

Defusing

(Taking the fuse out of the bomb)



If you have experienced a traumatic or high-stress event, a critical incident, or any event that causes unusually strong emotional reactions, your natural responses have the potential to interfere with your ability to function as usual.

Even though the event may be over, you may now be experiencing or may experience later some intense physical, cognitive, emotional, or behavioral reactions. It is very common and normal to experience emotional aftershocks when you have passed through a traumatic or high-stress event. (1/3 rule)

Occasionally emotional aftershocks (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 traumatic event's severity, level of exposure, or closeness. The understanding and support of loved ones usually cause stress reactions to pass more quickly. Occasionally, traumatic events are so painful that professional assistance may be necessary. This does not imply weakness, only that the event injured or damaged part of you that needs additional care (you wouldn't put a Band-Aid on an injury that needs stitches).

Some of the most common and normal signs of a stress reaction include:

Physical	Cognitive	Emotional	Behavioral
-chills -thirst -fatigue -nausea -muting -twitches -vomiting -dizziness -weakness -headaches -elevated BP -elevated heart rate -muscle tremors -grinding of teeth ===== *Profuse sweating *Chest pain *Difficulty breathing *Visual difficulties *Shock symptoms *Resting pulse above 120 *High blood pressure (Average = 120/80)	-nightmares -confusion -uncertainty -hypervigilance -suspiciousness -intrusive images -blaming someone -poor problem solving -poor abstract thinking -poor attention -poor decisions -poor concentration -the disorientation of time, place, or person -difficulty identifying people or objects -heightened or lowered alertness -increased or decreased awareness of surroundings	-fear -guilt -grief -panic -denial -anxiety -agitation -irritability -depression -intense anger -apprehension -emotional shock -emotional outbursts -feeling overwhelmed -lack of emotional control -inappropriate emotional response	-increased alcohol consumption -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 -change in usual communications

**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 reduce some of the physical reactions.
- Structure your time and try to keep busy.
- YOU ARE NORMAL and having NORMAL REACTIONS; don't label yourself BROKEN!
- Talk to people; talk is the most healing medicine.
- Be aware of *numbing* the pain with the 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 terrible and share your feelings with others.
- If you like writing or typing, keep a journal; write your way through those sleepless hours.
- Within reason, do things that feel good to you.
- Allow another person in the home to discipline the children for a couple of days.
- Realize those around you are under stress.
- For the next six months, 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 your partner/family member.
- 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 disciplining 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;" they are not consoled by those statements. Instead, tell them you are sorry such an event has occurred and want to understand and assist them.

The Alabama Law Enforcement Alliance for Peer Support (ALLEAPS) is a non-agency affiliated program to offer free, peer-based, *totally privileged, and confidential* (Alabama Statute 36-21-14) assistance to you and other officers! Your command will never know unless *you* tell them. If you want to talk or have further questions, don't hesitate to contact us.

Toll-Free Number (833) 219-2461
www.alleaps.org