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## Critical Incident Stress

All of our members experienced traumatic events on September 11, 2001 which may cause unusually strong emotional reactions which have the potential to interfere with your ability to function either now or later.

Even though the event may be over, you may now be experiencing or may experience later, some strong emotional or physical reactions. It is very common, in fact quite normal, for people to experience emotional aftershocks when they have passed through a horrible event.

Sometimes the emotional aftershocks (or stress reactions) appear immediately after the traumatic event. Sometimes they may appear a few hours or a few days later. And, in some cases, weeks or months may pass before the stress reactions appear.

The signs and symptoms of a stress reaction may last a few days, a few weeks or a few 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. Occasionally the traumatic event is so painful that professional assistance from a counselor may be necessary. This does not imply craziness or weakness. It simply indicates that the particular event was just too powerful for the person to manage by themselves.

### What to do in the short term

- Structure your time – keep busy.
- You're normal and having normal reactions – don't label yourself crazy.
- Talk to people – talk is the most healing medicine.
- Be aware of numbing the pain with overuse of drugs or alcohol, you don't need to complicate this with a substance abuse problem.
- Reach out – people care.
- Maintain as normal a schedule as possible.
- Spend time with others.
- Help your co-workers as much as possible by sharing feelings and checking out how they're doing.
- Give yourself permission to feel rotten and share your feelings with others.
- Keep a journal; write your way through those sleepless hours.
- Realize those around you are under stress.
- Don't make any big life changes.
- Get plenty of rest.
- Reoccurring thoughts, dreams or flashbacks are normal – don't try to fight them – they'll decrease over time and become less painful.
- Eat well-balanced and regular meals (even if you don't feel like it).

# Crisis Reaction

## A Normal Response to an Abnormal Situation

All of these – feelings and reactions – are normal and natural – even though they may seem unusual and even though some are very different from others. We are all individuals. We respond in our own way, differently. The memory will always be a part of your life – the incident cannot be erased. Everyone moves at their own pace through the stages of crisis and of healing – everyone has their own clock. For some people, there may be on-going problems.

### Possible Reactions:

Numbness	Confusion
Crying	Concentration problems
Fatigue	Memory problems
Sleep Disturbance	Religious confusion
Change in appetite/weight	Loss of trust
Low resistance to illness	Flashbacks
Frustration	Anniversary difficulties
Helplessness	Regression
Depression	Alcohol and drug abuse
Despair	Excessive use of sick leave
Grief	Work-family problems
Guilt	Withdrawal
Anger	Suicidal thoughts
Outrage	Feeling overwhelmed
Insecurity	Feeling inadequate
Fear	Difficulty returning to normal activity level
Anxiety	

### Suggestions:

Talk about what happened.

Talk about your feelings.

Don't Monday-morning quarterback. We can always think of what we or others could have done differently.

Take care of yourself physically – balanced diet, rest, and exercise – maintain a routine.

Avoid use of drugs or alcohol – medication should be taken sparingly and only under the supervision of a physician – substances may be addictive and interfere with the healing process.

# Long – Term Stress Reaction

When someone survives a traumatic event they often experience stress reactions for years.

Long-term stress reactions are natural responses of people who have survived a traumatic event.

Stress responses may involve Post Traumatic Stress Disorder which can be identified as a disorder experienced by an individual that is outside the range of human experience and that would be markedly distressing to almost anyone.

## Symptoms of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder

Experience one of the following:

1. Recurring and distressing recollection of the event.
2. Recurring distressing dreams of the event.
3. Sudden acting or feeling as if the event was recurring (flashbacks).
4. Intense psychological distress at exposure to events that resemble the incident.

Experiencing at least three of the following:

1. Deliberate efforts to avoid thoughts or feelings associated with the event.
2. Deliberate attempts to avoid activities associated with the event.
3. Inability to recall important aspects of the event.
4. Diminished interest in significant activities.
5. Feeling of detachment or estrangement from others.
6. Restricted range of anger.
7. Sense of foreshortened future.

Experiencing at least two of the following:

1. Difficulty staying awake or sleeping.
2. Outbursts of anger or irritability.
3. Difficulty concentrating.
4. Hypervigilance.

If you experience these symptoms for a month or longer, you may need an assessment by a professional therapist as it is likely you are suffering from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.

Please contact any of the Employee Assistance Program personnel listed below for a confidential interview and referral.