

## Critical Incident Stress

A critical incident is defined as an event that is outside the range of a normal human experience. It differs from everyday stress because it is often sudden and unexpected, and the event has the potential to overwhelm one's usual coping skills. This can result in significant distress and difficulties functioning.

Signs and symptoms of critical incident stress may last few days or for a few weeks. If symptoms persist for longer periods, please consider seeking professional help. With understanding and support from loved ones, friends and/or colleagues, these reactions usually pass more quickly. Listed below are some of the more common signs and symptoms of critical incident stress.

PHYSICAL	MENTAL	EMOTIONAL	BEHAVIORAL	SPIRITUAL
Fatigue	Nightmares	Anxiety	Change in activity	Anger at God
Nausea	Confusion	Guilt	Change in speech patterns	Loss of meaning/purpose
Muscle tremors or twitches	Poor attention	Denial	Emotional outbursts	Belief that God doesn't care
Chills	Poor decisions	Grief	Withdrawal	Questioning beliefs
Chest pain*	Poor concentration	Emotional shock	Suspiciousness	Rituals seem empty
Difficulty breathing*	Raised/lowered alertness	Fear	Change in usual communications	Withdrawal from spiritual activities
Elevated blood pressure*	Memory problems	Uncertainty	Restlessness	Anger at those who represent spirituality
Thirst	Heightened alertness	Emotional control problems	Increased alcohol use	Belief that God has failed
Headaches	Difficulty identifying familiar objects	Depression	Loss/increase in appetite	
Visual problems	More/less awareness of surroundings	Inappropriate emotions	Acting out/antisocial behavior	
Vomiting	Flashbacks/intrusive images	Apprehension	Nonspecific body complaints	
Grinding teeth	Poor problem solving ability	Feeling overwhelmed	Hyper-alert to environment	
Weakness	Decreased reasoning skills	Intense anger	Easily startled	
Dizziness	Loss of orientation	Irritability	Pacing	
Profuse sweating	Impaired thinking	Agitation	Erratic movements	

\*Indicates need for medical assistance.

Children can also have the same reactions as adults as well as other symptoms such as bedwetting, thumb sucking, withdrawal, fear of separation from their parent(s), nightmares, and noticeable sadness or anxiety. Children's reactions often mirror those of their care givers.