

# Helping Employees in the Immediate Aftermath of a Critical Incident: What to do immediately after a critical incident



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*A critical incident is any sudden or unexpected traumatic event that affects people's emotional lives, feelings of safety, and ability to cope. It might be a robbery in the workplace, the suicide of an employee, or a natural disaster or act of violence that occurred outside of work and significantly impacted employees. This article series offers strategies to help you support your employees during this difficult time.*

**This is the first in a three-part series of articles on helping employees in the immediate aftermath of a critical incident.**

## **What to do immediately after a critical incident**

It is important to provide appropriate practical and emotional support after a traumatic event. Below are some do's and don'ts to use as guidance.

### **Do:**

**Make sure everyone is safe and notify appropriate parties as necessary, such as police and fire departments and company security.** Be sure to inform the appropriate personnel in your company, such as human resources (HR), health and safety, designated trauma response coordinators, and media relations.

**Call your employee assistance program (EAP).** Every crisis, trauma, or critical incident is different. An EAP counsellor will discuss ways to respond to the crisis, given the specifics of the incident and your organization.

**Identify the employees who were most affected.** Encourage them to go to a quiet place with selected close friends or family who may have arrived. Until these support people arrive, have someone stay with affected employees.

**Remain calm and clear.** After an incident there is a great deal of emotion and confusion among employees. It is important that you as a manager calm the situation down by remaining calm and clear in your words and actions.

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*Employees often look to their managers for both practical and emotional support in the immediate aftermath of a critical incident.*

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**Try and obtain a clear picture of what happened.** Make sure all employees know exactly what occurred during the incident. Dispel any rumors and if information is not known do not speculate on what happened.

**Offer resources to employees.** Encourage employees to contact family and friends. Remind employees they may contact the EAP for support. The EAP offers support to employees and managers throughout the stages of recovery and can help people cope with the feelings that are common after a traumatic event. Remind employees that the call and the service are confidential and that they and their family members may contact the program 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

**Encourage employees to talk about what happened and their reactions.** Also encourage employees to sit quietly and not talk if this is what they want. Support employees in whatever emotions they display. Let them know there are no “right” or “wrong” feelings or reactions.

**Discourage employees from being on their own.** Encourage them to be supportive of each other and to seek support from one another as well as from family and friends.

**Keep employees focused on what did happen rather than what could or should have happened.** Remind employees not to be critical of each other or themselves.

## **Don't:**

**Do not force employees to talk about the event if they do not want to.**

**Do not criticize employees in any way.** This can be difficult as employees may be hypersensitive to any perceived criticism. If any coaching on policies or procedures needs to happen, schedule this for a later date after emotions subside.

By providing resources and support to employees following a traumatic event, you can help reduce the long-term effects of this event on your workplace and the people you work with and care about.

**This is the first in a three-part series of articles on helping employees in the immediate aftermath of a**

critical incident. Read the next in the series, “[Common psychological reactions.](#)”

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