



Tips for Employees **Coping after a Critical Incident**

Contact the **C-SEAP at 1-800-821-8154 or 303-866-4314** if you have questions or need support.

What is a Critical Incident? (APA, 2016; NIH, 2015)

- **Critical Incident** is a term used to describe a situation or event, created by natural or human-made factors, that causes risk of death or physical injury and/or risk to or destruction of personal possessions and property, the workplace, or entire communities. Critical Incidents can include large-scale or more personalized situations involving natural destruction, violent and/or criminal acts, or devastating accidents.
- **Trauma** is our “emotional response” to terrifying or destructive situations (APA, 2016).

What are normal trauma responses? (Rich, N. n.d.)

- Following a critical incident, you may experience or see – in a loved one, co-worker, etc. who has experienced a critical incident – signs of stress or trauma for **a month or longer**.
- These signs of stress or trauma are **normal** and may include physical, emotional, social, cognitive, behavioral, and spiritual responses.
- **Physical reactions** may include fatigue, insomnia, changes in activity-level, changes in appetite, pain, headaches, digestive concerns, changes in sex drive; **Cognitive responses** include confusion, poor problem-solving, disturbed thinking, changes in alertness.
- **Emotional reactions** can include fear, emotional numbing, symptoms of depression or anxiety, helplessness, irritability, lack of confidence in own abilities; **Behavioral reactions** include withdrawal, suspiciousness, hyper-alertness, emotional outbursts.
- **Spiritual responses** may include anger at higher power, loss of faith, questing faith/prior beliefs, turning toward or away from faith; **Social responses** can include withdrawing from others, spending time alone, fear of public or social situations, changes in interpersonal interactions and/or relationships.

What are some good coping strategies following a traumatic incident? (Rich, N. n.d.)

- The reactions described above are **normal** and, for many, unavoidable. However, patience and kindness to self can help throughout the healing process.
- In addition, do the things that seem **commonplace for you** as following a regular schedule of exercise, work, social outings, etc. can help with the healing process. Expect some lagging motivation to maintain these schedules - **take breaks and/or time off when needed**.
- Some experts suggest **avoiding major life changes** following a crisis. While unavoidable after some traumatic events, major shifts like re-location, change in job, etc. can create compounding stress.

What are maladaptive coping strategies and what can be done about them?

- Sometimes, the impact of a critical incident or trauma leads to use of coping strategies that may become **harmful or prolong the grief** and/or healing process.
- Contact C-SEAP and/or your healthcare provider if you are **concerned about one or more of the following** after a traumatic event – intrusive thoughts, avoidance of situations or people, hyper-vigilance, feeling detached from your own body, feeling detached from relationships, excessive use of alcohol or other substances, violent anger, excessive hours at work, excessive use of electronics or media to “zone out” or find answers, disregarding personal health or hygiene.

Sources:

Rich, Nancy (n.d). *Critical Incident Stress Reactions*, Mayflower Support Team.
National Institutes of Health, DIMRC (2015). *Coping with disasters, violence, and traumatic events*.
US Department of Labor (n.d). *Critical Incident Stress Guide*.

