

# CRITICAL INCIDENT

## Information Sheet | Worker Guidelines



Critical incidents are disturbing events, like a workplace injury or fatality, and can cause very strong emotional feelings and reactions. When a person witnesses something like this, it can affect his or her coping abilities either at the time of the event or later.

A person may experience emotional aftershocks – also known as stress reactions – after experiencing a disturbing event. This is normal and quite common. Emotional aftershocks may occur immediately after the event or hours or days later. They may last a few days, weeks, months or longer.

Common signs and symptoms of an emotional aftershock or stress reaction may include:

- chills or heavy sweating
- nausea and vomiting
- dizziness and fainting
- headaches
- confusion
- nightmares and sleeplessness
- guilt
- grief
- being easily upset
- intense anger
- loss of, or increase in, appetite.

### Coping methods

- Find and use any resources available through your employer's employee assistance program, faith-based services or your local community mental health services such as Klinik's Critical Incident Reporting and Support Line in Winnipeg, available 24/7 by calling (204) 788-8222.
- Within the first 24 to 48 hours after the incident, exercise moderately for short periods and then relax at regular intervals to ease some of the physical reactions.
- Maintain your normal schedule as much as possible. Stay active.
- Try not to think of yourself as ill or weak. You're having a normal reaction to a critical incident.
- Reach out and talk to people – they care.
- Realize that those around you may also be experiencing stress.
- Avoid numbing your pain with drugs or alcohol. Substance abuse may make it harder for you to deal with this event properly.
- Spend time with others - don't isolate yourself.
- Give yourself permission to feel rotten and share your feelings with others.
- Try to help your coworkers by asking how they are doing and then sharing your feelings with them.
- Do things that make you happy.
- Don't make any big life changes during this time period but do make some daily decisions, which will give you a feeling of control over your life.
- Get plenty of rest.
- Eat well-balanced and regular meals (even if you don't feel like it).
- Don't try to fight recurring thoughts, dreams or flashbacks – they are normal and will likely decrease over time and become less painful.
- If the critical incident has led to a physical or psychological injury, the WCB is there to help. To make a claim, you should report the injury to your employer, talk to your doctor or ask to be referred to a psychologist or psychiatrist, and contact the WCB at 204-954-4100 or toll free at 1-855-954-4321.

### Recovery

Many people who experience a stress reaction recover completely. If the symptoms last more than four weeks, contact your doctor as you may be at risk of developing more serious difficulties such as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

If a physician makes a diagnosis of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, you may be eligible for compensation benefits. For claim information, contact the WCB at **204-954-4100** or toll free at **1-855-954-4321**.