

Common Signs & Symptoms of Critical Incident Stress Reactions in Teens

Critical Incident Stress (CIS) is a **normal** reaction to an abnormal situation, CIS occurs when your coping skills are temporarily overwhelmed by a traumatic and sudden serious event affecting your being. No one experiences the CIS event in the same manner or intensity. Most CIS symptoms will diminish in frequency and intensity when you recognize and process them. Even though the event may be over, you may experience strong emotional or physical reactions which may feel unfamiliar.

Emotional

- feelings of fear, panic, shock, intense anger, uncertainty
- feeling overwhelmed and emotional
- moodiness and irritability
- generalized anxiety and nervousness

Physical

- difficulty sleeping and/or staying asleep
- difficulty breathing, chills, sweating
- disturbed by nightmares which persists beyond the first few days after the event
- complaints of stomach cramps, headaches or dizziness
- loss of appetite or overeating

Cognitive

- relives the traumatic event through vivid memories or flashbacks
- over-concern with health and safety of others
- difficulty concentrating, hypervigilance
- self-blame; inability to trust others

Behavioural

- attitude changes
- avoidance
- repeated/obsessive checking phone/news
- decreased interest in activities once enjoyed
- refusal to return to school
- hyper-vigilance
- abuse of drugs or alcohol
- isolation and withdrawal from friends and family
- sudden changes in school performance

What Can You Do to Help Yourself?

- Physical exercise can help relieve stress. Strenuous exercise alternated with relaxation will help alleviate physical reactions.
- Remind yourself that you are experiencing normal reactions to an abnormal situation.
- Talk to parents, teachers, a counsellor and other trusted adults.
- Avoid rewatching or reading about the event on social media.
- Give yourself permission to feel sad and/or angry.
- Eat regular and balanced meals.
- Get rest.
- Structure your time so that you do not allow worry to take over your free time.
- Reach out. Spend time with others.
- Do things that feel safe and comforting.
- Be kind and patient with yourself.

Advice for Family and Friends

- Listen carefully.
- Spend time with the person who experienced the stressful incident.
- Offer your assistance and a listening ear.
- Reassure them that they are safe.
- Don't take their anger or other feelings personally.
- Don't tell them what they should or shouldn't feel.

Supports Available

- Book an appointment to see your **WGSS Counsellor**..... wgsscourseguide.ca/contact
- **Mindfulness Resources**..... wgssmindfulness.weebly.com
- **Kids-Help-Line**.....1-800-668-6868 or kidshelpphone.ca
- **Foundry Langley**.....604.546.5700 or foundrybc.ca/langley
- **Langley Mental Health**.....604.514.2711
- **YouthSpace.ca**..... text: 778.783.0177