

CRITICAL INCIDENT STRESS REACTION

Tips for Coping and Recovery



Part of the Division of Student Affairs

Over the course of the next few weeks, you may experience a number of reactions to the event you have been through, many of which are normal and to be expected:

Physical Reactions

- Fatigue/exhaustion
- Sleep disturbance
- Underactivity/overactivity
- Change in appetite
- Digestive problems
- Nightmares
- Muscle tremors/witches
- Headaches
- Dizziness
- Muscle aches
- Vomiting

Emotional Reactions

- Guilt
- Feelings of helplessness
- Emotional numbing
- Being overly sensitive
- Amnesia for the event
- Fear and/or anxiety
- Hypervigilance
- Moodiness
- Anger, which may show itself by:
scapegoating, irritability, frustration
with bureaucracy, violent fantasies

Cognitive Reactions

- Difficulty Concentrating
- Difficulty solving problems
- Flashbacks of the event
- Difficulty making decisions
- Memory disturbance
- Isolation/withdrawal
- Preoccupation with the event
- Slowed thinking
- Problems naming familiar
objects or people

In addition, a period of mild to moderate **depression** is sometimes experienced following exposure to a stressful event or tragic loss.

Symptoms of depression include:

- Poor appetite
- Lethargy/low energy
- Loss of sexual drive
- Persistent sad mood
- Insomnia
- Social withdrawal/isolation
- Difficulty concentrating
- Intrusive thoughts

Again, these are **normal reactions** and although they are painful, they are part of the process of recovering from a loss, trauma, or the stress of a critical incident. While there is little anyone can do to take away these uncomfortable feelings, there are

If any of these symptoms persist, or if you have thoughts of harming yourself or someone else, consult the **Student Counseling Service** in Cain Hall during business hours or call the **HelpLine** after business hours or on weekends at **845-2700**.

Things to Try:

- Within the FIRST 24 TO 48 HOURS, periods of strenuous physical exercise alternated with relaxation will generally alleviate some of your physical reactions.
- Structure your time, keep busy, and keep your life as normal as possible.
- Remember you're normal and having normal reactions--don't label yourself as being crazy.
- Talk to people--talk is the most healing medicine.
- Be aware of and avoid attempts to numb the pain or deal with your stress through the use of drugs or alcohol.
- Reach out to others. Spend time with people you trust.
- Help your peers by sharing feelings and checking out how they are doing.
- Give yourself permission to feel rotten, and talk about these feelings with others.
- Keep a journal and "write your way through" those sleepless hours. (Remember that the HelpLine is open all night long at 845-2700)
- If you are a currently enrolled Texas A&M student, and would like to talk to someone further about your reaction to a critical incident or traumatic event or loss, come by the **Student Counseling Service in Cain Hall** (845-4427), or call the **HelpLine (845-2700)** evenings and weekends.

Texas A&M University has a strong institutional commitment to the principle of diversity in all areas. In that spirit, admission to Texas A&M University and any of its sponsored programs is open to all qualified individuals without regard to any subgroup classification or stereotype.

Student Counseling Service * Texas A&M University
Cain Hall * 845-4427 * scs.tamu.edu
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