

# Recovery after a Crisis

If you are reading this there is a strong chance that you or someone you love has recently experienced some form of critical incident.

A critical incident, at its worst, is any event that is subjectively judged to be horrific, frightening or overwhelming. During such events, people experience some very unfamiliar sights, situations, (and even smells).

There may have been a series of unusual and sometimes uncomfortable experiences for you. Having survived the incident, your expenditure of energy, care and concern for others will have depleted your resources. These now need to be replenished with some self care, family care and rest.

Here are some examples of the experiences many people have after encountering something similar to that which you or your loved ones have been through.

We have also included a few helpful tips for you and your social support network, or family, to help you in recovering from this ordeal.

## **Some Anticipated Normal Reactions to What You Have Been Through**

### **First, the Positive**

- A new appreciation of being home
- A sense of relief that the crisis has been accomplished or survived
- Pride in the work you and your colleagues have done
- Gratitude for all the good things in your life
- A new sense of yourself after being tested during the incident's harder moments
- Satisfaction in a job well done

### **Next, the Negative (*Remember, these are **Normal Reactions***).**

- Thinking: Some preoccupation with your experience, confusion, trouble concentrating, difficulty with decisions, short attention span, short term memory loss.
- Emotional Swings: Mood swings, irritability, anxiety, guilt, overreactions, grief, worry about those you have helped.
- Physical Reactions: Trembling, rapid breathing, headaches, loss of appetite, feeling light headed.
- Behaviours: Social withdrawal, startle responses, sleep disturbance, short temper, crying, self medication.

Good or Bad, these reactions are typical and part of the **normal recovery** process. At one moment you may feel the Positive and at other moments, feel almost overwhelmed by the negative. You are simply working your way through all the experiences you have had.

We can't do that in an intense manner all the time, so we take it in doses, alternating between the two.

The good news is that it will not last forever, or even for long. In a matter of days or weeks the emotional roller coaster will level out and you'll begin to feel like the old you again.





## In the meantime, here are some things you can try to help boost a good recovery:

- Structure your time and keep busy
- Talk to people - talk is the most effective medicine
- Reach out, people do care
- Maintain as normal a schedule as possible
- Spend time with others
- Help your co-workers as much as possible by sharing feelings and finding out how they are doing
- Give yourself permission to feel rotten and share these feelings with someone you trust
- Do some things that feel good to you
- Don't make any big life changes for a while
- Do make as many daily decisions as possible which will give you a feeling of control over your life
- Get plenty of rest
- Exercise each day- it uses up the stress chemistry in your body
- Recurring thoughts, dreams or flashbacks are normal - they will decrease over time and become less disturbing
- **Remember - your reactions are normal**

## For your family...

### How you can help a loved one recover after an incident

- Sympathetic listening is important. Listen and empathise
- Spend extra time with the recovering person. There is no substitute for being there
- Offer assistance and sympathy. Re-assure your loved one that he/she is now safe. Simply hearing the words is reassuring
- Don't offer helpful suggestions or interpretations of the difficult experiences (ie. 'you are being tested'). That's not helpful
- Respect their need for privacy and private feelings as they work through their experience
- Avoid labels. People are not crazy but just having a normal reaction to an abnormal experience
- Limit consumption of any mind altering chemical (i.e alcohol)
- Encourage good wellness and lifestyle behaviours
- Allow people control over their own lives. They may be upset for a while but are not incapacitated
- Give them time to recover. It may take up to eight weeks

***Give me the serenity to accept those things I cannot change,  
the courage to change those things that I can,  
and the wisdom to know the difference.***



# Recovery after a Crisis



## Recovery Tips - A Quick List

- **Breathe Deeply** You can do this anywhere. Concentrate on one part of your body. Imagine yourself slowly breathing in relaxation and breathing out tension. Do it from head to toe!
- **Stretch** This will loosen up some muscle tension and untie the knots.
- **Take time** It takes time to recover. Give yourself time. Read, go for a drive or a walk. Keep silence everyday for 30 minutes.
- **Eat well and avoid drugs and alcohol** Limiting caffeine will help reduce stress and anxiety. Limiting alcohol will help reduce depression. Avoid eating foods with high sugar or fat contents. Stay hydrated.
- **Exercise** It should be the fun kind, and challenging. It helps take your mind off your problems and produces pleasure endorphins in your brain.
- **Laugh, Cry, Scream** Let out your emotions. Holding them in will only cause greater and more harmful stress in the long run.
- **Play** Do something you love. Watching a movie, doing some gardening or being with friends will relax you and help keep you focused.

If after six weeks you feel you are still having difficulty, contact your union or ALPA or seek professional help.  
Some of this material is drawn from Los Angeles County, CA - Red Cross documents.

**Try this checklist as you are today and then repeat every week. Observe the decline in frequency of these symptoms, over time, as you recover.**

### A Checklist of Stress Symptoms

I experience these...	Seldom	Sometimes	Often
1. Headaches			
2. Irregular heart beat			
3. Gastrointestinal problems			
4. Vertigo (Dizziness)			
5. High Blood Pressure			
6. Fatigue			
7. Difficulty concentrating			
8. Feeling overwhelmed			
9. Anger, irritability			
10. Difficulty falling or staying asleep			
11. Sadness or depression			
12. Increased appetite			
13. Decreased appetite			
14. Rashes or hives (skin irritation)			
15. Feelings of helpless/hopelessness			
16. Apathy (low passion, enthusiasm)			
17. Increased use of alcohol, tobacco, caffeine			
18. Cynicism, negativism			

**Some people may not feel much or even any of the above. Don't feel guilty - it means your recovery is already well underway!**

