

Common reactions after a critical incident



Critical incidents are unexpected, unusual events perceived by an individual as threatening or traumatic. They are often sudden, outside our normal frame of reference and a challenge to our ability to cope. If you experience a critical incident, you can have a wide range of reactions. It is important to remember:

- Your reaction is your reaction
- You might react differently to different situations at different times
- There is no right way to react

Common reactions

Emotional

- Disbelief
- Anger or irritability
- Grief/sadness
- Fear
- Numbness
- Feelings of helplessness
- Guilt and/or feelings of shame
- Anxiety
- Yearning
- Loneliness

Cognitive

- Difficulty concentrating or loss of focus
- Intrusive flashbacks, memories of event
- Decreased trust
- Memory challenges
- Searching for blame or responsibility
- Ruminating on choices made
- Taking responsibility for things that weren't known or within one's control
- Searching for meaning

Physical

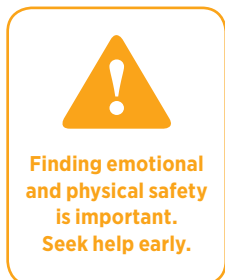
- Fatigue
- Physical Exhaustion
- Lack of energy
- Changes to appetite or weight
- Changes in sleep patterns
- Digestive upset
- Feeling dizzy or lightheaded
- Headache
- Heart palpitations
- Aches and pains

Behavioral

- Social withdrawal or isolation
- Dreams or nightmares
- Seeking closeness with loved ones
- Returning to old coping patterns
- Pacing/body agitation or restlessness
- Seeking people to talk to about the experience

Spiritual

- Seeking meaning of life and purpose
- Spiritual confusion and possibly estrangement
- Strengthened or renewed spirituality
- Feeling abandoned by spiritual connection



Additional supports are needed when:

- Your reactions are feeling particularly strong and persisting over time
- Your reactions are increasing in intensity, rather than decreasing over time
- You feel out of control, or your activities of daily living are being negatively affected
- Your own coping and support resources aren't helping you to find a resolution

What you can do to help others:

- Listen with an open mind, acknowledge their thoughts and feelings
- Accept that they may need time and space
- Offer to lend a hand with everyday tasks
- Point out there are resources and supports available to help
- Respect their privacy, and only reach out on their behalf with their consent, or if you are concerned about imminent safety

On-campus resources

Staff Wellness

Staff Wellness leads a number of programs, resources and services, to help promote, support, and sustain the health and wellness of faculty, staff and post-doctoral scholars.

403.220.2918 | staffwellness@ucalgary.ca | ucalgary.ca/staffwellness

Campus Security

For all imminent life-threatening situations, call 911. For all other safety and security concerns, call Campus Security.

403.220.5333 | ucalgary.ca/security

Sexual Violence Support Advocate

The Sexual Violence Support Advocate offers confidential support and information regarding sexual violence to all members of the university community.

403.220.2208 | ucalgary.ca/sexualviolencesupport

Office of Diversity, Equity and Protected Disclosure

The Protected Disclosure serves as a confidential resource for individuals seeking information and advice on sensitive and diverse matters.

403.220.4086 | ucalgary.ca/odepd

Student Wellness Services

Faculty and staff can contact Student Wellness Services for information about assisting students or visit for walk-in medical appointments, chiropractic treatments, massage therapy and nutrition services.

403.210.9355 | ucalgary.ca/wellnesscentre

Off-campus resources

Employee and Family Assistance Plan

TELUS Health provides in-person, online, telephone, and email support at no cost to faculty and staff.

1.866.424.0699 | ucalgary.ca/hr/efap

211 Alberta

211 Alberta connects users to the right community and social services.

Dial 211 | ab.211.ca

Access Mental Health

Access Mental Health provides information, telephone consultation and referral over the phone to help you understand and connect with helpful supports.

403.943.1500 | 1.844.943.1500

Distress Centre Calgary

Connect to professional counsellors at the Distress Centre Calgary through their 24-hour crisis line, email, or online chat. Face-to-face counselling is also available.

403.266.HELP (4357) | distresscentre.com

Reference:

Crisis & Trauma Resource Institute. (2016). *Critical Incident Group Debriefing: Common Reactions after a Critical Incident*. ctrinstitute.com

Student Wellness Services. *Understanding Grief*. SU Wellness Centre. University of Calgary