

# Critical Incident Stress Activity Sheet

victim  
assistance  
program™

Now  
what?

If you have experienced a traumatic event, even though the event may be over, you may now be experiencing, or may experience later, strong emotional or physical reactions. It is very common for people to experience emotional aftershocks following a traumatic event.

Sometimes the emotional aftershocks appear immediately. Sometimes they appear after a few hours or days. In some cases, week or months pass before the reactions appear.

The symptoms of a stress reaction may last a few days, weeks, months, or even longer. Sometimes the traumatic event is so painful, that professional assistance may be necessary. It is important to remember that this is not a sign of weakness.

## Common Responses

### Physical & Behavioral

- Nervous energy (jitters, muscle tension)
- Headaches
- Fatigue
- Excessive sweating
- Upset stomach
- Rapid heart rate
- Dizziness
- Teeth grinding
- Inability to sleep or excessive sleep
- Easily startled
- Change in eating habits
- Loss or gain in weight
- Increase or decrease in sexual activity

### Emotional & Cognitive

- Anxiety and fear
- Re-experiencing unwanted thoughts, nightmares, flashbacks
- Increased vigilance, impatience, irritability
- Avoidance
- Anger
- Guilt and shame
- Grief and depression
- Negative self-image and world view
- Withdrawal from daily activities

# Tips for You

- Within the first 24-48 hours, periods of appropriate physical exercise alternated with relaxation can alleviate some of the physical reactions.
- Structure your time by keeping busy.
- Remember that you are normal, and you are experiencing normal reactions; don't label yourself crazy or weak.
- Talk to people; talking is the most therapeutic type of medicine.
- Be aware of numbing the pain with overuse of drugs or alcohol; substances will make it harder to recover.
- Reach out to people who care.
- Maintain as normal of a schedule as possible.
- Spend time with others.
- Give yourself permission to feel all of your emotions.
- Keep a journal.
- Do things that feel good to you.
- Realize those around you are also under stress.
- Don't make big life changes.
- Do make as many daily decisions as possible to help you gain a feeling of control over your life.
- Get plenty of rest.
- Don't try to fight reoccurring thoughts, dreams or flashbacks – they are normal and will decrease over time and become less painful.
- Eat well balanced and regular meals, even if you don't feel like eating.

## Tips for Friends and Family

- Help your loved one by checking in on how they are doing.
- Spend more time listening.
- Spend time with them.
- Gently offer your assistance and support if they have not asked for help yet.
- Help them with everyday tasks like cleaning, cooking, carrying for family, or minding children.
- Don't take their anger personally.
- Give them private time.
- Don't tell them that, "it could have been worse." Traumatized individuals are not consoled by statements like that. Instead, tell them that you are sorry such an event occurred and that you want to understand and help them through their road to recovery.

## Contact Us

**24-hour Hotline | 330.376.0040**  
**24-hour Chat | [victimassistanceprogram.org](http://victimassistanceprogram.org)**

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