

# Customer Connection

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Prevention. Intervention. Results.

## Critical Incidents in the Workplace



Unfortunately, situations like these may have an impact on your workplace:

*A co-worker, client or customer suddenly dies.*

*An employee is seriously injured on the job.*

*An earthquake, fire, or severe winter storms devastate the community.*

A critical incident is “any situation in the workplace that is shocking and creates an unusually strong emotional reaction either during or after the event”. The impact of the critical incident can be so stressful that it overwhelms the individual’s usual coping skills.

**A key point to remember is that critical incident stress is the reaction of normal people experiencing normal responses to abnormal events.**

Every critical incident has the potential to impact both the employees as well as the overall organization. The costs associated with critical incidents include loss of productivity, lost work time, and increased workers compensation claims. In addition to the financial costs of a critical incident, the organizational impact of critical incidents may include changes in employee behaviours, changes in co-worker relationships, and changes in employees’ perceptions and attitudes towards management.

Everyone benefits when employees are promptly and compassionately supported in dealing with the impact of a critical incident. Having a sound crisis intervention plan in place can go a long way towards minimizing the impact of a critical incident.

- Establish guidelines to identify situations that may need intervention, including asking yourselves the questions: *How will our organization define a critical incident?*
- Determine areas of risk or vulnerability, for example: *What types of critical events are most likely to occur, given the nature of our business?*
- Develop policies and procedures to address crisis situations
- Train your managers on their role in supporting staff in the aftermath of critical incidents.

# The Manager's Role in a Critical Incident

Managers play a critical role in the success of a crisis response. Two factors greatly reduce critical incident stress:

1. Pre-trauma awareness. Education and familiarization with critical incident stress and a response plan will help protect and prepare your work group.
2. Timely support following a critical incident

Many times a manager will call their EAP provider and request that a counsellor come on-site within minutes of the incident, however, this may not be the most appropriate or helpful response for the organization and its employees. Not all incidents require professionally led group interventions.

In periods of crisis, employees want concrete evidence that management views their distress as one of the company's key concerns. As soon as possible after the event, it is important that managers check in with staff members to see how they are doing. If more support is requested or if strong feelings are evident, there may be a need for a more formal intervention.

Human Resources and Interlock can assist you in arranging the appropriate help. If the consultation results in a plan for a group meeting (often referred to as defusing or debriefing sessions) the manager will be put in touch with the Interlock representative. This person will discuss the needs of the work group with the manager and will determine the most suitable timing, location and composition for any group sessions. Remind involved staff that any such session is offered for their support, is confidential and remains totally separate from any workplace investigative process.

## ***Further Reading:***

The above article is adapted with permission from Supportive Solutions Inc.

<http://www.supportive-solutions.com/news.htm>

*Blindsided – A Manager's Guide to Catastrophic Incidents in the Workplace.*  
Blythe, B. T. (2002).

*Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM): A New Era and Standard of Care in Crisis Intervention.* 2nd Ed. Everly, G. S. and Mitchell, J. T. (1999).

International Critical Incident Stress Foundation, <http://www.icisf.org/articles/>

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