



# Placer County Law Enforcement Chaplaincy

## ***You've just experienced a Critical Incident...***

**You've just experienced a very distressing event.** You find yourself feeling confused and alone, overcome with emotions. You wonder, "What's happening to me? Am I going crazy? How will I get through this? Will anyone understand?"

**"Critical Incident Stress"** is a reaction to a traumatic event. This extreme form of stress evokes significant symptoms of distress in almost everyone. Just remember: these symptoms are **a normal reaction to an abnormal event.**

A common misunderstanding about Critical Incident Stress is that it is brought on due to my own weaknesses, but even a healthy, functioning person will be impacted by a highly disturbing situation.

Each individual responds to Critical Incident Stress in their own unique way. All your reactions to extreme stress, no matter how unusual, are **perfectly normal**, and not everyone is affected in the same manner. There are many variables that can determine the impact an incident has on you: the gruesomeness of the trauma, your own emotional make-up, your own thoughts about the incident or people involved, your actions during and after the incident, your support systems, or even how the incident reminds you of some personal issue. Any of these factors may have a bearing on your reaction.

### **Some possible reactions are:**

*Agitation*

*Denial*

*Feeling numb*

*Repetitive or intrusive thoughts*

*Sleep disturbances: Inability to sleep, sleeping too much, nightmares*

*Crying*

*Change in appetite / weight*

*Low resistance to illness*

*Frustration*

*Helplessness*

*Depression*

*Despair*

*Grief*

*Guilt*

*Sexual dysfunction*

*Headaches and back pain*

*Anger*

*Outrage*

*Insecurity*

*Anxiety*

*Feeling overwhelmed*

*Confusion*

*Difficulty concentrating*

*Memory problems*

*Religious confusion*

*Loss of trust*

*Flashbacks*

*Anniversary difficulties*

*Alcohol / drug abuse*

*Excessive uses of sick leave*

*Work / school / family problems*

*Withdrawal*

*Suicidal thoughts*

*Fear*

*Feelings of inadequacy*

### **Possible delayed reactions include:**

*Hyper-alertness*

*Becoming easily startled*

*Anxiousness*

*Crying spells*

*Feeling detached from others*

*Hyper-activity*

*Lethargy*

*Spontaneous shaking*

**All of these reactions are normal**, even though they feel unusual and extreme. We are all unique and we all respond in our own way. You may find yourself experiencing one or more of these reactions, or even some other reactions not listed here. Some people may even experience long-term difficulties. Just remember that we all move through stages of crisis and healing at our own pace.

### **Some suggestions:**

- Talk about what happened
- Talk about how you feel
- Attend a Critical Incident Stress Debriefing
- Do not "Monday morning quarterback". You can compound your stress dwelling on what you or others could have done differently.
- Take care of yourself physically: Eat regular meals and a balanced diet – even if you don't feel like it. Get adequate rest and exercise, and maintain as normal of a routine as possible.
- Avoid alcohol and drugs. Any medication should be taken sparingly and only under a doctor's supervision. Substances may be addictive and can interfere with your healing process.