

States of Jersey
Emergency Planning Group
Critical Incident Support Team

Coping with a Critical Incident

“when you need that extra help”

This leaflet has been produced by the States of Jersey Emergency Planning Group Critical Incident Support Team to assist you to understand the possible thoughts, feelings and reactions to the recent incident in which you were involved.

Whilst training and experience are often a help in avoiding the worst effects of a critical incident, they do not always provide a complete safeguard to the emotional shock you may experience.

How you may feel emotionally after a critical incident

The impact of an event may be so significant that it may be re-experienced for several hours after the incident and individuals may appear out of character (over the top or withdrawn). Flashbacks and dreams are also common, as is the feeling that the event is happening again. The reactions to this, although natural, can be distressing and frightening.

Children and young people are as likely to be affected as adults and they may have similar experiences. Parents can help their children by providing both information and reassurance.

Sadness

Profound sadness is common following tragic deaths, severe injuries and losses of every kind.

Anger

Anger may be felt about the injustice (senselessness) of an incident. This anger may not dissipate and can show as angry outbursts.

Continual Adrenaline Reaction

You may feel that your body is in continuous turmoil (churned up) – you may find it difficult to rest, sleep or have peace of mind – you may experience loss of concentration or memory and it is not unusual to cry.

Numbness

A traumatic experience may cause blocking of feelings – withdrawal from feelings, interests, people and activities.

Living on Borrowed Time

Traumatic events can fundamentally change your outlook on life and your thoughts on death. It may also trigger concern for family members safety and mortality.

Helplessness

These incidents may be overwhelming, making you feel powerless to help.

Guilt

When others have been injured or killed, a common reaction is to feel guilty for surviving or for not having done more.

Fear

New fears and worries may start to feature in your life. The fear of losing control or breaking down may be intense. Fear of a similar incident happening again may become a preoccupation.

Physical Effects

Mind and body work in conjunction and in addition to emotional distress the human body may react in certain ways:-

- ❖ After the ‘adrenaline rush’ required at an incident, the body may need to shut down leading to exhaustion.

- ❖ Alternatively the ‘adrenaline rush’ may persist resulting in:

- Palpitations of the heart;
- Rapid respirations;
- Tremors, shaking, profuse sweating especially palms of hands;
- Gastro-intestinal symptoms, diarrhoea, vomiting, constipation, loss of appetite, comfort eating;
- Tension – can result in muscles tensing, causing headaches, backaches or general stiffness, chest pains, dizziness, a choking sensation (lump in throat). All of these are common physical symptoms.

Remember you do not need to react to be normal but it is normal to react

Reactions may come and go or be present all the time.

The reactions usually start to diminish within a week or so before fading away altogether. If the reactions **persist** beyond 4 to 6 weeks it is important that you talk to someone about it.

Details of where to find help can be found on the last page of this leaflet

Relationships

After a critical incident you may tend to distance yourself from those you are close to, be they friends, colleagues or family. You may imagine your feelings are best not shared. This is the very time when you should share your feelings and not assume ‘no one will understand’.

By sharing your thoughts and feelings you allow your family and friends to support and comfort you.

Remember accidents are more common following severe stress. So please be careful when driving, when at work and around the home.

Self Help

Talking to friends – family – colleagues.

Don't Bottle It Up

If you feel you need to speak with someone in confidence about your thoughts and feelings, contact numbers can be found on the last page of this leaflet.

Support from Family, Friends and Partners

You may find it useful to give people who are important to you the chance to read this leaflet. The information shown will help them understand the possible effects of a critical incident. This will encourage their support should you wish to talk about your feelings with them.

When to find Further Help

Experience shows that reactions to traumatic incidents usually fade as time passes. However, if you continue to experience:-

- The incident in the forefront of your mind
- You feel tense, exhausted, confused or restless
- You feel angry
- Those close to you comment on your personality change
- Your work performance deteriorates
- You have nightmares, flashbacks, panic attacks or disturbed sleeping patterns
- Your relationships are suffering badly

- There is change in sexual drive
- You are more accident prone
- You feel you want to avoid contact with work, or people connected with it
- You have noticed an increase in your smoking/drinking habits
- Your eating patterns are erratic
- You find yourself relying more on medication.

WHERE TO FIND THAT EXTRA HELP

Your general practitioner should be contacted if you suffer an acute reaction. The same advice applies for children:

- a) To ensure your medical record is complete;
- b) In case medication is required;
- c) To allow your GP to monitor your recovery.

Should the symptoms continue for more than a month your GP should be notified.

For further information on Coping with a Critical Incident please contact:

Critical Incident Support Team
Helpline Tel:
Email:
Website:

The Psychology Assessment & Therapy Service Tel: (01534) 624554

Other support groups and caring organisations include:

The Samaritans
Tel: 08457 90 90 90
Website: www.samaritans.org

Community Bereavement Service
Tel: (01534) 285144