

CRITICAL INCIDENT

Information Sheet | Manager's Guidelines



What is a critical incident?

A critical incident is an event that takes place suddenly — like an injury, fatality or robbery — which can cause emotional or psychological trauma in people directly exposed to the incident. It is outside of both the range of normal experience and a worker's control.

Reactions to a critical incident can include:

- jumpiness, anxiousness, moodiness or irritability
- difficulty concentrating, making decisions or thinking clearly
- avoiding the incident scene or places that trigger memories of the incident
- difficulty being around people
- difficulty being alone
- sleep disturbance or nightmares.

These reactions are normal and usually decrease over time. In addition to the above, however, workers' feelings about their jobs and the workplace can be seriously affected by a critical incident and the whole workplace may suffer as a result. Effects may include poor morale, decreased productivity, increased incidents of sick time, higher disability claims and greater staff turnover.

How can an employer respond to a critical incident?

Here are some measures you can use to help support your staff:

- **Provide information about available services for post-incident counselling.** Make sure workers know about available services such as an Employee Assistance Program, faith-based services or local community health services such as Klinik's Critical Incident Reporting and Support Line in Winnipeg, available 24/7 by calling (204) 788-8222.
- **Be there for your workers.** Listening to them is one of the most helpful things you can do.
- **Meet with your workers regularly.** Check with each one individually and privately and also meet with them as a group. Ask them how they are doing. Find out their concerns.
- **Build on the strengths of the group.** Encourage workers to take care of one another through measures like listening to coworkers in distress, offering practical help, visiting hospitalized coworkers or going with a worker on a first visit to a feared site.
- **Share your reactions with your workers.** Knowing that you also experience anxiety, fear, anger or grief will help normalize and validate what they are experiencing. Showing you can function effectively in spite of your reactions may help them do likewise.
- **Try to answer questions as best you can.** If you don't know the answers to their questions, it's okay to say that there are some things you don't know or understand.

Clear policies as well as humane and sensitive procedures are necessary to help workers who have been affected by a critical incident. Goals of proper handling of a critical incident include preventing further incidences, and reducing the development of further, more serious difficulties such as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). With support, people can recover from the effects of trauma.

Contact Safe Work Manitoba

For more information on mental health concerns in the workplace, please contact Safe Work Manitoba at **204-957-SAFE (7233)** or toll free at **1-855-957-SAFE (7233)**, or visit **safemanitoba.com**.