

# WAYS TO DEAL WITH CRITICAL INCIDENTS

## TIPS FOR EMPLOYEES

- ? Stay in touch with family and friends. Structure your time. Be with people. Wanting some “peace and quiet” is common but avoid long periods of isolation.
- ? Remember that your reactions are normal and are expected. Don’t label yourself “crazy” or “weak”.
- ? Keep your life as routine as possible. Avoid making any big life-changing decisions. Do, however, make choices about your daily activities. This can return a sense of control to you.
- ? Avoid alcohol and drug usage. Any relief that is felt will be short lived and your feelings afterward will be more extreme than before.
- ? Give yourself permission to feel sad, scared, or concerned.
- ? Watch your diet. Avoid sugar and caffeine. Eat regular and balanced meals. Increase your intake of fruits and vegetables.
- ? Alternate strenuous exercise and relaxation for the first 24 to 48 hours.
- ? Realize that others have gone through this before and have felt the same way you are feeling now.
- ? Anticipate mood swings. They are part of the process by which conflicting feelings are resolved. As time passes they will lessen in frequency and intensity.
- ? Call the EAP for further assistance. People are available day and night if you want to talk.

## Employee Assistance Program

800-448-4434



# HOW TO HELP YOUR EMPLOYEES

## TIPS FOR MANAGERS

1. Following a traumatic incident, *everyone* has some type of an emotional response.
2. *Each person will recover at his/her own rate.* Recovery can be a long and difficult process.
3. *Tell you employees how you feel and that you are sorry they are troubled or upset.* Avoid statements like, “I know how you feel” or “Everything will be all right”. These statements make some people think their feelings are not understood.
4. *Be willing to say nothing.* Just being there to listen is often the most supportive thing you can do to help.
5. Remind people that their confusing emotions are *normal*.
6. *Attempting to explain why this incident happened is not helpful.* Your explanation may not be believed and may hurt your relationship.
7. *Encourage people to ask for help from the EAP.* If people wish, offer to help make an appointment.

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# FACTORS INFLUENCING AN INDIVIDUAL'S REACTION TO TRAUMA

The following are some general factors that may influence how an individual may respond to a tragic event.

1. Magnitude of the disaster.
2. The duration of the exposure, even via the media.
3. The degree of actual or perceived personal danger.
4. The individual's personality and emotional stability.
5. The coping mechanisms developed from past experiences.
6. The role of the employee.
7. The frequency of similar experiences.
8. The individual's expectations.
9. A recent tragedy in the individual's life.
10. The support and understanding of fellow-workers.
11. The support and understanding of management.
12. Ostracism by co-workers, family or the general public.
13. Personal acquaintance with the victim(s), or the setting.

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# OFFERING SUPPORT TO CO-WORKERS

There are many ways to offer support to someone who has experienced a loss or trauma:

1. Acknowledge the event:
  - a. talk about what happened
  - b. be present to them, spend time with them
2. Offer to listen:
  - a. validate their experience
  - b. allow them to repeat things
  - c. often their questions don't need answers
3. Offer Support, no answers
  - a. ask them how they are doing
  - b. be with them for the long haul
4. Offer specific help
  - a. help around the house
  - b. cook a meal and take it to them
  - c. run an errand
5. Be prepared for some changes due to the event
  - a. new behaviors
  - b. new attitudes
  - c. things you did not expect and could not anticipate
6. Be alert for **serious problems**
  - a. watch for depression
  - b. talk about what you are observing
  - c. let them know that you care

**Serious problems** – professional help may be needed when:

- ✍ the person is stuck in the grief process and is becoming depressed
- ✍ the person can't express his or her feelings
- ✍ they talk about feeling alone and that no one cares or understands
- ✍ the current trauma/loss stirs up other losses

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# Trauma and Children/What Can Parents Do?

How a child responds to a tragic event will vary depending on a child's age, personality and maturity level—and how directly he or she was involved with the tragedy. Children that were directly affected by an incident may suffer from severe anxiety or trauma—and will probably need professional help. All children, however, may be affected by the violence.

Younger children may react by showing more separation anxiety when their parents leave them at child care or school. Some children, particularly those age nine and under, may be unable to grasp the reality of the tragedy, or comprehend that violence could affect their own lives. Others may be frightened that something could happen to them. Older children may present a rough exterior or act out with aggressive behavior, and still others may attempt to protect themselves through denial, cynicism or apathy. Some signs of anxiety that may indicate your child is having difficulty dealing with the stress of a traumatic event include:

- ? Disrupted sleep patterns—frequent nightmares and/or insomnia
- ? Changes in eating habits—loss of appetite or overeating
- ? Decline in school performance
- ? Lack of concentration
- ? Irritability or prolonged depression
- ? Separation anxiety
- ? Unusual clinginess
- ? Regression

Remember, these symptoms are common reactions to anxiety. However, if symptoms persist for longer than six weeks and disrupt your child's daily routine, seek help from a pediatrician, psychologist or social worker. A professional can help your child deal with his or her emotions and can provide valuable tips and guidance to parents.

Your EAP counselor can provide counseling on a wide range of issues, including stress, anxiety, dealing with violence and more and can be reached at **800-448-4434**

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# How Can Parents Help?

Speak to your child about the tragedy openly and honestly, adapting your conversations to the age of the child. Children deserve honest answers, regardless of their age. You do not have to provide every detail, but don't hold back too much information, either; instill trust in your child while helping him or her understand what happened.

The following tips may help:

**Encourage your child to express his or her feelings.** Children usually feel better when they can talk about their feelings. To help your child sort out his or her feelings, ask specific questions such as "How do you feel? Does it make you feel scared? What worries you the most?" Encourage your child to be honest and open, and listen carefully for clues about hidden feelings or worries.

**Reassure your child.** Respond to your child's feelings; acknowledge his or her fears; and continually reassure your child that he or she is safe. Stress that this was a rare incident, and that he or she is not in danger, but avoid making false promises such as "Nothing like this will ever happen to you." Instead, offer your love, support and guidance and say things such as "I am here to protect you and to help keep you safe." In addition, remind your child that others such as the police and government are also doing everything they can to keep us safe.

**Monitor the media.** Monitor and limit the amount of television your child watches. If your child sees disturbing footage, his or her fears and anxieties may escalate. Do not allow younger children (under age eight) to watch television. Older children should watch television (briefly) with parental supervision. Explain to them what is going on and then shut the TV off, saying you will check back later.

**Speak to your child's school administrators.** Ask your child's teachers and/or school principal how they are handling the event. Are classes proceeding as normal? Are crisis counselors available? Many schools speak to students about safety issues, and reassure them that they are doing everything possible to keep the children safe.

**Pay close attention to your child.** If you notice any unusual behavior, it may be a reaction to stress, fear or trauma. Learn how to recognize the warning signs (as described in the previous section) and seek professional help from a pediatrician, counselor, social worker, psychologist or other professional if necessary.

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