

- ✓ Allow yourself time to rest and recover
- ✓ Drink water and non-sugary, non-caffeinated fluids
- ✓ Allow those you trust to provide support and direction
- ✓ Talk about your experiences
- ✓ Recognize that intrusive recollections of the incident are normal and will subside
- ✓ Ask your supervisor for what you feel you need
- ✓ Participate in whatever support and recovery resources your employer provides

KEEP IN MIND

Stress after a critical incident may not feel good, but it is normal. However, if you're struggling and finding it hard to return to your work and life routines, it might be time to seek counseling. Remember to reach out to your Human Resources leader or EAP for additional support.



Coping with Critical Incident Stress
Health & Wellness

Coping with Critical Incident Stress

A “critical incident” is an event that is sudden, unexpected, and threatening to your sense of safety, security, and wellbeing.

It's natural to feel stress after a critical incident, and the more stressful the event, the more intense your reaction can be.

Critical incidents can include:

- natural disasters
- workplace accidents resulting in fatal or catastrophic injuries
- loss of life of a coworker on or off the job
- active shooters
- workplace homicides and suicides
- robberies, assaults, and acts of violence in the community
- sudden downsizing, layoffs, and other major events

STRESS REACTIONS

When we feel distressed, our bodies and brains protect us by activating our nervous systems. We may spring into action or shut down and detach. Both are normal. You might also find that you hardly feel impacted at all, and that's normal too.

Most symptoms will usually decrease within 30 days. However, some thoughts, images, and sensory memories related to smells and sounds may persist, especially if you've experienced other life-threatening incidents in the past. Your body and mind just need time to process so you can heal. Everyone experiences stress in their own way, but some commonalities include:

- Physical distress (headaches, dizziness, pain or tightness in chest, chills, excessive thirst, fatigue)

- Mental distress (difficulty concentrating, memory issues, reduced attention span, confusion, nightmares, poor decision-making and problem-solving skills)
- Emotional distress (fear and anxiety, grief, guilt, intense anger, depression, irritability, tearfulness, agitation)
- Behavioral distress (intrusive images and memories, hypersensitivity, a startle response, difficulty sleeping or resting, withdrawal, increased alcohol or drug use, change in communication patterns and in appetite)

BEHAVIORS TO AVOID

- Taking on new projects and other mentally demanding tasks
- Self-medicating with excessive alcohol or drug use
- Avoiding everything that reminds you of the incident
- Staying away from work and your usual routines
- Withdrawing
- Ignoring the persistence of physical symptoms
- Expecting yourself to quickly “get over it” and not have any symptoms at all
- Skipping meals or overeating

WAYS TO COPE

- ✓ Connect with people you trust and re-establish a sense of community
- ✓ Identify a place you feel safe