

## CRITICAL INCIDENT STRESS REACTIONS

Holston Conference Pastoral Counseling Center

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Over the next few weeks, you and/or members of your church and community may experience a number of reactions to the recent tragic events related to Hurricane Katrina and its aftermath. These reactions are expected and normal:

### Physical Reactions

Fatigue/exhaustion  
Sleep disturbance  
Underactivity/overactivity  
Change in appetite  
Digestive problems  
Nightmares  
Muscle tremors/twitches  
Headaches  
Dizziness  
Muscle aches  
Vomiting

### Cognitive Reactions

Difficulty concentrating  
Difficulty solving problems  
Flashbacks of the event  
Difficulty making decisions  
Memory disturbance  
Isolation/withdrawal  
Preoccupation with event  
Slowed thinking  
Problems naming familiar objects/people

### Emotional Reactions

Guilt  
Feeling of helplessness  
Emotional numbing  
Overly sensitive  
Amnesia for the event  
Fear/anxiety  
Hypervigilance  
Moodiness  
Anger which may be manifested by:  
scapegoating, irritability,  
frustration with bureaucracy,  
and violent fantasies

In addition, a period of mild to moderate depression is sometimes experienced following exposure to a stressful event or tragic loss. Symptoms of depression include:

Poor appetite	Insomnia
Lethargy/low energy	Social withdrawal/isolation
Loss of sexual drive	Difficulty concentrating
Persistent sad mood	Intrusive thoughts

If any combinations of these symptoms persist, consult your personal physician, psychologist or professional counselor.

Again, these are normal reactions, and although painful, are part of the process of recovering from a loss or critical incident stress. While there is little anyone can do to take away these uncomfortable feelings, there are several things you can do to speed up the recovery process.

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### Things to try:

1. WITHIN THE NEXT 24 TO 48 HOURS, periods of strenuous physical exercise alternated with relaxation will generally alleviate some of the physical reactions.
2. Structure your time, keep busy, and keep your life as normal as possible.
3. You're normal and having normal reactions—don't label yourself crazy.
4. Talk to people—talk is the most healing medicine.
5. Be aware of and avoid attempts to numb the pain with use of drugs or alcohol.
6. Reach out to others. Spend time with people you trust. Spend time with others in prayer.
7. Help other friends and loved ones by sharing feelings and checking out how they are doing.
8. Give yourself permission to feel rotten, and share these feelings with others.
9. Keep a journal—write your way through those sleepless hours.
10. If, after several weeks, you find that the reactions outlined above are still a problem, consider individual stress reactions counseling.