



RBH Road Maps™

Acute Signs and Symptoms

Following a Critical Incident

Not everyone goes through each phase, but most people experience at least some of the following symptoms at varying levels of intensity.

I. IMPACT PHASE: within the first 24 hours

Physical

- Shock
- Hypothermia
- Fight/flight
- Insomnia
- Trembling
- Nausea

Cognitive

- Perceptual distortion
- Difficulty with decisions
- Repeated thoughts of the incident
- Memory lapses

Behavioral

- Decreased or increased talking
- Agitation
- Decreased or increased motion or activity

Emotional

- Tearfulness
- Numbing
- Re-experience past emotions
- Excitability
- Helplessness

Spiritual

- Disorientation of beliefs
- Experience meaningless (why?)
- Feeling betrayed or abandoned
- Up-rooted/disconnected
- Guilt (am I being punished?)

II. RECOIL PHASE: 1 to 10 days

Physical

- Fatigue
- Low energy
- Nightmares
- Fitful Sleep
- Decreased or increased appetite

Cognitive

- Repeated thoughts
- Poor concentration
- Psychogenic amnesia
- Self-doubt (what if...)
- Confusion

Behavioral

- Decreased sexual interest
- Withdrawn from family/friends
- Avoiding things that produce memories of incident
- Increased use of drugs/alcohol

Emotional

- Denying emotions
- Fear of losing control
- Hyper vigilance
- Irritability

Spiritual

- Reassessing ultimate beliefs/values
- Hyper-religious
- Disaffection
- Distrust/lack of trust
- Retreating to aloneness/loneliness

III. COPING PHASE: 10 days to several months

Symptoms listed above may occur at less frequent, milder levels. Symptom distress gradually declines. Occasional, spontaneous, short-term return of symptom intensity may be triggered by sights, sounds, smells, or events that bring back mental images of the incident. If many of the above symptoms continue to be distressing or interfere with life functions for longer than 30 days, or if distressing symptoms do not occur until six months following incident, then you may be experiencing Post Traumatic Stress Disorder to some degree.

Evaluation by a psychologist or professional who is knowledgeable about the diagnostic criteria for PTSD can help determine a productive course of action. Consultation with the Employee Assistance Program can be helpful.

Symptoms that occur within the first 30 days and gradually begin to lessen are not Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). They are unpleasant, intrusive, and painful, but natural, human reactions following a critical incident.

For help with any issues you may be having in your life, contact the EAP for free, confidential counseling, work-life services and 24-hour crisis support.

1.866.750.1327
www.MyRBH.com





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Helpful Activities after a Critical Incident

- Physical exercise within 24 hours.
- Allow plenty of rest, while at the same time sticking to a normal schedule.
- Balanced nutrition.
- Know that it's okay to feel numb and in shock for awhile - this is normal.
- Avoid boredom.
- Talk about reactions and feelings with people who are genuinely concerned about you. Use your support systems: family, friends, co-workers, etc.
- Don't fight dreams and flashbacks - they are distressing and normal.
- Organize and attend a Critical Incident Support Session.
- If distressing symptoms continue for six weeks or more, call the EAP.
- Avoid major decisions. Accept that you may be more absentminded and forgetful.
- Remind yourself that you will survive and things will get better.
- Maintain a balanced sense of humor.

Helpful Coping

- Ability to identify the stressors.
- Viewing the problem as shared by the family, not the property of one person.
- Clearly expressing the problem (reject the commandments of masculinity).
- Evidence of role flexibility (adjust to meet the needs of the situation).
- Evidence of high family (or work group) cohesion.
- Avoiding (absence of) substance abuse/dependence.
- Adopting a solution-oriented approach instead of blaming.

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