

Defusing Handout

Alabama Statute 36-1-14

You have experienced a traumatic event, a high-stress event, or a critical incident (any event that commonly unusually strong emotional reactions that have the potential to interfere with the ability to function normally).

Even though the event may be over, you may now be experiencing or may experience later, some strong emotional, spiritual, or physical reactions. It is very common, in fact **quite normal**, for officers to experience emotional aftershocks when they have passed through a horrible event. (1/3 rule)

Sometimes the emotional aftershocks (or stress reactions) appear immediately after the traumatic 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 traumatic event. The understanding and the support of loved ones usually cause the stress reactions to pass more quickly. Occasionally, the traumatic 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 you to manage alone.

Here are some common signs and signals of a stress reaction

Physical*

chill
thirst
fatigue
nausea
Muting
twitches
vomiting
dizziness
weakness
chest pain
headaches
elevated BP
rapid heart rate
muscle tremors
shock symptoms
grinding of teeth
visual difficulties
profuse sweating
difficulty breathing,
etc.

Cognitive

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

Emotional

fear
guilt
grief
panic
denial
anxiety
agitation
irritability
depression
intense anger
apprehension
emotional shock
emotional outbursts
feeling overwhelmed
lack of emotional
control
inappropriate
emotional responses
etc.

Behavioral

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

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

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.
- Structure your time; keep busy.
- You're normal and having normal reactions; don't label yourself crazy.
- Talk to people; talk is the most healing medicine.
- Be aware of numbing the pain with overuse 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.
- Help your co-workers as much as possible by sharing feelings and checking out how they are doing.
- Give yourself permission to feel rotten and share your feelings with others.
- If you like writing or typing, keep a journal; write your way through those sleepless hours.
- Do things that feel good to you.
- Allow another person in the home to render discipline to children for a couple of days.
- Realize those around you are under stress.
- Don't make any big life changes.
- Do make as many daily decisions as possible that will give you a feeling of control over your life, e.g., if someone asks you what you want to eat, answer him /her even if you're not sure.
- 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!

FOR FAMILY MEMBERS & FRIENDS

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

Alabama Law Enforcement Alliance for Peer Support

We're just like you. We're here to respond and help you deal with the physical, emotional, cognitive, behavioral and spiritual effects of job-related stresses. You are not alone! If you have any questions, please let us know.

**You may also visit our website: www.alleaps.org
State -Wide Emergency Toll -free: (833) 219 -2461**

- Heath Carpenter, LT, SBI , State Coordinator, ALLEAPS @ 334 -726 -1980
- Tim P. Faulk, Ph.D. , CTTS , Clinical Director, ALLEAPS @ 334 -701 -9624
- John Gallups, USSS, ICPC, ALLEAPS Chaplain @ 334 -201 -2432