



Common Responses to Traumatic Events

A **critical incident** can range in severity but often has the potential to impact the workplace.

Many people experience some signs or symptoms of trauma-related stress after natural disasters or a personal crisis. These stress symptoms may appear immediately following the event or they may appear after time has passed. Regardless of the timing, it is important to remember stress-related symptoms are a normal reaction to a very abnormal situation.

Common responses immediately following a traumatic event:

- Shock, feeling dazed or numb
- Confusion or disbelief
- Sense of hopelessness or despair
- Feeling on edge
- A racing heart or dizziness
- Restlessness or helplessness
- Difficulty making decisions
- Difficulty concentrating
- Feeling sad or blue
- Fatigue or loss of appetite
- Changes in sleep patterns
- Tearfulness or irritability
- Desire to withdraw from others

Common longer-term reactions may include:

- Nightmares or flashbacks
- Disruptive memories
- Being startled easily
- Emotional withdrawal
- Avoiding social situations
- Difficulty sleeping or eating
- Irritability, sadness or depression
- Survivor's Guilt

Common triggers of stress-related symptoms:

- Anniversaries of the event
- Sights, sounds, smells or physical sensations that serve as reminders
- Returning to the scene of the event
- Weather reports or other warnings that a similar event could occur

These responses are considered normal. Symptoms may last for days or weeks. People typically find that many of their immediate stress reactions decline or disappear after a brief time. However, some may continue to experience stress-related reactions for a more extended period after the traumatic event.

If you believe that you are having trouble handling the stress of a traumatic event, your EAP is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Reach out for help, we are here for you.