

Critical incidents in the workplace

Disruptive events that have impacted the work environment are known as “critical incidents.” Here’s what you should know.

Common examples include community or natural disasters, serious injury, death of a co-worker, major organizational changes, and workplace violence, suicide or homicide. It is common and natural for people to experience a wide range of emotional and physical reactions after a critical incident that can temporarily disrupt an individual or group’s ability to cope.

Critical Incident Response Services are designed to help employees cope with their stress responses and promote organizational resiliency.



Recognizing disruptive event stress

Critical incidents or disruptive events may produce a wide range of symptoms that are unusual for you. Remember that these are normal reactions to an abnormal situation. The responses are different for each person, but may affect:

How you think

- Poor concentration
- Shorter attention span
- Slowed problem solving
- Memory problems
- Difficulty making decisions

How you feel physically

- Headaches
- Chest or stomach pain
- Muscle tremors
- Difficulty breathing
- Elevated blood pressure

How you feel emotionally

- Depression
- Grief
- Guilt
- Anxiety or fear
- Feeling lost or overwhelmed

How you behave

- Excessive silence
- Social withdrawal
- Changes in sleep and eating habits
- Lower work performance



How to help yourself

Remember that you're normal and having normal reactions. Here are some ways you can help yourself cope:

- Give yourself permission to feel bad.
- Get plenty of rest.
- Eat well-balanced and regular meals.
- Don't "escape" with drugs or alcohol.
- Talk to people you trust, but don't feel that you have to talk if you don't want to.
- Realize that recurring thoughts, dreams or flashbacks are normal. They'll decrease over time and become less painful.
- Hold off on making big decisions.
- Ask for help if you need it.



Positive steps forward

With time, you may be able to:

- Complete daily tasks more easily.
- Improve sleep and energy levels.
- Have more positive feelings about the present and future.

You and your family have access to confidential assistance to help deal with a wide range of personal, health or work-related issues. These services help you manage stress, overcome anxiety or depression and cope with grief or loss. Our Emotional Wellbeing Specialists are available any time, every day.



There are a variety of resources available to yourself and loved ones at optumwellbeing.com

Our Critical Support Center offers emotional support resources and information when you need it most. Find a variety of topic areas including mental health, traumatic events, natural disasters, grief and loss, supporting adolescents in crisis, and more.



Critical support when you need it

Visit optumwellbeing.com for additional critical support resources and information.



Call for support at

Your Optum benefit offers support from specially trained, mental health specialists to help anyone who is overwhelmed, depressed, or searching for answers.



This program should not be used for emergency or urgent care needs. In an emergency, call 911 or go to the nearest emergency room. This program is not a substitute for a doctor's or professional's care. Consult with your clinician for specific health care needs, treatment or medication. Due to the potential for a conflict of interest, legal consultation will not be provided on issues that may involve legal action against Optum or its affiliates, or any entity through which the caller is receiving these services directly or indirectly (e.g., employer or health plan). This program and its components may not be available in all states or for all group sizes and is subject to change. Coverage exclusions and limitations may apply.

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