

CRITICAL INCIDENT STRESS

Information Sheet for Significant Others

Your loved one has been involved in an emotion-charged event, often known as a critical incident. He/she may be experiencing common stress responses to such an event (critical incident stress). No one is immune to critical incident stress, regardless of past experiences or years of service. Your loved one may experience critical incident stress at any time during his/her career.

The following guidelines may be helpful when trying to help a person that is suicidal.

- The signs of critical incident stress are physical, cognitive, emotional and behavioral. Your loved one has received a handout outlining these signs. Please ask him/her to share it with you.
- Critical incident stress response can occur at the time of the incident, within hours, within days, or even within weeks.
- Your loved one may experience a variety of signs/symptoms of a stress response or he/she may not experience any of the reactions at this time.
- Suffering from the effects of critical incident stress is completely normal. Your loved one is not the only one suffering; other personnel shared the event and are probably sharing the reaction.
- The symptoms will normally subside and disappear in time if you and your loved one do not dwell upon them.
- All phases of our lives overlap and influence each other: personal, professional, and family. The impact of critical incident stress can be intensified, influenced or mitigated by our own personal, family, and current developmental issues.
- Encourage, but do NOT pressure, your loved one to talk about the incident and his/her reaction to it. Talk is the best medicine. Your primary “job” is to listen and reassure. Remember that if an event is upsetting to you and your loved one, your children may be affected, also. They may need to talk, too.
- You may not understand what your loved one is going through at this time but offer your love and support. Don't be afraid to ask what you can do that he/she would consider helpful.
- Accept the fact that life will go on: his/hers, yours, and your children. Maintain or return to a normal routine as soon as possible.
- If the signs of stress your loved one is experiencing do not begin to subside within a few weeks, or if they intensify, consider seeking further assistance.

Things to Do: 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 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 those statements. Instead, tell them that you are sorry such an event has occurred and you want to understand and assist them.