

# **Guide to Critical Incident Stress Management for Supervisors and Managers**



FASAP serves employees of the Johns Hopkins University, Johns Hopkins Medicine, and Community Physicians. Faculty, staff, employees, and their dependents and significant others are eligible for services, without charge. For more information or to schedule an appointment with a FASAP clinician, please call 443-997-7000.

## **Supervisor/Manager Guide to Helping Employees Immediately After a Critical Incident**

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### **What to Provide Employees**

Remove all employees from the trauma scene and move to a safe areas as soon as feasible.

Provide employees with necessities such as water, tissues, food, etc.

### **What Behaviors You May Observe**

Employees may be in a state of shock.

Employees may be crying and perhaps unable to stop.

Feelings of anger and frustration.

Employees may withdraw and isolate.

### **How to Support Employees**

Be willing to say nothing. Just being there is often the most supportive thing you can do to help.

Be aware that employees will be having mixed emotions. These are normal reactions to the critical incident.

Allow all employees to express any reactions to the critical incident.

Answer any questions employees may have.

### **Suggestions for What to Avoid**

Avoid statements like, "I know how you feel" or "Everything will be all right." These statements make some people think their feelings are not understood.

Do not attempt to explain why the incident happened. Your explanation may not be believed and may negatively impact your relationship with the employee.

### **Information for Employees**

Avoid any alcohol or caffeine; rest; relax with breathing exercises; increase support from family and loved ones; drink plenty of water.

Give FASAP's phone number (443-997-7000) for those employees who feel they need to speak with a counselor.

Post FASAP's phone number (443-997-7000) in a place where all employees can see it.

## Common Responses to Traumatic Events

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Although trauma affects people differently, there are some common reactions that you may experience. These signs and symptoms may begin immediately, or you may feel fine for a couple for days or even weeks, and then suddenly be hit with a reaction. The important thing to remember is that these reactions are quite normal. Although it may feel abnormal, it is very normal for people to experience emotional “aftershocks” following a traumatic event. Some common responses to traumatic events are:

### Physical Reactions

Insomnia  
Fatigue, hyperactivity or “nervous energy”  
Pain in the neck of back  
Headaches  
Heart palpitations or pains in the chest  
Dizzy spells  
Appetite changes

### Emotional Reactions

Flashbacks or “reliving” the event  
Excessive jumpiness or tendency to be startled  
Irritability  
Anger  
Feelings of anxiety or helplessness  
Feeling vulnerable

### **Effect on Productivity:**

Inability to concentrate	Increase in absenteeism
Increased incidence of errors	Tendency to overwork
Lapses of memory	

Usually, the signs and symptoms of trauma will lessen with time. If you are concerned about your reaction, note the specific symptoms that worry you. For each symptom, note the:

- Duration - Normally, traumatic reactions will grow less intense and disappear within a few weeks.
- Intensity - If the reaction interferes with your ability to carry on your life normally, you may want to seek help.

**FASAP is a confidential, voluntary, short-term counseling service that is provided to you by The Johns Hopkins Institutions. It is a benefit provided for your overall well being. If you are concerned that your trauma response is too intense, or is lasting too long, please seek counseling. FASAP is available to you, your family members, and your co-workers at no cost. For confidential help, contact FASAP at 443-997-7000.**

## After a Critical Incident

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### Things for you to include:

- Physical exercise alternated with relaxation may help with some of the physical reactions. Consult your doctor if they persist.
- You are normal and having normal reactions - don't label yourself as abnormal.
- Talk to people; talk is the most healing medicine.
- Spend time with others. Resist the tendency to isolate.
- Help your co-workers as much as possible by sharing feelings and checking out how they are doing.
- Give yourself permission to feel rotten and share your feelings with others.
- Keep a journal; write your way through sleepless times.
- DON'T make major life changes.
- DO make as many daily decisions as possible, which will give you a feeling of control over your life.
- Get plenty of rest and eat regular meals, even if you don't feel like it.
- Recurring thoughts, dreams or flashbacks are normal. Don't try to fight them. They will decrease over time and become less painful.

### Things for family and friends to try include:

- Offering your assistance and a listening ear even if you haven't been asked for help.
- Don't take stress reactions experienced by others (anger, irritability) personally. Spend time with each other. Keep talking about what happened.

**For confidential help, contact FASAP at 443-997-7000**

## **Suggested Management Responses after the Critical Incident**

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A supervisor should be well aware and understanding of the normal reactions to trauma and stress.

The supervisor should be alert to deteriorating behavioral changes, and should be aware of available sources for counseling via FASAP (443-997-7000).

The supervisor may choose to be temporarily tolerant of reduced performance or increased time-off, but he or she must use such tolerance carefully and not create resentment in other employees.

Although some employees may need time off to work through their problems, productive work is historically a "healer" of emotional damage.

The supervisor can reduce the effect troubled employees have on others by structuring some time for "talking it out" via a defusing or debriefing from FASAP, eliminating the need some have to "dump" their troubles on other employees.

Productivity is still the supervisor's key responsibility. Employees need to know the company expects the employee to continue to function, and to regain acceptable performance levels.

The supervisor should respectfully confront employees with unacceptable work behavior, regardless of the cause.

The supervisor should report all threats of violence to the authorities.

The normal steps of good management govern such confrontations, even if trauma related.

It may be difficult for managers to determine how long an individual will need to recover from a traumatic event. However, your job is still to manage outcomes and productivity.

**If you find yourself struggling with an employee weeks to months after a workplace crisis, please call for consultation from the Faculty and Staff Assistance Program. FASAP has specially trained consultants who work with managers and human resources staff on these and many other employee issues. Services are available, 24 hours, 7 days a week by calling 443-997-7000.**

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