



Central Minnesota EMS Region CISM Team

Critical Incident Stress Information Sheet for Significant Others

Your loved one has been involved in an emotion-charged event, often known as a critical incident. He/she may be experiencing normal stress responses to such an event (critical incident stress). Critical incident stress affects most of the people exposed to a critical incident. No one is immune to critical incident stress, regardless of past experiences or years of experience. Your loved one may experience critical incident stress at any time during his/her career.

Important things to remember about critical incident stress:

- ❑ The signs of critical incident stress are physical, cognitive, emotional, and behavioral. Your loved one has received a handout outlining these signs. Please ask him/her to share it with you.
- ❑ Critical incident stress response can occur right at the scene, within hours, within days, or even within weeks.
- ❑ Your loved one may experience a variety of signs/symptoms of a stress response or he/she may not feel any of the signs at this time.
- ❑ Suffering from the effects of critical incident stress is completely normal. Your loved one is not the only one suffering; other emergency personnel shared the event and are probably sharing the reaction.
- ❑ The symptoms will normally subside and disappear in time if you and your loved one do not dwell upon them.
- ❑ All phases of our lives overlap and influence each other; personal, professional, family, etc. The impact of critical incident stress can be intensified, influenced, or mitigated by our own personal, family, and current developmental issues.
- ❑ Encourage, but do NOT pressure, your loved one to talk about the incident and his/her reaction 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 he/she would consider helpful.
- ❑ Accept the fact that life will go on: his/hers, yours, and your children's, etc. 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. The Critical Incident Stress Debriefing Team can help you and your loved one find a professional who understands critical incident stress and how it can affect you.