Taking Control of Your Stress

- **Increase your physical activity** – within the first 24-48 hours, periods of exercise (walking, running, aerobics, yard or house work, etc.) alternated with relaxation will alleviate some physical reactions.
- **Share your stress** – sometimes just talking with a friend or family member helps.
- **Sleep and diet** – the better rested and nourished you are, the better equipped you are to tackle your stress.
- **Recognize your limits** – learn to accept that you are not capable of doing all things all the time. You are healing.
- **Get involved** – becoming a participant is a good way to reduce stress.
- **Prioritize your time** – write down the things you have to do in the order that they have to be done.
- **Alcohol and drugs** – neither helps you to actually manage your stress.
- **Do things that you enjoy doing**. Do something for yourself that might make you feel better, even for a little while.
- **Realize that those around you are under stress also** – share your feelings with others and check out how they’re doing.

**Remember** – You are normal and your reactions are the normal reactions of one who has experienced an abnormal event.

Things to Try

- Within the first 24-48 hours, periods of strenuous physical exercise alternated with relaxation will alleviate some of the physical reactions.
- **Structure your time** – keep as busy as possible.
- **You’re normal and having normal reactions** – don’t label yourself as “going 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.
- **Keep your life as normal as possible**.
- **Spend time with others**.
- **If others are involved help them as much as possible by sharing your feelings and checking out how they’re doing**.
- **Give yourself permission to feel “awful” 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**.
- **The Nutrition Almanac recommends supplementing your diet with Vitamins C, B2, B6, Calcium and Magnesium**.
- **Don’t make any big life changes or decisions in the next couple of months** (e.g. divorce, quit job, move). Hold your thought(s), try to not take action for at least 6 weeks.
- **Do make as many daily decisions as possible**, which will give you a feeling of control over your life (e.g., if someone asks you what you want to eat – answer him or her even if you’re not sure).
- **Eat well** – but there is no need to force yourself if it makes you ill.
Normal Reactions to an Abnormal Event

**PHYSICAL/BODY**
- fatigue
- muscle tremors/twitches
- nausea
- elevated blood pressure
- thirst
- nonspecific body complaints
- headaches
- loss or increase in appetite
- dizziness
- visual difficulties
- vomiting
- rapid heart rate
- weakness
- grinding of teeth
- chills
- profuse sweating
- fainting
- difficulty breathing*
- chest pain*
- shock symptoms*

*Indicates need for medical evaluation

**COGNITIVE/MIND**
- blaming someone
- hyper vigilance
- confusion
- nightmares
- uncertainty
- suspiciousness
- poor concentration
- poor decision-making
- memory problems
- intrusive images poor problem solving
- poor abstract thinking
- disturbed thinking
- distressing dreams
- increased vigilance/watchfulness
- difficulty identifying familiar objects or people
- increased or decreased awareness of surroundings
- disorientation (time, place and/or person)

**SPIRITUAL REACTIONS**
- Crisis of faith
- Doubt
- Preoccupation
- Questioning beliefs or values

**EMOTIONS/FEELINGS**
- Anxiety
- guilt
- grief
- panic
- denial
- emotional shock
- fear
- uncertainty
- depression
- apprehension
- feeling overwhelmed
- emotional outburst
- intense anger
- irritability
- agitation
- sadness
- feeling numb or cold
- denial of reality
- feeling isolated
- intense worry about others
- loss of emotional control

**BEHAVIORAL/ACTIONS**
- change in socialization
- suspiciousness
- change in eating habits
- intensified pacing
- inability to rest / relax
- sleep problems
- antisocial acts
- pacing
- erratic movements
- less humor
- withdrawal/isolation ("others do not understand")
- change in usual communications/speech
- increase in alcohol and/or drug consumption
- change in sexual functioning
- hyper alert to environment

Source: International Critical Incident Stress Foundation, Inc., 1995