



# LAKES REGION CISM PEER TEAM

You have experienced an event “outside the norm” that may be called a traumatic or critical event. Critical events may cause severe physical and emotional reactions that impact your ability to function normally. This is common and is the result of stress response. Stress response may happen immediately or several hours, days, weeks, even months after the event. Stress response is often cumulative. Know the signs and how to manage stress response. Often talking with family, friends, and doing things you enjoy can help. Peer support is available to listen, provide resources, and may refer to a culturally competent clinician if needed.

## REACTIONS TO CRITICAL INCIDENT STRESS

<u>Physical</u>	<u>Cognitive</u>	<u>Emotional</u>	<u>Behavioral</u>	<u>Spiritual</u>
Fatigue	Confusion	Fear/Anxiety	Withdrawal	Anger at God
Nausea	Nightmares	Guilt	Inability to rest	Crisis of Faith
Vomiting	Hypervigilance	Panic Attacks	Motor agitation	Withdrawal
Chest Pain	Intrusive images	Agitation/Irritability	Change in appetite	
Headaches	Inability to focus	Depression	Change in social behavior	
Elevated BP	Poor memory	Intense anger	Change in alcohol/drug use	
Muscle tension	Decision making	Overwhelmed	Avoidance of work, place of event, people	
Difficulty Breathing	Suicidal Thought	Tearful	Avoidance of similar calls	

## THINGS TO TRY

- WITHIN THE FIRST 24 – 48 HOURS: HYDRATE, EAT, REST. 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.
- Keep a journal; write your way through those sleepless hours.
- Do things that feel good to you.
- 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; i.e., if someone asks you what you want to eat, answer them 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).

## FOR FAMILY MEMBERS AND FRIENDS

Your loved one has been involved in an emotion-charged event, often known as a critical incident. He/she may be experiencing normal stress responses to such an event (Critical Incident Stress). Critical Incident Stress affects up to 87% of all uniformed service personnel exposed to a critical incident. **Responders are NOT immune to Critical Incident Stress, regardless of past experiences or years of service.** Your loved one may experience Critical Incident Stress at any time during his/her career.

- Listen carefully
- Spend time with the person
- Offer your assistance and a listening ear if they have not asked for help
- \*Reassure them that they are safe
- Help them with everyday tasks like cleaning, cooking, caring for the family, 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 such statements. Instead, tell them that you are sorry such an event has occurred, and you want to understand and assist them.
- You may not understand what your loved one is going through at this time, but offer your love and support. Don't be afraid to ask what you can do that he/she would consider helpful.
- Maintain or return to a normal routine as soon as possible.

**Important things to remember about Critical Incident Stress: The signs of Critical Incident Stress are physical, cognitive, emotional, behavioral, and spiritual.**

- Critical Incident Stress responses can occur right at the scene, within hours, within days, or even within weeks.
- Your loved one may experience a variety of signs/symptoms of a stress response or he/she may not feel any of the signs at this time.
- Suffering from the effects of critical incident stress is completely normal. Your loved one is not the only one suffering; other emergency personnel shared the event and are probably sharing the reaction.
- The symptoms will normally subside and disappear in time
- Encourage, but DO NOT pressure your loved one to talk about the incident and his/her reaction to it. Your primary "job" is to listen and reassure. Remember that if an event is upsetting to you and your loved one, your children may be affected also. They may need to talk, too.

## STRATEGIES TO MANAGE STRESS RESPONSE

“Edgy”, “anxious”, “jacked up” are some words people use to describe their response to various stress events. Your body is wired to respond this way and it is NORMAL. Immediately after an event out of the norm the heart is pounding, headaches, sweating, feeling numb, nausea, cannot breathe, chest pain, agitation. Hours, days, and possibly for 3 to 4 weeks later sleep disturbance, nightmares, intrusive thoughts/images, avoidance of things that remind you (ie work in some cases, similar calls), difficulty with focus/concentration, difficulty making decisions... ALL NORMAL.

Not so fun facts- this can come on as result of response to years of cumulative stress and seem “random”. Post-Traumatic Stress Injury may onset several weeks, months, or even years after an event that exceeds level of your average calls or if something else triggers the response (ie having your own children then makes calls involving children even more stressful). Stress responses should subside over the course of 3-4 weeks. If things are getting worse or last longer than a month, consider seeking help from a behavioral health provider **who is experienced working with responders**.

What causes this??? A little almond sized thing called the amygdala in the limbic system of the brain. This is the “alarm system” for the body where our automatic fight-flight-freeze happens. Fight-flight-freeze causes adrenaline and cortisol surge. People who are working as first responders and public safety officers are “fight response” people. The nature of your job causes you to be in a perpetual state of alert and response which seems normal to you but your increased production of adrenaline and cortisol affects health and wellness.

