



## MANAGER SERIES

### Tips for assisting employees after a critical incident

Critical Incidents are usually unexpected powerful events outside the range of everyday experiences. Examples of Critical Incidents include assault, imminent threat of harm, serious injury or death of a close friend, relative or colleague. Critical incidents have the potential to cause trauma to people that have experienced or witnessed the event. Their ability to function might be impacted.

#### How to respond as a Manager?



**Follow your Organisation's Policy or Procedure.** There are many ideas about the do's and don'ts in regards to supporting employees after a critical incident. Before putting any of those into action, it's essential to remember that most organisations have policies, procedures or guidelines about Critical Incident Responses. The content can vary per industry, organisation or department, which is why it's important to know what's expected of you according to your organisation.



**Provide the person with a safe place to unwind after the incident.** Take them somewhere safe and away from prying eyes so they can relax and not have to keep working or responding to the demands of colleagues or customers. People like to regain control of their emotions and it is important to allow them the space and time to do this.



**Normalise reactions:** Being (in) directly involved in a critical incident can cause distress and unwanted disruption to someone's life. It is common to experience a range of intense and sometimes confusing emotions after a critical incident. Examples are: numbness, emptiness, anxiety / fear, sadness, guilt, regret, anger or relief. These feelings are normal responses to an abnormal event. Let them know that what they are experiencing is normal and ask them what would be helpful. Encourage them to ask for what they really need.



**Provide the person with information about the event.** Information could help people to understand what happened and assists them to put an event into perspective. Sometimes people blame themselves for the incident or say they did not act quickly enough. Offer other explanations and be careful only to provide the facts as you know them. If you are giving an opinion ensure the person understands it is only your opinion.



**Provide them with the opportunity to make necessary telephone calls.** They may need to contact friends and family members to cover practical everyday errands, such as collecting children from school, picking up a car being serviced and cancelling appointments. People regain control more effectively when they don't have to worry about things they should be doing.

If you would like to book an appointment and /or speak with one of our Counsellors, it's as easy as calling 1300 66 77 00 or New Zealand 0800 327 669 or visit our website [www.accesswellbeingservices.com.au](http://www.accesswellbeingservices.com.au)



- Spend time listening to people's experiences as to what has happened.** Be available to listen if the person wishes to talk. Don't minimise the impact of the incident. Even if the incident appears to be something manageable to you, reactions such as 'it could have been worse' aren't helpful. People react in different ways and each needs time to recover at their own pace and in their own way. Respect each person as an individual. Offer refreshments and the chance to talk about what happened. People who have experienced a traumatic event welcome assistance, but not imposed help.
- Have a trusted or experienced colleague available to sit with the person.** The person may request someone in particular or may wish to be alone. Do not leave them alone if they are showing physical signs of distress. Some danger signs are chest pains, difficulty breathing, panic attacks, general confusion, uncontrolled crying or outbursts of anger. Consider seeking immediate professional help in these instances.
- Know your role and encourage support.** Remember you are not a Counsellor, you are a colleague or Manager and you are providing a listening ear and practical support to the person. It can be helpful if a Manager encourages professional support as someone may, at some point, wish to speak confidentially with a Counsellor. They could understand how they are feeling, listen without judgment, offer psychoeducation, support and assist with strategies to cope with the negative impact of the event. Seeking counselling is not a sign of weakness. Counselling can significantly help the recovery from a critical incident. There is no right or wrong way to feel. If the situation is difficult, contact a Counsellor.
- Organise relief staff, if necessary.** Don't assume people are able to continue working. Allow them time to defuse the strong emotions that accompany a critical incident and consider if they can return to work. Even if they say they are okay, give them time to sit for a while to gather themselves. People like to be given choices and not told what to do. Check on them at regular intervals to assess if they are coping. If not, get some help.
- Encourage light exercise and offer refreshments.** Engagement in light activities, such as walking and talking or offering a water or cup of tea can be helpful. Don't provide or encourage alcohol or other drugs, including medication. The person needs a clear mind and healthy body to recover. Excessive smoking can also interfere with a person's recovery.
- Check in with your employees in the weeks following an incident.** Support is often offered briefly after a critical incident, however it is also important to check in with the person over the next few days and weeks to see how they are getting on. Reinforce their sense of control and how they now have more knowledge about themselves to cope with a difficult situation. Allow them the necessary time to recover.

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### **Services that can assist Managers**

Access Wellbeing Services (AWS) offers a range of services that could be beneficial to Managers. Please see below for some practical information on the services and how they can assist Managers.

- Onsite critical incident attendance

AWS applies frameworks adapted from the Critical Incident Stress Debriefing (CISD) model and Psychological First-Aid (PFA) model when responding to a critical incident. They are effective and evidence based psychological tools that support people who have experienced traumatic events. This type of support and debriefing can be delivered to a group or at an individual level. It is typically delivered by a Counsellor during a singular session, between 24-72 hours post incident.

- Manager Support hotline

Managers, supervisors and team leaders are often faced with the tasks of balancing operational demands and people management issues. AWS Manager Support (MS) offers the opportunity to discuss difficult situations with our counsellors, seek support and advice, develop concrete strategies and discuss options or recommendations for managing employee related challenges. AWS free 15-minute MS is offered via telephone. If further support is required, this can also include face-to-face contact as a fee for service.

- Wellness Checks for employees

AWS provides a Wellness Check (WC) service with the purpose to provide immediate support to employees, advise of EAP service and complete a risk assessment where required. The WC comprises of a 15 minute phone consultation with the employee on the referral form, with an (in)formal follow up if required by the referrer.

- General EAP counselling for employees and managers

AWS counselling service could be offered to individuals, couples and families with the goal of building resilience, empowerment of self, strengthening relationships, supporting individual and families. Counselling enables employees to resolve work related issues as well as personal issues that may affect their wellbeing and productivity. EAP Counsellors are highly experienced and qualified in a number of therapeutic modalities to maximise outcomes for clients.

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