

Employee fact sheet:

Experienced or Witnessed a Critical Incident



Experiencing or witnessing a critical incident can be deeply distressing. You may have been directly involved, seen something happen, supported others through the event, or been affected by what you heard afterwards.

There is no single right way to respond. Some people feel the impact straight away. Others notice changes in the hours, days or weeks that follow. Whatever you are experiencing, support is available.

What is a critical incident?

A critical incident is an event that may significantly affect your wellbeing, sense of safety or ability to cope. This may include:

- A workplace accident or serious injury
- Exposure to violence, threats or aggression
- A medical emergency
- The death or serious injury of a colleague, client or member of the public
- A natural disaster or major workplace disruption

How you might feel

After a critical incident, a range of emotional, physical and psychological reactions are common. These responses are often a normal reaction to an abnormal event.

You may notice What this can feel like

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Emotions	Feeling shocked, anxious, sad, angry, overwhelmed or more emotional than usual.
Body	Feeling unusually tired, restless, tense or physically on edge.
Thoughts	Difficulty concentrating, replaying the event, unwanted images or memories, or feeling unsure whether your reaction is normal.
Behaviour	Withdrawing from others, avoiding reminders of the event or staying busy to avoid thinking about it.
Sense of self	Feeling numb, disconnected or unlike your usual self.
Work and daily life	Difficulty focusing, reduced confidence, emotional reactions or finding everyday tasks harder than usual.

You don't need to be the person directly affected to feel the impact. Witnessing an event, supporting others through it or hearing about it afterwards can all have an effect.

What to do after a critical incident

1. Give yourself time

Recovery does not happen overnight. Allow yourself time to process the event and avoid putting pressure on yourself to “get back to normal” immediately.

2. Talk to someone you trust

Connecting with friends, family, colleagues or other trusted people can help you feel supported and less isolated.

3. Maintain routines

Regular sleep, meals, physical activity and daily structure can help create a sense of stability during difficult periods.

4. Notice changes in how you are coping

Pay attention of changes in your mood, sleep, concentration or energy. Recognising these changes early can help you take action before they become overwhelming.

5. Avoid unhealthy coping strategies

Alcohol, drugs or withdrawing from others may provide temporary relief but can make recovery more difficult over time.

6. Seek support

If the impact of the incident is affecting your wellbeing, work or daily life, talking to a health professional can help you understand your reactions and develop strategies to manage them.

Seek professional support

Speak with your GP, psychologist or access support through your EAP if you are finding things difficult.

Through your EAP with PeopleSense, you can speak confidentially with a qualified psychologist for support, guidance and practical strategies as you navigate your recovery.



Reaching out early makes a real difference.
Contact **PeopleSense** to book a confidential
appointment with a qualified psychologist.

If you are having thoughts of self-harm or suicide, seek urgent support immediately. Call 000, Lifeline on 13 11 14.

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