



UW CareLink

Faculty and Staff
Employee Assistance Program

Recent National Tragedy

Something happens; it is sudden, random, senseless. The national tragedy of September 11th has affected not only the immediate victims and their family and friends but also all of us to some degree. Our ability to function normally may be temporarily disrupted.

Individuals will react with different levels of intensity. However, most people will experience some form of reaction, which is outside the range of their usual way of coping. People may experience the following after a traumatic event.

Numbness. You may withdraw from others, feel down, emotionally drained or “lost in a fog” and/or have difficulty concentrating.

Hyper arousal. You may feel irritable, be easily startled, feel nervous or have nightmares, and have a need for information.

It's not uncommon to go back and forth between these two states. You may feel numb one day and irritable the next. The experience may bring back situations from the past in which you felt helpless or out of control.

What is a Critical Incident Response?

The critical incident response is a temporary reaction to a serious event. Understanding that you may be having a normal response to an abnormal experience, and then making a conscious effort to work through it, will ultimately help you to overcome the stress and pain.

Common Critical Incident Responses

Physical:

- Fatigue
- Nervous energy
- Appetite changes
- Neck/back pain
- Headaches
- Chest pain/heart palpitations
- Insomnia/nightmares

Emotional:

- Feeling jumpy or easily startled
- Irritability
- Difficulty concentrating
- Intrusive thoughts about what happened
- Avoidance of people, places & activities
- Anger

Feelings of Helplessness

Flashbacks

Productivity:

- Inability to concentrate
- Making more mistakes than usual
- Trouble remembering things
- Tendency to overwork
- Staying home from work more often

Reactions of Young Children

- Clinging to parents
- Reluctance to go to bed
- Nightmares
- Crying

- Withdrawal and immobility
- Refusal to attend school
- Problems at school and inability to concentrate

Taking Care of Yourself

Relaxation techniques can be helpful. Stress is completely normal at a time like this. Acknowledge that you may have a lot of unpleasant feelings. Learn some stress management strategies and use them frequently. Give yourself time to recover from the crisis.

Sleep is always important—but especially now. Restlessness, nightmares and obsessing about the event can disrupt your sleep. Make sure you allow enough time for a full night's sleep. If you have difficulty sleeping for more than a week, consult your doctor.

Exercise can help clear the cobwebs. A brisk walk is good for the body and has a calming effect on the mind as well. Mild exercises can help combat stress but don't over do it. Even if you exercise regularly, over exercising can lead to injury. You don't need that right now!

Traps to Avoid

Smoking is always a health risk. Unfortunately, many ex-smokers become current smokers during crisis. Try to avoid using cigarettes as a crutch.

Alcohol and other drugs under extreme stress people may try to “self medicate” with alcohol, caffeine and/or other drugs, legal and illegal. When you are in pain, it is hard to tell what is enough. Perhaps the best idea is to try to avoid mood-altering substances as much as possible. They may cause far more problems than they solve. Instead of a drink, take a walk. Instead of taking pills, try talking to friends or to your spouse.

Suggested “Do’s & Don’ts”

Do

Get ample rest.

Maintain a good diet and exercise.

Take time for leisure activities.

Follow a structured schedule but allow some flexibility in case you are unable to follow through.

Find and talk to supportive peers and/or family members about the incident.

Learn about post-traumatic stress.

Spend time with family and friends.

Expect the incident to bother you.

Call your EAP or get extra help from a post trauma counselor if you need it.

Offer to help others – (i.e. call the Red Cross, donate blood, or check for volunteer opportunities with religious or civic groups).

Don’t

Drink alcohol excessively.

Use legal or illegal substances to numb consequences.

Withdraw from significant others.

Stay away from work.

Reduce amount of leisure activities.

Have unrealistic expectations for recovery.

Look for easy answers.

Make major life changes or decisions at this time.

Be hard on yourself or others.

When You Need Help

If you are concerned that your response is too intense or lasting too long, you may call your Employee Assistance Program. A professional counselor experienced in Critical Incident Trauma is available to help you.

For an Appointment

Call toll free

866-598-3978

**For 24-hour seven days per week crisis
counseling, call:**

800-833-3031