

How to Support your Loved One: DOs and DON'Ts

- ✓ **DO** offer a listening ear
- ✗ **DON'T** probe them to share their experience (many prefer to limit sharing certain experiences with a co-worker)
- ✓ **DO** listen carefully and non-judgmentally
- ✗ **DON'T** ask them to share graphic, gruesome, or distressing details (especially in presence of children)
- ✗ **DON'T** tell them they are 'lucky it wasn't worse'
- ✓ **DO** tell them you are sorry such an event has occurred and that you want to help
- ✓ **DO** spend time with them (engage in activities you enjoy doing together)
- ✓ **DO** offer help with everyday tasks like cooking, cleaning, and caring for the family (even if they haven't asked)
- ✗ **DON'T** take their anger or other feelings personally
- ✓ **DO** give them more opportunities for personal time

MORE INFORMATION

For more information on how to support your loved one after a crisis response, visit the following sources:

- Supporting Law Enforcement Families in Understanding Trauma (theiacp.org)
- Resources - ICISF (icisf.org)
- First Responders and Disaster Responders Resource Portal | SAMHSA (samhsa.gov)

Information Sources

International Critical Stress Foundation

<https://icisf.org>

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

<https://store.samhsa.gov>



information for officer families

Supporting your Loved One After a Crisis Response

General Things To Know

Critical incident stress responses can occur right at the scene, within hours, within days, or even within weeks. During this time, your loved one may experience an immediate stress or grief response or may not feel any of these reactions. The effect of critical incident stress is a completely normal response to an abnormal event.

Common Signs and Symptoms of a Stress Reaction

Physical	Cognitive	Emotional	Behavioral
chest pain	blaming	agitation	antisocial
chills	confusion	anxiety	appetite change
difficulty breathing	difficulty identifying things	apprehension	change in communication
dizziness	disorientation	denial	change in social activity
elevated BP	change in alertness	depression	change in speech
fainting	hypervigilance	discouragement	conflicts with family
fatigue	change in awareness	emotional outbursts	erratic movement
grinding of teeth	intrusive images	emotional shock	hyperalert
headache	nightmares	fear	inability to sit still
muscle tremors	poor abstract thinking	feeling overwhelmed	increased alcohol use
nausea	poor attention	grief	pacing

Physical	Cognitive	Emotional	Behavioral
profuse sweating	poor concentration	guilt	waking up to early
rapid heart rate	poor problem solving	inappropriate emotion	withdrawal /isolation
shock symptoms	recurring memories	intense anger	
thirst	suspiciousness	irritability	
twitches	uncertainty	loss of emotional control	
visual difficulties		panic	
vomiting			
weakness			

Note: most of these signs will disappear within 3 weeks, but if they worsen or do not begin to dissipate after 2 weeks, additional intervention is recommended

Serious Signs

the following signs strongly suggest need for additional help

- **Acute psychiatric symptoms:** hearing voices, seeing visions, having delusional thinking
- **Disorientation:** experiencing memory loss, not being able to give certain dates or times, not being able to recall recent events
- **Domestic violence, child abuse, or elder abuse**
- **Inability to care for self:** not eating, bathing, changing clothing
- **Problematic use of drugs:** excess use or misuse of alcohol, drugs, or prescription medication
- **Significant depression**
- **Suicidal:** pervasive feelings of despair or hopelessness, homicidal thoughts or plans

Signs of Posttraumatic Distress/ Peritraumatic Predictors



1. Dissociation, depersonalization, derealization
2. Dysfunctional parasympathetic nervous system arousal
3. Giving up, helplessness, hopelessness
4. Guilt reactions (survivor or responsibility guilt)
5. Neuromuscular immobility or "freezing"
6. Psychogenic analgesia
7. Self-destructive (suicidal or homicidal) ideation
8. Severe dysfunctional time distortion
9. Sympathetic nervous system dysfunction (panic attacks, malignant arrhythmias)
10. Traumatic psychogenic amnesia

Signs of Positive Change

1. Becoming more understanding and alert
2. Being more grateful for what they have
3. Having improved perspective
4. Having increased appreciation for relationship and loved ones
5. Not taking life for granted