

# Critical Incident Stress Resources

People involved in critical incidents or traumatic events experience a wide range of physical and emotional reactions. These stress-related symptoms can be disturbing and unpleasant, yet they are a completely normal response.

Help is available if you've been directly affected by an incident or event. There are also things you can do to help yourself. Or if you are concerned about someone who has been directly affected, you can support them as well.

## In this handout you'll find...

- Signs and Symptoms of Stress Reactions
- Where to Turn
- How to Relieve Your Stress Reaction
- How You Can Help Others
- Other On-Line Resources and Links

To consult with a Carnegie Mellon therapist, call **(412) 268-2922**.

## Signs and Symptoms of Stress Reactions

- **Inability to function** as one normally would.
- **Physical reactions** like chills, fatigue, headaches, elevated heart rate, muscle tremors, loss of appetite, or sleeplessness.
- **Emotional reactions** such as fear, guilt, sadness, or anxiety.
- **Cognitive difficulties** such as confusion, poor concentration, memory loss, hyper-vigilance, intrusive thoughts or images, nightmares, or disorientation.
- **Troubling behaviors** like withdrawal, restlessness, or substance abuse.

Physical Reactions*	Emotional Reactions	Cognitive Difficulties	Troubling Behavior
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>› Breathing Difficulties</li> <li>› Chest Pain</li> <li>› Chills</li> <li>› Dizziness</li> <li>› Elevated Blood Pressure</li> <li>› Fainting</li> <li>› Fatigue</li> <li>› Headaches</li> <li>› Muscle Tremors</li> <li>› Nausea</li> <li>› Profuse Sweating</li> <li>› Rapid Heart Rate</li> <li>› Shock Symptoms</li> <li>› Teeth Grinding</li> <li>› Thirst</li> <li>› Twitches</li> <li>› Visual Difficulties</li> <li>› Vomiting</li> <li>› Weakness</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>› Agitation</li> <li>› Anxiety</li> <li>› Apprehension</li> <li>› Denial</li> <li>› Depression</li> <li>› Emotional Outbursts</li> <li>› Emotional Shock</li> <li>› Fear</li> <li>› Feeling Overwhelmed</li> <li>› Grief</li> <li>› Guilt</li> <li>› Inappropriate Emotional Response</li> <li>› Intense Anger</li> <li>› Irritability</li> <li>› Loss of Emotional Control</li> <li>› Panic</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>› Blaming Someone</li> <li>› Confusion</li> <li>› Difficulty Identifying Objects or People</li> <li>› Disorientation to Time, Place, or Person</li> <li>› Heightened or Lowered Alertness</li> <li>› Hyper-Vigilance</li> <li>› Increased or Decreased Awareness of Surroundings</li> <li>› Intrusive Images</li> <li>› Nightmares</li> <li>› Poor Abstract Thinking</li> <li>› Poor Attention / Decision Making</li> <li>› Poor Concentration / Memory</li> <li>› Poor Problem Solving</li> <li>› Suspiciousness</li> <li>› Uncertainty</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>› Antisocial Acts</li> <li>› Change in Social Activity</li> <li>› Change in Speech Patterns</li> <li>› Change in Usual Communication</li> <li>› Erratic Movements</li> <li>› Hyper-Alert to the Environment</li> <li>› Inability to Rest</li> <li>› Increased Alcohol Consumption</li> <li>› Intensified Pacing</li> <li>› Loss or Increase of Appetite</li> <li>› Withdrawal</li> </ul>

\* Certain physical symptoms could indicate the need for a medical evaluation. When in doubt, contact a physician immediately.

## Critical Incident Stress Resources (cont.)

### Where to Turn

- Reach out to **family and friends** who can be supportive.
- Call **Counseling and Psychological Services** (412-268-2922) to speak with a professional therapist. The phone is answered 24/7.
- Contact **Student Health Services** (412-268-2157) or your physician if you are concerned about your physical health.

### How to Relieve Your Stress Reaction

- **Spend time with others.** Talk to them. Being with people and talking can be the most healing medicine.
- **Exercise moderately** to alleviate some of your physical stress reactions, especially within the first 24-48 hours of the incident.
- **Eat well-balanced, regular meals** (even if you don't feel like it).
- **Get plenty of rest.**
- **Maintain your normal schedule**, if possible. Keep busy. Structure your time.
- **Don't label yourself crazy or sick.** Your reactions are completely normal and will lessen over time.
- **Try not to numb the pain** with alcohol or other substances.

### How You Can Help Others

- **Make yourself available** just to spend time and listen.
- **Help normalize** the stress reactions. Reassure them that they are now safe.
- **Don't tell them they're "lucky it wasn't worse."** That won't be consoling or reassuring to a person who has been traumatized.
- **Express concern** about physical, cognitive, emotional, or behavioral symptoms that you think would require immediate care.
- **Offer to help** with everyday tasks until the person's life gets back to normal.
- **Don't take it personally** if the person is angry, irritable, or withdrawn. Give them space or privacy when they need it.
- Call **Counseling and Psychological Services** (412-268-2922) to speak with a professional therapist if you have concerns or need information.

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### Other On-Line Resources and Links



**Pennsylvania Psychological Association**  
**Disaster Response Network**

<http://www.papsy.org/about/disaster.html>

Provides pro bono psychological services to Pennsylvania communities affected by trauma, crisis, or disaster.



**American Psychological Association**  
**Nationwide Referral Network**

<http://www.apa.org/practice/refer.html>

Offers links to state psychological associations for referrals to local psychologists and mental health resources.