

Supporting Employees after Critical Incident

A Guide for Managers and Leaders

Critical incidents can affect employees in different ways, whether they were directly involved, indirectly impacted, or supporting others. Managers play a key role in creating a safe, supportive environment during and after these events.

WHAT EMPLOYEES MAY BE EXPERIENCING

Employees may show:

- Shock, distress, anxiety, or grief
- Difficulty concentrating or making decisions
- Fatigue, irritability, or withdrawal
- Changes in performance, behaviour, or attendance

Responses may be immediate or delayed. There is no single “right” reaction, but usually any aberration from their normal behaviour is an early warning sign.

HOW MANAGERS CAN PROVIDE SUPPORT

Check In Early and Often

- Reach out with empathy: “How are you going?”
- Listen without judgement or rushing to solutions
- Respect privacy — not everyone will want to talk

Create Psychological Safety

- Normalise different reactions to distressing events
- Avoid assumptions about how someone “should” feel
- Discourage speculation or unhelpful conversations

Offer Practical Flexibility

- Adjust workloads, deadlines, or rosters where possible
- Encourage breaks and time away from high-stress tasks
- Support temporary arrangements or leave if needed

Connect People to Support

- Organise critical incident response where people are impacted
- Remind employees about EAP support
- Encourage, but don’t pressure, people to seek help
- Know how to escalate urgent concerns

SUPPORTING YOUR TEAM OVER TIME

- Check in again after the initial period - impacts can surface later or remain protracted
- Watch for ongoing changes in mood, behaviour, or performance
- Reinforce that support remains available

LOOKING AFTER YOURSELF AS A MANAGER

- Recognise that supporting others can be emotionally demanding
- Use peer support, debriefs, or professional resources
- Set boundaries: you don’t have to carry this alone

WHEN TO SEEK ADDITIONAL HELP

Escalate or seek professional advice if an employee:

- Appears overwhelmed or unable to function
- Expresses ongoing distress or hopelessness
- Raises safety concerns

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