



AFRICA FIRE MISSION

Firefighter Self Care Following A Critical Incident

What Is A Critical Incident?

A critical incident is often referred to as a crisis event. Any event which has a stressful impact which overwhelms the normal coping skills of either an individual or a group of individuals may be considered a critical incident. Critical incidents are typically sudden, powerful events which are outside the normal range of ordinary human experiences. Unusual events can cause a strong emotional effect even on well-trained professionals and may impact the ability to function.

Common Reactions and Symptoms of Concern

Critical incidents trigger stress symptoms. Stress symptoms usually occur in five different categories. There is greater potential for lasting harm the longer these symptoms persist. Some examples include:

Cognitive/ Thinking

Poor Concentration
Difficulties with Calculations
Poor Attention Span
Difficulty Making Decisions
Slowed Problem Solving
Memory Problems

Emotional/ Feeling

Guilt
Feeling Lost / Overwhelmed
Anger
Depression / Grief
Loss of Emotional Control

Physical/Body

Muscle Tremors
Chest Pains
Gastrointestinal Distress
Difficulty Breathing
Headaches
Elevated Blood Pressure

Behavioral/Actions

Excessive Silence
Sleep Disturbances
Extreme Behavioral Change
Changes in Eating Habits
Withdrawal from Contact
Change In Work Habits

Spiritual/ Relationship with God

Anger at Clergy
Changes in Religious Involvement
Sense Of Isolation From God
Questioning Basic Beliefs
Loss Of Meaning Or Purpose
Faith Practices Seem Empty
Withdrawal From Place Of Worship
Anger At God

Reactions to a stressful event may last a few days, weeks or months and occasionally longer depending on the severity of the traumatic event. With understanding and the support of loved ones, the stress reactions usually pass more quickly.

Family and Friends can help by:

- ◆ Listening carefully
- ◆ Spending quality Time with loved ones
- ◆ Reassuring safety
- ◆ Allowing for private time
- ◆ Avoid critiquing, probing or attempting to fix the problem
- ◆ Help with everyday tasks (cleaning, cooking, household)
- ◆ Avoid statements like "God's Will," "Could have been worse", etc.



Scriptures for Comfort

1 Peter 5:7

Cast all your anxiety on Him because He cares for you.

Psalms 18:6-35

⁶In my distress I called to the Lord; I cried to my God for help. From His temple He heard my voice; my cry came before Him, into His ears... ¹⁶He reached down from on high and took hold of me; He drew me out of deep waters... ³²It is God who arms me with strength and keeps my way secure... ³⁵You make Your saving help my shield, and Your right hand sustains me; Your help has made me great.

2 Thessalonians 3:3

But the Lord is faithful, and He will strengthen you and protect you from the evil one.

Taking Care Of Yourself

- ◆ Watch for illnesses, headaches, stomach disorders
- ◆ Exercise (especially within the first 24 hours)
- ◆ Plenty of rest
- ◆ Maintain a normal routine
- ◆ Structure your time, keep busy
- ◆ Use Vitamins B & C
- ◆ Spend time with trusted family, friends, co-workers
- ◆ Share your thoughts with trusted family, friends
- ◆ Deep breathing exercises
- ◆ Relaxation / Prayer
- ◆ Reach out to others and avoid isolation
- ◆ Avoid the use of caffeine, drugs, alcohol
- ◆ Keep a journal
- ◆ Maintain good posture to remove tension from your shoulders
- ◆ Watch for signs of stress in your peers / co-workers
- ◆ Remember it is okay to smile and laugh—laughter increases oxygen to your brain
- ◆ Recognize you are experiencing stress



Things to AVOID When Coping With Stress

- ◆ Denial or ignoring the problem
- ◆ Finding fault, complaining, criticizing, judging
- ◆ Indulging or acting on impulse, wasting time or sleeping in
- ◆ Passivity or procrastination . . . Hoping it gets better
- ◆ Revenge or negative talk / sarcasm
- ◆ Stubbornness, demanding your own way

Professional assistance from a counselor may be beneficial and necessary. This does not imply craziness or weakness. The need simply indicates that the particular event was too powerful for the individual to manage on his/her own.