

## What is critical Incident Stress?

Workers responding to emergency events and or disasters will see and experience events that will strain their ability to function. These events, which include having to witness or experience tragedy, death, serious injuries and threatening situations, are called "Critical Incidents." The physical and psychological well-being of those experiencing this stress, as well as their future ability to function through a prolonged response, will depend upon how they manage this stress. Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder differs from critical incident stress by lasting longer than four weeks after the event is triggering the emotional, mental or physical response. Most instance of critical incident stress last between two and four weeks.

## What are some signs of critical incident stress?

The signs of critical incident stress can be physical, emotional, cognitive, or behavioral. Individuals express stress in different ways and therefore manifest different reactions. The list below is not exhaustive but will help supervisors to identify workers who are exhibiting stress reactions.

### COGNITIVE

- Confusion
- Nightmares
- Poor attention, decision making ability
- Poor concentration, memory
- Poor problem solving ability
- Uncertainty

### EMOTIONAL

- Apprehension & depression
- Chronic anxiety
- Fear
- Grief
- Intense anger
- Irritability

### BEHAVIORAL

- Antisocial behavior
- Change in communication
- Inability to rest
- Increased alcohol consumption
- Loss/increase in appetite
- Withdrawal

## What can be done immediately?

During the emergency phase of the response, monitoring of employee by simple conversation and observation may help to identify early signs for the responder. The following steps can help to reduce significant stress detected early in the response:

- Limit exposure to noise & odors.
- Dictate an immediate 15 minute rest break.
- Provide non-caffeinated fluids to drink
- Get the person to talk about his or hers feelings.
- Do not rush the person back to work.

**For assistance with stress and coping strategies, call Rodney Clark @ 415-827-1624 or Dr. Dan Clark 360-561-0254**