

## *ACUTE SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS FOLLOWING CRITICAL INCIDENTS*

**Not everyone goes through each phase or symptom;  
Most individuals will experience some of the following symptoms to varying degrees of intensity.**

### **I. Impact Phase: Within the first 24 hours**

<u>Physical</u>	<u>Cognitive</u>	<u>Behavioral</u>	<u>Emotional</u>	<u>Spiritual</u>
Shock Hypothermia Fight/flight Insomnia Trembling Nausea	Perceptual distortion Difficulty with decisions Repeated thoughts of the incident Memory lapses	Decreased/ increased talking Agitation Decreased /increased motion	Tearfulness Numbing Re-experience emotions Excitability Helplessness	Disorientation of beliefs ( the ground cracks open) Experience meaningless ( why?) Ones dreams being shattered Feeling betrayed Up-rooted/disconnected Abandonment Guilt ( am I being punished)

### **II. Recoil Phase: 1 to 10 days**

<u>Physical</u>	<u>Cognitive</u>	<u>Behavioral</u>	<u>Emotional</u>	<u>Spiritual</u>
Fatigue Low energy Nightmares Fitful sleep Decreased or increased appetite	Repeated thoughts Poor concentration Psychogenic amnesia Self doubt ( what if) Confusion	Decreased sexual interest Withdrawn from family and friends Avoiding things that produce memories of incident Increased use of drugs or alcohol	Denying emotions Fear of losing control Hypervigilance Irritability	Reassessing ultimate beliefs/values Hyper/religious Disaffection Distrust/Lack of trust Retreating to aloneness/loneliness

### **III. Coping Phase: 10 days to several months**

Symptoms listed above may occur at less frequent, milder levels. Symptom distress gradually declines. Occasional, spontaneous, short term, return of symptom intensity may be triggered by sights, sounds, smells, or events that bring back mental images of the incident.

If many of the above symptoms continue to be distressing or interfere with life functions for longer than 30 days, or if distressing symptoms do not occur until 6 months following the incident, then you may be experiencing **Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder** to some degree. Evaluation by a psychologist or professional knowledgeable about the diagnostic criteria for P.T.S.D can help determine a productive course of action. Consultation with the employee assistance program can be helpful.

Symptoms that occur within the first 30 days and gradually begin to lessen are not P.T.S.D

## Critical Incident Amnesia

“ A form of temporary amnesia subsequent to Sympathetic Nervous System mass discharge release of the stress hormone, cortisol”

### a. C-I-A triggers

1. Deadly force threat perception
2. Deadly force startle response
3. Overload of sensory input
4. High degree of aerobic/anaerobic output
5. Overwhelming sense of fear

### b. Time table to memory recovery

1. Memory before the first sleep period
  - a. General characteristics of weapon
  - b. General assailant information
2. Memory after second sleep period will increase 50-90 %
3. Memory after third sleep period is most complete and final

### c. Critical incident reporting

1. Ingest protein/carb meal 1 hour prior to report writing or debriefing
2. First report should be verbal and titled, “preliminary” report
3. Writing may be difficult due to Parasympathetic Nervous System
4. Supplemental debrief/report should not occur until after first sleep period
5. Final report after second sleep period

Source: PPCT Management Systems, Inc.