skills to support resiliency. There may be other ways of promoting healthy recovery as well. Whenever you're in doubt, consult with CISM team members or mental health professionals for further advice and direction.