**Serious effects of stress:** you are statistically at a much higher risk for serious health issues due to inflammation caused by chronic stress/adrenaline and cortisol dump. You are also at higher risk to have post-traumatic stress injury, substance misuse issues, and very high risk for suicide. **GOOD NEWS:** There are things you can do to reduce the adrenaline/cortisol post stress event. Responders Together NH at Kilter Fitness in Bristol has info and resources 603-254-9610 or find them on FB. Free open gym for responders! Also visit [www.responderstogethernh.org](http://www.responderstogethernh.org)

### **\*WORKOUT/GET ACTIVE**

Hit the gym. Get outdoors. Moderate to hard workouts will significantly decrease levels of stress hormones AND increase feel good hormones. Rhythmic and repetitive things like boxing/martial arts, weight training, yoga, Pilates, running, walking, hiking, biking are all great. MOVE!!!

### **\*PROGRESSIVE MUSCLE RELAXATION**

Flex hard, hold 10 to 30 seconds, then release each muscle group in progression from head to feet, feet to head, then entire body. There are scripts on u tube if you like guided stuff.

### **\*BODY SCAN**

Start at your head and scan to your feet. Notice and soften any area that feels tight. Intentionally soften and relax muscles. You can do this anywhere!!

### **EYE GAZE** (this regulates blood pressure, heart rate)

Focus your gaze on one spot on the wall or floor for several seconds. Without moving your eyes, shift to what you see in peripheral vision.

### **\*BOX BREATHING**

Breathe four sides of the square: IN 4, HOLD 4, OUT 4, HOLD 4. Repeat a few times. Any focus on a repeated breath pattern works because it requires the cortex, limbic system, and brainstem to communicate with each other.

### **\*VISUALIZATION/CALM PLACE/SOMETHING YOU LOVE DOING**

Your brain does not know the difference between real and imagined. Think dreams/nightmares and how real that can feel. Go on a headspace vacation or practice moving between a mildly irritating event and pleasant/calm. This trains your brain to be able to refocus away from stressful memories/images. **FLASHBACKS:** fast forward through the event to the point you thought it was under control or over.

### **GROUNDING IN THE PRESENT** (also good for intrusive thoughts, images)

A gentle grounding would be to notice what is happening on a sensory level in the present moment. Notice you 5 things you see, 4 things you hear, 3 things you can touch, 2 things you smell, 1 thing you taste. Other grounding strategies might be hot/cold shower, hard workout, being outside and again noting what you see, hear, touch, smell, and taste.

### **REFRAME UNHELPFUL THOUGHTS “EVEN THOUGH [event/stress factor], AT LEAST \_\_\_\_\_”**

You may have to stretch sometimes; at least the sun came up, I have electricity, an asteroid didn't hit last night, etc. Other ideas: Take inventory of what went WELL on the call/shift, list things you are grateful for each day. Be aware of NEGATIVE LENS bias. You aren't called to happy and heart lifting situations. You spend way more time with people and events that are the opposite of desired situation or behavior.

### **SLEEP**

Not something everyone can “do” but this is the body's natural method of washing away stress hormones and repair. Exercise, diet, reducing alcohol, and good sleep hygiene can help.

### **NOTE:**

**IF YOU OR SOMEONE YOU KNOW IS THINKING OR TALKING ABOUT SUICIDE SEEK HELP.**

**CALL THE NATIONAL SUICIDE PREVENTION LIFELINE 1-800-273-TALK (8255) or call 988 or 911**

**Talking and asking about suicide PREVENTS suicide**

## STRESS RESPONSE RESET

I know it looks silly, explosive movement!!! Jump like your jumping rope, wall pushups, squat

Start at your head and move down your body intentionally tighten then release each muscle group. Reverse moving from feet to head. You could also tighten/release entire body.

Peripheral Gaze- choose a spot on the wall and focus gaze. Without moving your eyes, expand to see what is in the periphery.

Eye Movement left to right for about 30 seconds. Top to bottom as well.

Emotional Freedom Tapping. This is a great reset because it regulates in both directions. Feeling low or high energy, this tapping sequence neutralizes the CNS.

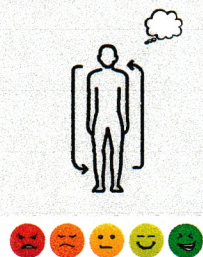
Body scan and name the feeling and sensation. Bringing awareness and naming reconnects the cortex (thinking brain) to the limbic system (emotional brain)

Breathe. It does not matter what your numbers, breathe in slow and out slower. Hold on the top if you'd like.

