

Myth #1

Talking about critical incidents increases the likelihood of problems and it's better to try and forget about them.

Myth #2

Critical incident stress is considered to be an indicator of psychological weakness.

What can help?

In time, symptoms of critical incident stress disappear for most people. If you, or someone close to you, have been involved in a critical incident, the following suggestions may help until things settle down:

1. Acknowledge any stress reactions that may be affecting you.
2. Be kind to yourself. Admit you are human and have every right to feel what you are feeling.
3. Remember that feelings of sadness, vulnerability, anger or irritability are normal reactions to distressing or traumatic events.
4. Recognise and try to cut down on doing things that don't work; particularly the overuse of alcohol, caffeine and prescription medications.
5. Identify and contact friends and/or family who may be good sources of support.
6. Talk to a doctor or counsellor if you have any concerns or questions about how you are feeling.

ITIM Australia Limited

About ITIM

ITIM Australia Limited is a national organisation with offices in every state and territory. Established in 1960, ITIM is Australia's first provider of Employee Assistance Programs and is today one of the country's largest providers of support services to people in workplaces. ITIM engages more than 300 qualified staff who provide over 130 000 hours of service to 630 organisations in more than 200 locations.

The purpose of ITIM is to provide services which will assist you to achieve a safe, positive and productive work environment. ITIM is a 100 per cent not-for-profit Australian organisation.

Where to seek professional help

1. Call ITIM on 1800 337 068 for more information about ITIM's Critical Incident Management and Response or to arrange an appointment with a counsellor. If your organisation has a contract with ITIM, you will not pay for counselling. This is a 24-hour toll free number.
2. Call your doctor or community health organisation in your area for assistance.

Free call
1800 337 068

www.itim.com.au

ITIM Australia Limited

“Coping after a
critical incident:
the **ITIM** approach”

For immediate critical incident response
contact ITIM Australia on
1800 337 068 toll free 24 hours, 7 days
Australia-wide

ITIM Australia Limited

“Using the **ITIM** approach to cope following a critical incident”

What is a Critical Incident?

A critical incident is a sudden or shocking event that has the potential to cause a high level of distress for the people involved. A critical incident might also be experienced as traumatic if people perceive themselves or others as having been under a major threat to their physical safety.

Examples of critical incidents include:

- serious injury to, or death of a work colleague or member of the public
- physical, sexual or psychological threats; including assault, robbery, verbal abuse, intimidation or hostage situations
- motor vehicle and machinery accidents
- exposure to shocking or horrifying circumstances
- cumulative or on-going job related stress
- fires, explosions, chemical spills
- terrorism and related threats
- threatened with firearms
- destruction of work environment due to natural disaster, and
- deadly diseases and food contaminations.

Each person's experience of a critical incident is unique and personal. Some people experience no change while others may undergo severe emotional and/or physical changes. Some people react intensely and others hardly at all. Some people notice changes immediately, while others become aware of them some time later. These are all normal reactions to a critical incident.

What are some common reactions to a critical incident?

Being involved in a critical incident can be a frightening and disturbing experience. Your experience is a very personal one. Remember each person reacts differently and there is no right or wrong way.

The following reactions are normal reactions to an abnormal event, and for most people disappear over the next few weeks.

- **Emotional:** shock, sadness, anger, fear, guilt, anxiety, irritability, frustration
- **Physical:** tiredness, appetite changes, headaches, muscle tension
- **Thinking:** confusion, memory problems, slowed thinking, intrusive thoughts, difficulty concentrating
- **Activity:** restlessness, withdrawal from others, sleep difficulties

When to seek professional help?

Some people may need extra help in dealing with the effects of a critical incident. If you are experiencing any of the reactions listed below and it has been more than two weeks since the incident, then it is important you seek professional advice.

A professional counsellor can help if you:

- are feeling depressed
- are experiencing continued anger, irritability or frequent mood swings
- have a tendency to jump or startle at sudden noises or unexpected movements
- continue to have disturbed sleep or nightmares
- are having repetitive distressing thoughts about the incident
- notice increased sweating, trembling or fast heart beat when reminded of the incident
- continue to experience muscle tension, headaches or tiredness
- continue to feel numb or empty, or if you have to keep active to avoid thinking and feeling about the incident
- have no person or group with whom to share your feelings
- notice personal and work relationships seem to be suffering as a result of the incident
- are having accidents, or increasing your intake of alcohol or medications, and
- are experiencing any other ongoing changes in your emotions or behaviour that are worrying you.