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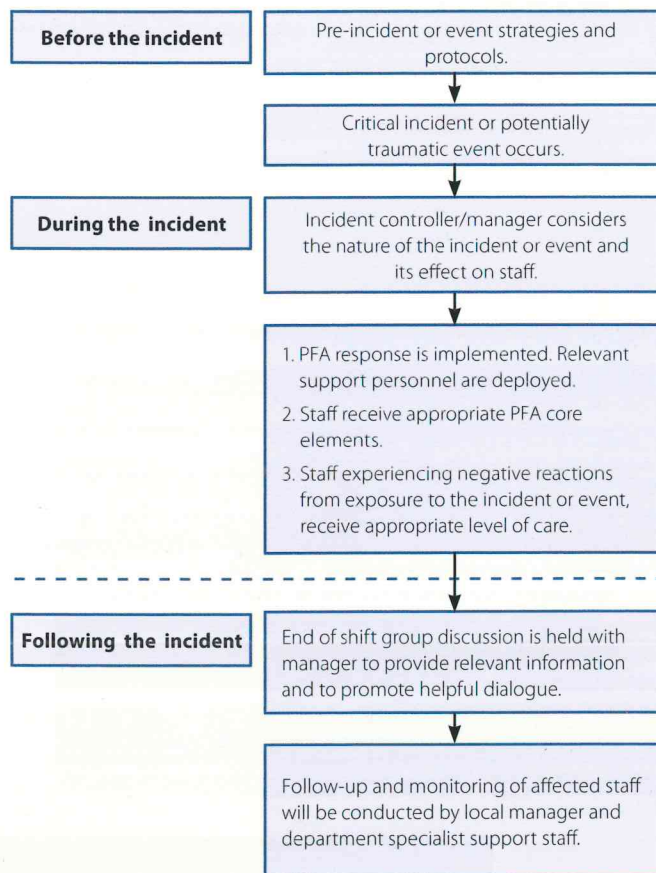
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Self-help tips

Aspects of critical incident stress might feel strange, unusual or disturbing. However, they are common and quite normal experiences following a traumatic event. It is highly likely that these reactions will gradually decrease over time, especially if you follow some simple tips:

- maintain a healthy, balanced diet and get adequate sleep and exercise
- balance your work with recreation and rest
- keep a routine with family, close friends and familiar surroundings
- don't push thoughts and memories of the event away – talk about them
- don't feel embarrassed about needing to talk about them over and over
- don't be 'too tough' to get help
- recognise that previous unresolved stress may increase current reactions to a critical event.

DBCA's Psychological First Aid (PFA) Stress Management Model



For more assistance

Remember, these reactions are normal and, in most cases, will gradually become less intense after a few weeks. The support of family and friends is particularly vital during this time. There is no set pattern on how people cope with trauma. Each person has a unique way of recovering. For some, the symptoms may last longer and be more severe. This may be due to several factors such as the nature of the event, the level of available support, previous and current life stress or health conditions, personality, and coping resources.

If you are very distressed or your reactions are interfering with work and relationships, it is important that you talk to a health care professional. DBCA has support services or referral advice available to you and your family members.

You can access more information and assistance via the following contact numbers.

Health, Safety and Wellbeing Section

0418 949 177

Wellbeing Coordinator

0429 346 243

Employee Assistance Program (24 hour availability)

1300 307 912

Advice and material for this brochure has been generously provided by the Critical Incident Stress Management Team, Victorian Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning



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Photos – DBCA

Information current at September 2022.

This information is available in alternative formats on request.



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Stress: following a critical incident or potentially traumatic event



Normal stress is part of everyday life.

However, some events in the work we do may trigger stress over and above that regarded as normal. These situations include, but are not limited to:

- bushfires
- cliff rescue and recovery
- verbal or physical assault
- vehicle incidents
- workplace incidents, including 'near miss' situations
- intense media scrutiny
- emergency response.

The stress evoked by these critical incidents is called **critical incident stress (CIS)**.

This pamphlet outlines signs and symptoms of critical incident stress and what you can do about it.

Signs and symptoms to look out for:

Physical

- headache or other pains
- muscle tension
- excessive fatigue
- autonomic reactions: for example dizziness, sweating, trembling, looking pale, palpitations
- gastrointestinal reactions: for example nausea, diarrhoea, loss of appetite
- increased nervous reactions, being easily startled

Mental

- poor memory, especially for names
- difficulty concentrating, organising, making decisions or planning
- mental confusion, misunderstanding or uncertainty about the incident or one's actions
- losing track of thoughts
- flashbacks or can't stop remembering, thinking or being reminded of the incident
- uncertainty about what to do or how to respond
- continuing to imagine the incident (if not present)
- distracting yourself to avoid thinking about or remembering events
- mental pressure, feeling as though you cannot manage

Behavioural

- feeling 'flat' and demotivated
- feeling restless, jumpy or unable to relax
- sleep disturbance, dreams or nightmares
- increased alcohol, tobacco or caffeine consumption
- changes in behaviour patterns or habits, for example exercise, eating, recreation, sex drive
- slurred or confused speech
- avoiding reminders of the incident

Emotional

- feeling irritable or frustrated
- anger, often at the organisation or management
- mood swings or a lack of feeling
- suspiciousness
- feeling depressed, 'down' or sad, tears for unexpected reasons
- feeling guilty: for example feeling 'I should have done more' or 'I should have been there'
- experiencing conflicting feelings and attitudes about the incident or your own role
- feeling devalued, ignored or misunderstood, especially by managers
- experiencing dissatisfaction with own or others' performance
- feeling isolated or unsupported at work or at home
- ongoing sadness, irritability, anger, guilt or helplessness

A changed sense of self

- experiencing disillusionment or cynicism
- experiencing a loss of interest, motivation or career plan
- wondering what the point of it all is
- questioning one's sense of self, the meaning of life and values
- functioning inefficiently since the incident
- experiencing a loss of commitment or attachment to your job
- experiencing decreased work satisfaction or sense of purpose
- reviewing your career
- realising you were not expecting to react that way

Social

- excessive talking about events or need for support
- experiencing misunderstandings and conflict in close relationships or with those involved in the incident
- finding you cannot communicate to others effectively
- experiencing a loss of interest in work
- feeling detached from others
- avoiding people, feeling distrustful or threatened
- wanting excessive contact and reassurance

*Reference: Human Resources Branch,
Department of Human Services, Victoria, May 1997*

