

# High Stress Events

You have experienced a High Stress Event (any event that causes you to change emotionally). Even though the event may be over, you may be experiencing, or may experience later, some strong reactions. It is in fact *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 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, a few months, or longer, depending on the severity of the event. The understanding and the support of loved ones usually cause the stress reactions to pass more quickly. Occasionally, the event is so painful that professional assistance 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 himself/herself.

Here are some common signs and signals of a stress reaction:

## *Physical*

chills  
thirst  
fatigue  
nausea  
twitches  
vomiting  
dizziness  
weakness  
headaches  
elevated BP  
rapid heart rate  
muscle tremors  
grinding of teeth  
visual difficulties  
profuse sweating  
**difficulty breathing\***  
**fainting\***  
**chest pain\***  
**shock symptoms\***  
**panic attacks\***

## *Cognitive*

confusion  
nightmares  
uncertainty  
hyper-vigilance  
suspiciousness  
intrusive images  
blaming someone, self-blame  
poor problem solving  
poor abstract thinking  
poor attention/decisions  
poor concentration / memory  
disorientation of time, place,  
or person  
difficulty identifying objects or  
people, losing objects  
heightened or lowered  
alertness  
increased or decreased  
awareness of surroundings,  
etc.

## *Emotional*

fear  
guilt  
grief  
**panic attacks\***  
denial  
anxiety  
agitation  
irritability  
depression  
intense anger  
apprehension  
emotional shock  
emotional outbursts  
feeling overwhelmed  
loss of emotional control  
inappropriate emotional  
response etc...  
Questioning Authority

## *Behavioral*

Withdrawal  
antisocial acts  
inability to rest  
intensified pacing  
erratic movements  
change in social activity  
change in speech patterns  
loss or increase of appetite  
hyper-alert to environment  
increased alcohol consumption  
change in usual communications, etc.

## **Spiritual Changes**

Questioning God  
Questioning your own faith  
+ or - Change in faith practices  
Change in church attendance

\* Any of these symptoms may indicate the need for medical evaluation.

When in doubt, contact a physician.

## **THINGS TO TRY:**

- WITHIN THE FIRST SEVERAL DAYS periods of appropriate physical exercise, alternated with relaxation will alleviate some of the physical reactions. If you don't normally exercise, don't overdo it.
- Structure your time; keep busy. Don't sit around your house feeling sorry for yourself.
- You're normal and having normal reactions; don't label yourself crazy.
- Talk to people; talk is healing medicine.
- Avoid "Numbing" the pain with use of drugs or alcohol, you don't need to complicate this with a substance abuse problem.
- Reach out; people do care.
- Maintain as normal a schedule as possible.
- Spend time with others. Some self or "me" time is ok as long as it is limited.
- Help your co-workers as much as possible by sharing feelings and checking out how they are doing.
- Give yourself permission to feel
- Try not to use drugs to help you sleep. Warm milk, turkey, and a boring book will help.
- Do things that feel good to you.
- Allow another person in the home to render discipline to children for a couple days.
- Realize those around you are under stress.
- Don't make any major life changes for at least six

months

- Do make as many daily decisions as possible
- Get plenty of rest.
- Don't try to fight reoccurring thoughts, dreams or flashbacks - they are normal and will decrease over time and become less painful.
- Eat well-balanced and regular meals (even if you don't feel like it).
- Remember your fellow officers are here to help!
- It's OK to laugh. It's OK to Cry. It's OK for others to see you doing both.
- *Keep this handout for future reading and reference*

## **FOR FAMILY MEMBERS & FRIENDS**

- Listen carefully.
- Spend time with the traumatized person.
- Offer your assistance and a listening ear if (s)he has not asked for help.
- Help him with everyday tasks like caring for the family and minding children.
- Give him some private time. Don't take his anger or other feelings personally.
- Don't tell him that he is "lucky it wasn't worse;" a traumatized person is not consoled by those statements. Instead, tell him that you are sorry such an event has occurred and you want to understand and assist him.

NAME HERE

Law Enforcement Alliance for Peer Support

(cell)

[www.alleaps.org](http://www.alleaps.org)