To stop the feeling of "panic" breathe in deeply and then take a second breath. Out slow.

Eat something sour.

## STRESS RESPONSE PLAN

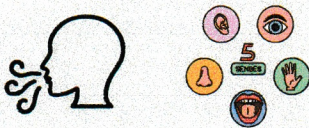


Observe and note:

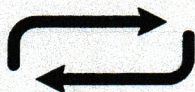
- emotion/"name it to tame it"
- where do you feel in your body?
- event/thought CAN I CHANGE IT?
- YES do it NO let it go



**SHOCK** your Central Nervous System  
Jump squats, jumping jacks, shake your body, ice pack on the back of your neck



**BREATHE** slow in , slower out  
**SOFTEN** anything that is tense  
What do you see, hear, feel, smell, taste (sour is good!)



**REASSESS** and repeat  
until you are below a 5 on a 0-10 scale

# Warning Signs of Suicide: A Fact Sheet for Family and Community Members



**988**  
SUICIDE  
& CRISIS  
LIFELINE

People who are considering suicide may show signs that they are thinking about or planning to attempt suicide. These are known as *warning signs of suicide*. It can be scary when someone you care about may be considering suicide, but there are things you can do to help. This fact sheet can help you recognize common warning signs that may indicate a person is at risk of suicide. It also provides tips on how to respond if you observe these warning signs in someone and when to seek immediate professional help.

## Common Warning Signs of Suicide



### Talking about:

- Attempting suicide
- Feeling unbearable pain
- Death or a recent fascination with death
- Feeling hopeless, worthless, or “trapped”
- Feeling guilt, shame, or anger
- Feeling like they are a burden to others



### How to respond if you observe warning signs:

- Let the person know you are concerned and ask if they are ok.
- Ask the person if they are having thoughts of suicide.
- Listen attentively and without judgment.
- Let the person know you care about them and support them.
- Offer to help connect them with professional help.



### Changes in behavior or mood:

- Recent suicide attempt
- Planning a suicide attempt
- Increased alcohol or drug use
- Losing interest in personal appearance or hygiene
- Withdrawing from family, friends, or community
- Saying goodbye to friends and family
- Giving away prized possessions
- A recent episode of depression, emotional distress, and/or anxiety
- Changes in eating patterns
- Changes in sleep patterns
- Becoming violent or being a victim of violence
- Expressing rage
- Recklessness

## When to Seek Professional Help Immediately

Some behaviors may indicate an emergency is happening or that a person is in crisis. **If you observe the following behaviors, you should immediately connect the person with professional help, such as the [988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline](#), emergency medical services, or a mental health professional.**

- Talking about immediate harm to oneself or others
- Planning to attempt suicide (for example, searching online for information about how to attempt suicide)
- Acting in such an erratic manner that you are concerned about their safety

If the person in crisis is unwilling or unable to seek professional help, or if you are struggling yourself, contact the [988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline](#) to ask for guidance and support.

### Disclaimer

*The content of this fact sheet is intended for informational purposes only and does not constitute or substitute for medical or clinical advice, consultation, diagnosis, intervention, or treatment from a licensed health care professional.*



## WHAT DOES THE LAKES REGION CRITICAL INCIDENT STRESS MANAGEMENT PEER TEAM DO?

### INDIVIDUAL PEER TO PEER

Peer Supporters are different than any other peers. They have been trained in basic wellness and mental health and are supported by a clinician. Peer supporters are relatable, provide resources if requested, and can consult a mental health provider 24/7. Peer support is **CONFIDENTIAL**- no documentation, no sharing of information unless limits of confidentiality apply.

### GROUP DEFUSING/DEBRIEFS

Also confidential, never documented, and voluntary, these are structured group processes to defuse or debrief critical events that are above and beyond typical calls. "The Terrible Ten". **ANYONE CAN REQUEST A DEBRIEF.** We have meeting space available if a department is not available.

**YOU DO NOT HAVE TO BE IN CRISIS TO ACCESS PEER SUPPORT** Stress related to work, home, or whatever else. Early connection prevents burnout, Post Traumatic Stress Injury, substance use disorder, and suicide.

**CONTACT ADMIN TO CONNECT WITH ANY LEAD FOR INDIVIDUAL OR DEFUSING/DEBRIEF  
603 - 254 - 9610**

### LAKES REGION CISM PEER TEAM LEADS:

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### QUESTIONS OR MORE INFORMATION

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[www.responderstogethernh.org](http://www.responderstogethernh.org)