

CRITICAL INCIDENT INFORMATION FOR SIGNIFICANT OTHERS

Your loved one has been involved in a highly challenging event, sometimes known as a critical incident. He/she may be in the process of adjusting to this event. Listed below are some hints, which may prove helpful over the next few days or weeks.

- Exposure to an extremely challenging event may produce changes in your loved one's behavior and his/her physical, cognitive, and emotional functioning. These changes are common and signal that he/she is beginning the process of adjusting to an event that may have been temporarily overwhelming.
- All parts of our lives overlap and influence each other: personal, professional, past, present, etc. The impact of a critical incident may be mitigated by those who love us the most, so don't underestimate your importance in your loved one's recovery.
- Be ready to "listen" and reassure when your loved one is ready to talk. Talking is the best medicine. Do NOT pressure your loved one to talk.
- Remember that if an event is upsetting to you and your loved one, your children may be upset as well. Encourage them to talk, too.
- You may not understand what your loved one is going through, but offer your love and support. Ask what you can do to help.
- To be an effective source of support, you must receive support as well. Alert your friends that you may need some extra TLC in the coming days.
- Life will go on and it will return to normal. Normal may be different; different is not necessarily bad. Many people find that their lives and relationships take on renewed value following a critical incident.
- Three basic kinds of support are important to most of us as we deal with the challenges of a critical incident. Each type of support focuses on a different area of adjustment and each comes from different people or networks:

Emotional support comes from those we care about and love the most. Family members, close friends, and other personally significant people are our main sources of emotional support. Take care of each other as you work your way through this time of adjustment.

Appraisal support is important as we each ask ourselves how we are doing, what we expect of ourselves and others, and what we seek in the challenges we are addressing. Look for and listen to those who have experienced similar losses and have begun to heal. They can be powerful models of healthy response and, most importantly, hope. You may also be a model for others.

Instrumental support is assistance with the concrete needs involved in recovery. Help with food and child care are examples of instrumental support, but so are things like information and opportunities to interact with those who give us emotional and appraisal support.

- If you or your loved one is experiencing a particularly difficult time, consider seeking further assistance. Your Employee Assistance Program (EAP) stands ready and willing to assist you.

THINGS TO REMEMBER

- There is no such thing as a "normal" reaction to an overwhelming event. Expect a wide range of reactions in yourself and in others.
- You'll get by with a little help from your friends and family. Talking about your reactions with people you care about and who care about you can help you and them through this difficult time. Reach out your hand to others along the way as well.
- Exercise is helpful for your body and your emotional state.
- Try to maintain your routine schedule, but don't force it. Don't be alarmed if your body won't cooperate. Your appetite and sleep habits may be off kilter for a bit as you begin the process of adjusting to the event. Caffeine and alcohol tend only to intensify your reactions.
- Distressing things like dreams and flashbacks are part of the process of readjustment. Although unpleasant, they help us to come to grips with what has happened. They will fade over time.
- When it's all said and done, emerging with strength and focus from a challenging experience is all about our values...what we hold most dear: service, commitment, courage, family...Hold tight to these in the days and weeks to come as they will help steady you in the midst of the turmoil of readjustment.
- Give yourself permission to ask for help from your family, your friends, your co-workers, your supervisor, the Employee Assistance Program (EAP). Seeking help is a sign of strength and resilience.
- Recovery from an overwhelming incident doesn't happen all at once. It is a process, not an event. Some moments will be much better than others, but most people find that in time they emerge stronger, ready to face the next challenge.
