

Coping After a Critical Incident or Traumatic Event: Common reactions after a traumatic event



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A critical incident or traumatic event such as a robbery in the workplace, a sudden death, a natural disaster, or an act of violence close to home or far away, can be distressing and have an impact both immediately and in the days and weeks afterward. This article series provides information to help you cope and find support during this time.

This is the first in a two-part series of articles on coping after a critical incident.

Common reactions after a traumatic event

Different people react in different ways following a traumatic event. Some of the most common reactions people experience include feeling:

- afraid or unsafe
- distracted
- numb or in shock
- angry
- guilty
- anxious, nervous, or jumpy

In the immediate aftermath, it is also common to cry or feel tearful. You may find yourself having intrusive or

recurring thoughts, dreams, or flashbacks about the event as well. These are not uncommon and will decrease over time.

You may experience physical symptoms following a trauma, including:

- headaches
- neck and back pain
- nausea
- breathlessness
- palpitations
- fatigue and exhaustion, physical and emotional

Realize that the feelings you are experiencing are not uncommon. There are no right or wrong ways to feel after a traumatic event.

The emotions and reactions described here are not uncommon. The positive news is that most people exposed to a traumatic event will recover using the same types of support that they have previously used to cope with other challenges in life.

Reviewed June 20, 2018 by Vince Citano, MA, Manager of Organizational Services at LifeWorks.

This is the first in a two-part series of articles on coping after a critical incident. Read the next in the series, [“Coping after the incident.”](#)

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