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Critical Incident Stress Information for Significant Others

Your loved one has been involved in an emotionally 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 emergency personnel exposed to a critical incident. No one in emergency services is 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.

Important Things to Remember About Critical Incident Stress:

- * The signs of critical incident stress are physical, cognitive, emotional and behavioral. Your loved one has received a handout outlining these signs. Please ask him/her to share it with you.
- * Critical incident stress response can occur right at the scene, within hours, within days, or even within weeks or months.
- * 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 if you and your loved one do not dwell on them.
- * All phases of our lives overlap and influence each other: personal, professional, family, etc. The impact of critical incident stress can be intensified, influenced, or mitigated by our own personal, family and current developmental/life cycle issues.
- * Encourage, but do NOT pressure your loved one to talk about the incident and his/her reaction to it. Talk is the best medicine. 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, whether they were directly involved or not.

- * 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 help.

- * Accept the fact that life will go on. His/hers, yours and your children, etc. Maintain or return to normal routine as soon as possible.