Stressful/Traumatic Events Information Sheet

You have experienced a traumatic event or a critical incident (any event that causes unusually strong emotional reactions that have the potential to interfere with the ability to function normally). Even though the event may be over, you may now be experiencing or may experience later, some strong emotional or physical reactions. It is very common, in fact quite normal, for people to experience emotional aftershocks when they have passed through a horrible event.

Sometimes the emotional aftershocks (or stress reactions) appear immediately after the traumatic event. Sometimes they may appear a few hours or a few days later. And, in some cases, weeks or months may pass before the stress reactions appear.

The signs and symptoms of a stress reaction may last a few days, a few weeks, a few months, or longer, depending on the severity of the traumatic event. The understanding and the support of loved ones usually cause the stress reactions to pass more quickly. Occasionally, the traumatic event is so painful that professional assistance may be necessary. This does not imply craziness or weakness. It simply indicates that the particular event was just too powerful for the person to manage by themselves.

Common Reactions to Stressful Events:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PHYSICAL</th>
<th>THINKING</th>
<th>EMOTIONAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nausea</td>
<td>Slowed thinking</td>
<td>Anxiety</td>
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<tr>
<td>Upset stomach</td>
<td>Difficulty making decisions</td>
<td>Sadness</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chills</td>
<td>Difficulty concentrating</td>
<td>Feeling abandoned</td>
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<tr>
<td>Profuse sweating</td>
<td>Memory problems</td>
<td>Worry about others</td>
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<tr>
<td>Diarrhea</td>
<td>Thinking about the event</td>
<td>Anger</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Headaches</td>
<td>over and over</td>
<td>Irritability</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rapid breathing</td>
<td></td>
<td>Feeling numb</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rapid heart rate</td>
<td></td>
<td>Shocked</td>
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<td>Sleep disturbance</td>
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<td>Fear</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dreams</td>
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<td>Guilt</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Wanting to limit contact</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>with others</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Again, these are normal reactions to a stressful event. However, if these signs continue over time and start making it hard for you to function, you may want to contact the School Counselor at 607-749-1209 or one of the following community resources for help:

- Guthrie Cortland Medical Center Psychiatric Services Hotline: 607-756-3771
- Cortland County Mental Health Clinic: 607-758-6100
- Family Counseling Services: 607-753-0234
- Copeland Avenue Associates: 607-749-5711
- Cortland County Mobile Crisis Team: 607-756-3771
Helpful Hints for Dealing with a Stressful/Traumatic Event

Trying some of the following hints may help to alleviate the emotional pain of a traumatic event:

**For Yourself:**
- Try to get more sleep
- Contact friends
- Have someone stay with you for at least a few hours or periods for a day or so
- Reoccurring thoughts, dreams or flashbacks are normal so don't try to fight them. They will decrease over time and become less painful
- Maintain as normal a schedule as possible.
- Eat well-balanced and regular meals (even when you don't feel like it).
- Try to keep a reasonable level of activity
- Keep active (physical activity is often helpful).
- Fight against boredom
- Re-establish a normal schedule as soon as possible
- Express your feelings with friends and family.
- Find a good counselor if the feelings become prolonged or too intense

**For Family Members & Friends:**
- Listen carefully
- Spend time with the traumatized person
- Offer your assistance and a listening ear even 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, etc.
- Give them some private time
- Don't take their anger or other feelings personally.
- Don't tell them that they are "lucky it was not worse". Traumatized people are not consoled by that statement. Instead, tell them that you are sorry such an event has occurred and you want to understand and assist them.