

## **Critical Incident Stress Information Sheet for Significant Others**

Your loved one has been deployed to an event of some magnitude. Sometimes they will see things, or hear stories that are quite outside the normal experience of most people. As a result of this experience, they may be experiencing some normal stress responses, something we call Critical Incident Stress. No one is immune to critical incident stress, regardless of past experiences or years of service. There are some things that you can do that might be helpful to your loved one.

### **Important things to remember about Critical Incident Stress:**

- The signs of critical incident stress can show up as changes in any of the five domains of life; physical, cognitive, emotional, behavioral, and spiritual.
- Critical incident stress responses can occur during the time of the deployment or after their return to home.
- 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.
- Having the reactions of critical incident stress is completely normal. Your loved one may not be the only one experiencing reactions. Often other personnel who shared the event may have similar reactions.
- 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 lessened by our own personal and family issues.
- Encourage, but do NOT pressure, your loved one to talk about the deployment and their reactions 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 they 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 your loved one, at the same time give them some "space" if they request it.
- Offer your assistance and a listening ear even if they have not asked for help.
- 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." Your loved one is not consoled by these statements. Instead, tell them that you are sorry such an event has occurred and you want to understand and assist them.

A Critical Incident Stress Management Team has been developed to help you and your loved one if the symptoms of Critical Incident Stress are disruptive for you loved one.

If you have any questions or concerns, you can contact a CISM team member at \_\_\_\_\_