

Dear Fellow Officer,

You have been involved in what is known as a “High Stress Event” (a situation that causes you to have unusually strong emotional reactions, which have the potential to interfere with your ability to function normally). It is my intent to help you through this event and the days and weeks that follow. Please understand my sole purpose is to help you.

Let me begin by saying that 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of officers involved in critical incidents have serious trauma, 1/3 have moderate trauma, and 1/3 have no trauma. With this in mind, any reaction you have can be considered “normal.” The reactions you have, the feelings you have, and will have are all normal. You may feel a variety of emotions ranging from fear to sadness to anger to loneliness at any given time. You may have no emotional change at all for some time. Just understand it is OK to talk about your feelings to someone you trust, and that it is my purpose to get you through this incident and the events that will follow. This letter is to begin a “defusing” process (to take out the “fuse of a bomb”) in order to help you to understand human reactions to certain situations.

During the incident, your body may have changed and may take several hours to return to normal. You may have any one or combination of any of these physical changes during this return to normal:

Tremors/shakes, lightheadedness, increased heart rate, increased blood pressure, chills, hyperventilation, sweats, and/or nausea.

Psychological changes that may occur are: denial or dissociation from the event; emotional moods such as anger, sadness, and fear; irritability, overactive, agitated; feeling of isolation; preoccupation with the event; and oversensitivity. The most common psychological reaction is a heightened sense of danger. You will second guess yourself and your actions a hundred times or more. Over the next few days to weeks, you may experience difficulty sleeping and eating, irritability, anxiety, fatigue, stomachaches, indigestion/heartburn, difficulty concentrating, emotional numbing, depression, alienation, guilt, sorrow, remorse, loss of control, flashbacks, the mark of Cain, and other feelings. Please know that these are ***normal human reactions to an abnormal situation*** and that different people react differently to any given situation. Remember, 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of officers experience all or most of these emotions, 1/3<sup>rd</sup> experience some of these emotions, and 1/3<sup>rd</sup> experience little or no change to emotions at all. Any of the three is normal.

What you can do for yourself to help? Here are some suggestions of what to do:

1. Do NOT consume alcohol or controlled substances.
2. Only talk to the people you want to talk to. Obviously, you’ll have to talk to investigators about crucial evidence, but do NOT give or write a complete statement until you have had two consecutive nights of good, non-drug induced sleep.
3. Talk to your lawyer about the incident. They will help you with legal matters that may be coming.
4. Have a fellow officer who you trust stay close by at all times. Let them screen your calls, bring you and your family food, and generally take care of you. Talk to them about your emotions. Be careful about talking about the details of the incident. Your pastor/priest/rabbi will be an excellent person to talk to. This conversation is privileged.
5. Take care of your body. Shower, eat, sleep, and exercise. If you were injured, do exactly what your doctor tells you to do.
6. Turn on your answering machine at home; turn off your cell phone. Your friends will make you relive the incident a hundred times over the phone. At the same time, talking to someone you trust is very good medicine. People care about you and want to help. Have them come see you and talk things out.

7. Wait at least 6 months before making major life changes (marriage, divorce, new job).
8. I am available to help you 24 hours a day. I can get you some of the world's best police counselors to help you for free. We may go through a "debriefing" within the next few days. This will help you to feel better and you will hear from others who have been in incidents similar to yours.
9. If you have continuing signs of high blood pressure, chest pain, severe headaches, or stomach problems, you must get medical attention immediately.
10. Know that people may say dumb things like "You should have..." or "I would have..." Take these things with a grain of salt. You are the one going through this.
11. Don't neglect your family. Remember, they are going through this event, too. Keep your life balanced with church/synagogue, family, friends, exercise, and time alone.
12. If you have continued thoughts of suicide or homicide, call me immediately.

The Chief/Sheriff, \_\_\_\_\_, has made me available for you 24 hours a day, seven days per week. Should you need anything, please call me. My numbers are:

Cell:

Home:

Office:

Please know that I care about you and want to help, and everything you tell me is absolutely confidential.

Sincerely,