



International Critical Incident Stress Foundation, Inc.

Traumatic/Critical Incident Stress Information Sheet For Spouses, Families, & Significant Others

**from the course *Stress and the Responder's Family CISM Skills for Family Crisis Intervention* by Anne Balboni*

Your loved one has been involved in an emotionally charged event, often referred to as a critical incident. They may be experiencing stress responses to this event. A stress response to a traumatic or critical incident may occur at any time during their career, and no one is immune regardless of past experiences or years of service. Some important things to remember about critical incident stress:

The signs of critical incident stress are physical, cognitive, emotional, behavioral, and spiritual. Your loved one has received a handout outlining these signs. Please ask them to share it with you.

Critical incident stress responses can occur right at the scene, within hours, or within days, even within weeks.

Your loved one may experience an immediate stress or grief response, or a variety of stress response signs and/or symptoms or may not feel any of these reactions at this time.

The effects of critical incident stress are completely normal. They are a normal response to a highly abnormal event. Your loved one and the other emergency personnel who shared the event may or may not be experiencing similar reactions. All phases overlap and influence each other: i.e., personal, professional, family, etc. The impact of critical incident stress can be intensified, influenced or mitigated by all of these.

Helpful Hints

For Those Personnel Directly Involved in the Incident

Reestablish and maintain your routine and/or schedules as possible.

Try to keep a reasonable level of activity.

Physical exercise is very helpful.

Give yourself permission to try and rest a bit more.

Attempt to eat well-balanced and regular meals (even when you don't feel up to it).

Express your thoughts and feelings regarding the event to someone you trust.



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For Family Members and Friends

Share the gift of your time.

Listen carefully and non-judgmentally.

Offer unsolicited help with the everyday tasks, i.e., cleaning, cooking, and caring for family and/or children.

Give them more opportunities for personal time.

Be careful in your reassurance, don't say that they are lucky it wasn't worse. This is not a comforting statement. Instead, do say that you are sorry this has occurred, and you want to understand, and be there for them.