



## How to Respond to Critical Incidents in the Workplace

Stress related symptoms and productivity problems may surface immediately or may not surface for employees for many weeks following a critical incident.

### Behaviors that may be present immediately or over time:

- Vigilance and jumpiness
- Concentration problems
- Fatigue
- Need to re-establish control
- Irritability: people being short with each other
- Talking – recounting experiences many times over
- Phobia for “dreaded areas” (could be parking lot, car, etc.)

### Avoiding secondary reactions:

Employees exposed to traumatic events are particularly vulnerable to secondary reactions, which occur when there is a perceived lack of expected support and/or rejection by co-workers, management, friends, family and community agencies.

### How to respond:

- Be supportive of a wide range of individual responses among employees and each other. Encourage acceptance and sensitivity among individual members of work groups regarding these different responses
- Be visible and available to employees
- Allow for continuing need to talk, share and compare events. Allow employees to communicate about their feelings and what’s been helpful for them.
- Tolerate non-harmful shows of emotion: tearfulness, anger, expression of guilt.
- Create/Support activities that re-establish a sense of control.
  - Allow people to set goals and determine priorities that do not negatively impact operations
  - Let people decide what, if any, physical re-arranging of the environment would help
  - Allow people flexibility to “pace” themselves in returning to work
- Seek consultation from EAP on worrisome employees, including those who are disruptive.