

Critical Incident in the Workplace Self-Care Information

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What is a Critical Incident?

A Critical Incident is defined as an event out of the range of normal experience – one which is sudden and unexpected and may have a physical or emotional impact. In some cases it may involve the perception of a threat to life. Critical incidents are challenging events that have the potential to create significant distress and can overwhelm one's usual coping mechanisms.

Critical incidents in the workplace may include:

- death/serious injury
- assault
- personal threat
- robbery/fire/accident in the workplace
- fraud

Experiences resulting from a critical incident or traumatic event can be very personal.

On-duty EAO available at 0818 008120

Monday – Thursday: 9am – 5.15pm

Friday: 9am – 5pm

**Appointments are available evening
and weekends if required**

Email: cseas@per.gov.ie

www.cseas.per.gov.ie

This leaflet aims to provide an understanding of some common reactions which may be experienced following such an event. It may also help by offering some coping strategies.

Normal feelings and emotions you may experience:

Fear

- Of damage to oneself and those we love
- Of being left alone, of having to leave loved ones
- Of “breaking down” or “losing control”
- Of a similar event happening again
- Helplessness

Sadness

- For deaths, injuries and other losses

Longing

- For all that has gone

Guilt

- For being better off than others, e.g. for surviving, for not being injured, regrets for things not done or said

Memories

- Of other similar events or losses

Disappointment

- For all the plans that can now never be fulfilled

Shame

- For having been exposed as helpless, emotional and needing others
- For not having reacted as one would have wished

Anger

- Anger at what happened, at whoever caused it or allowed it to happen
- At the injustice and senselessness of it all
- Why me?

Hope

- For the future and better times

Experience has shown that these feelings may vary in intensity according to circumstances. Expressing these feelings helps the healing process. Suppressing them may lead to other and possibly more complicated problems.

Possible reactions following trauma

Some common physical and mental sensations can include tiredness, sleeplessness, bad dreams, loss of memory and concentration, dizziness, palpitations, shakes, difficulty in breathing, tightness in the throat and chest, nausea, diarrhoea, muscular tension which may lead to pain, e.g. headaches, neck and backaches, abdominal pain/tummy ache, menstrual disorders, change in sexual interest.

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Shock

The initial reaction to news of a traumatic event is usually one of shock, disbelief and numbness. These feelings are very normal and are nature's way of gently sedating us to allow time to begin to realise what has happened.

Reality

Facing the reality, e.g. attending funerals in the case of death may help you to come to terms with the event.

Support

It can be a relief to receive other people's physical and emotional support. Sharing with others who have had a similar experience can help.

Privacy

In order to deal with the after-effects of a traumatic event, you may prefer at times to be alone, or just with family and close friends.

Family and social relationships

New friendships and relationships can develop. On the other hand, strains in existing relationships may appear. You might feel that you cannot give as much as may be expected of you. It is important that your family/loved ones are aware of the emotions that you are experiencing and it may be helpful to give them a copy of this leaflet. Accidents can occur after a critical incident – e.g. take extra care when driving.

Coping strategies you may find helpful

DO:

- express your emotions
- talk about what happened
- find opportunities to review the experience
- look to friends, family and colleagues for support
- listen sympathetically if a colleague wants to speak with you, unless it is too distressing
- advise colleagues who need more support of where they can get appropriate help
- try to keep your life as normal as possible
- try to keep to daily routine/recreation
- drive more carefully
- find time for physical exercise

DON'T:

- a misuse alcohol, nicotine or other drugs to hide your feelings
- avoid the workplace – seek help and support
- allow anger and irritability to mask your feelings
- bottle up feelings/emotions
- be afraid to ask for help
- think your feelings are signs of weakness

Sometimes a traumatic event is so painful that professional support and/or medical assistance may be necessary. These feelings can be very common and simply indicate that the particular event is just too powerful for you to manage by yourself. Seeking help does not imply weakness or inadequacy.

Seek support if

You feel you cannot handle intense feelings or body sensations.

Your stress reactions do not lessen in the weeks following the event.

You continue to have nightmares and poor sleep.

You have no-one with whom to share your feelings when you want to do so.

Your relationships seem to be suffering badly, or sexual problems develop.

You become clumsy or accident prone.

After the event, you smoke, drink or take more medication, or use other drugs.

Your work performance is adversely affected.

You are tired all the time.

Things get on top of you and you feel like giving up.

You take it out on your family.

Your health deteriorates.

Where to find help:

- Civil Service Employee Assistance Service
- Consult your G.P.

Civil Service Employee Assistance Service (HQ)
Department of Public Expenditure and Reform
4th Floor, St. Stephen's Green House,
Earlsfort Terrace,
Dublin 2, DO2 PH42, Ireland
Tel: 0818 008120

Email: cseaseper.gov.ie
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