

EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

TRAUMA RESPONSE SERVICES

Tips on Coping for Individuals Directly Involved in a Traumatic Event

You may have been exposed to a traumatic event, also called a *critical incident*. A critical incident sometimes causes people to experience unusually strong reactions that may interfere with their ability to function both during and after the critical incident. It is common and quite normal for people to experience acute stress reactions when they have been through a critical incident. **These are normal reactions to an abnormal event.**

Sometimes the acute stress reaction may last days, weeks, or months, and occasionally still longer. **With the understanding and support of family, friends, co-workers, and supervisors, acute stress reactions to critical incidents tend to pass more quickly.** As well, trauma response interventions may help to prevent or decrease the severity and length of the reactions. Occasionally the critical incident is so overwhelming that additional assistance from a mental health professional with special training in addressing traumatic stress reactions may be necessary.

DOs

- Try some physical exercise. Exercise may help alleviate some of the physical reactions.
- Make sure to eat regular, well balanced meals.
- Try to cut down on caffeine. Reduce your intake of coffee, teas, colas, and chocolate. Instead, drink water, fruit juices, and herbal teas.
- Expect the traumatic event to bother you.
- Give yourself permission to feel badly but share your feelings with others.
- Reach out to others.
- Talk with a trusted friend, spouse, or colleague – putting your feelings into words often has a healing effect.
- Help your co-workers by sharing your feelings and asking how they're doing.
- Structure your time – keep busy.
- Allow yourself some private time but still spend time with others.
- Do things that make you feel good.
- Have realistic expectations for recovery.
- Call EAP for help or support if you need it or if you think you might – the earlier, the better.

DON'Ts

- Don't use drugs or similar substances to numb yourself or get to sleep. If you take prescription drugs, don't change the dose without first speaking to your physician.
- If you experience insomnia, it can help to get up, read, walk, or keep a journal and write your thoughts down.
- If you happen to experience recurring thoughts, images or flashbacks, don't try to fight them. Typically their frequency decreases over time and they become less intrusive.
- Don't watch the news or read the newspaper. Limit your exposure to the event.
- Avoid giving interviews to the media. This may cause additional stress that you don't need.
- Don't be unsettled if you do happen to experience stronger symptoms. Remind yourself that you are having normal reactions to abnormal events.
- Postpone any major decisions or big life changes.
- Don't automatically stay away from work. If you feel up to it, try going back and see if it helps you settle down.



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*All
information
that you
provide to
your EAP will
be kept in the
strictest
confidence.*

Warning Signs of Excessive Stress and Impending Burn-out

Do any seem familiar to you? Check the ones you experience when under stress. These are your personal stress warning signals. If you check five or more responses, they may be interfering with your health and effectiveness and you could benefit from some alternate healthy life management activities. Seek medical attention if you experience chest pain or difficulty breathing or other persistent physical symptoms. Call your **Employee Assistance Program** for resources in balancing the demands of your life and developing a self-care plan.

Physical Signs

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Headaches | <input type="checkbox"/> Racing heart |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Chills or sweating | <input type="checkbox"/> Difficulty breathing |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Nausea, vomiting | <input type="checkbox"/> Increased blood pressure |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Backache, shoulder pain, tight neck | <input type="checkbox"/> Sweaty palms |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Indigestion, constipation, diarrhea | <input type="checkbox"/> Restlessness |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Chest pain | <input type="checkbox"/> Muscle tension |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Stomach aches | <input type="checkbox"/> Fatigue |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Dizziness | <input type="checkbox"/> Ringing in ears |

Behavioral Signs

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Excessive smoking | <input type="checkbox"/> Accusing others |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Grinding of teeth at night | <input type="checkbox"/> Inability to get things done |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Increased use of drugs and alcohol | <input type="checkbox"/> Crying |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Compulsive gum chewing | <input type="checkbox"/> Bossiness |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Compulsive eating | <input type="checkbox"/> Sleep difficulties |

Emotional Signs

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Anxiety, fear, dread | <input type="checkbox"/> Feeling powerless to change things |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Anger or rage | <input type="checkbox"/> Easily upset, irritable |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Mood swings | <input type="checkbox"/> Resentful, edgy |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Loneliness | <input type="checkbox"/> Unhappiness for no clear reason |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Emptiness | <input type="checkbox"/> Feeling underappreciated |

Cognitive Signs

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Difficulty concentrating | <input type="checkbox"/> Lack of creativity |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Difficulty making decisions | <input type="checkbox"/> Loss of sense of humour |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Forgetfulness | <input type="checkbox"/> Self-doubt |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Constant worry | <input type="checkbox"/> Loss of meaning |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Loss of direction | <input type="checkbox"/> Tunnel vision, muffled hearing |

Interpersonal Signs

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Withdrawing from others | <input type="checkbox"/> Intolerance |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Overreacting | <input type="checkbox"/> Increased arguments |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Conflict with co-workers or employers | <input type="checkbox"/> Clamming up |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Using people | <input type="checkbox"/> Lowered sex drive |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Nagging | <input type="checkbox"/> Lack of intimacy |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Distrust | |