

SOME DO'S AND DON'TS

It is very common, in fact quite normal, for people to experience emotional after-shocks when they have experienced a critical incident. If you are experiencing signs of excessive stress – you may find the following suggestions helpful in coping with the symptoms:

DO express your emotions & feelings

DO identify trusted friends and colleagues to whom you can

- ▶ talk about what happened
- ▶ review the experience(s)

DO look to friends and colleagues for support

DO listen sympathetically if a colleague wants to speak with you, unless it is too distressing

DO advise colleagues who need more support where they can get appropriate help

DO try to keep your life as normal as possible

DO try to keep to daily routines

DO drive more carefully

DO be more careful around the home

DON'T use alcohol, nicotine or other drugs to hide your feelings or manage your reactions

DON'T simply stay away from work – seek help and support

DON'T allow anger and irritability to mask your feelings

DON'T bottle up feelings

DON'T be afraid to ask for help

DON'T think your feelings are signs of weakness

WHERE TO FIND HELP:

1. The Ambulance Service has a **Peer Support Worker** network and we recommend that you contact them for help and advice. For contacts details see below.
2. By consulting your own GP.
3. The HSE also have a staff support system which you can contact directly, see link HSE link below <http://www.hse.ie/eng/staff/safetywellbeing/eap/>
4. If you require professional support, your PSW or regional coordinator can arrange to refer you on.

Don't simply stay away from work if you are feeling down – talk to your manager and seek support through the CISM system

REGIONAL CISM INFORMATION:

Coordinator: Name & Number

Deputy Coordinator: Name & Number

Trained PSWs: Names & Number

If you need support from the system you can contact any of the PSWs with whom you feel confident in discussing your difficulties.



Stress and Critical Incident Stress – A Guide for the Ambulance Service

How to recognise Stress in yourself and colleagues & How to seek help

WHAT IS STRESS?

Stress is a mental and physical condition which results from pressure or demands that strain or exceed our capacity or perceived capacity to cope (HSE, 2012). The greater the demand the more intense the stress reaction. Prolonged or excessive stress causes distress.

HOW DO WE KNOW WHEN WE ARE STRESSED?

Listed below are some common indicators

- ▶ Feeling overwhelmed
- ▶ Loss of motivation
- ▶ Dreading going to work
- ▶ Becoming withdrawn
- ▶ Impaired concentration
- ▶ Racing thoughts
- ▶ Confusion
- ▶ Difficulty making decisions
- ▶ Impaired memory
- ▶ Feelings of
 - ▶ Anxiety
 - ▶ Depression
 - ▶ Anger
 - ▶ Guilt

- ▶ Racing heart, breathlessness and rapid breathing
- ▶ Feeling hot and flushed, excessive sweating
- ▶ Dry mouth, churning stomach
- ▶ Diarrhoea and digestive problems
- ▶ Frequent desire to use toilet
- ▶ Muscle tension
- ▶ Restlessness, tiredness, sleep difficulties, headaches
- ▶ Increased drinking or smoking
- ▶ Over eating, loss of appetite
- ▶ Loss of interest in sex
- ▶ Self neglect

WHAT IS CRITICAL INCIDENT STRESS (CIS)?

CIS is the stress caused by an event, or series of events, which is of such severity that it has the capacity to overwhelm our usual coping mechanisms, thereby creating significant distress and impaired functioning.

HOW DO I KNOW WHEN I AM ADVERSELY AFFECTED BY A CRITICAL INCIDENT(S)?

Prolonged or excessive levels of stress are factor in the origins of some physical and psychological health problems.

Listed below are some common ways in which people react to incidents like this:

- ▶ Feeling of distress
- ▶ Feeling of sadness
- ▶ Strong feelings of anger
- ▶ Feeling of disillusionment
- ▶ Feeling of guilt
- ▶ Feeling of apprehension/anxiety/fear of:
 - ▶ losing control/breaking down or
 - ▶ something similar happening again
 - ▶ not having done all I think I could have done
- ▶ Avoidance of the scene of incident /trauma or of anything that reminds you of it.
- ▶ Bad dreams or nightmares
- ▶ Distressing memories or “flashbacks” of the incident coming into your mind even though you don’t want them to.
- ▶ Feeling “on edge” irritable, angry, under threat/ pressure.
- ▶ Feeling emotionally fragile – unable to experience your normal range of emotions
- ▶ Feeling cut off from your family or close friends – “I can’t talk to them” or “I don’t want to upset them”

These are all normal reactions which you may experience.

They are not signs of weakness or inadequacy.

Also, it is perfectly normal NOT to experience any of these emotions or not to experience them to an upsetting degree.

WHEN TO FIND HELP:

1. If you feel you cannot cope with your reactions or feelings.
2. If your stress reactions do not lessen in the two or three weeks following the event.
3. If you continue to have nightmares and poor sleep.
4. If you have no-one with whom to share your feelings when you want to do so.
5. If your relationships seem to be suffering badly, or sexual problems develop.
6. If you become clumsy or accident prone.
7. If, in order to cope after the event, you smoke, drink or take more medication, or other drugs.
8. If your work performance suffers.
9. If you are tired all the time.
10. If things get on top of you and you feel like giving up.
11. If you take it out on your family
12. If your health deteriorates.