



Employee Assistance Program



## Critical Incidents

The Employee Assistance Program (EAP) helps employees and their families deal with problems that can affect relationships, their careers and their personal lives. This includes providing assistance to employees who have been involved in a critical incident.

### What Is a Critical Incident?

Some examples of critical incidents include assaults on employees, hostage-takings, the suicide or murder of a co-worker, accidents causing bodily harm or death, as well as airplane crashes or natural disasters including floods, fires and tornadoes.

A situation can be considered a critical incident when people feel a lack of control, have a shock reaction to the event, and are left feeling very vulnerable.

### Impact on the Employee and the Workplace

#### Short-term:

People often respond to a crisis with shock, disbelief, denial and confusion. Research has shown that when distress is not acknowledged, people frequently question their feelings and reactions. A decline in workplace morale is a common response to unacknowledged reactions.

#### Long-term:

Failure to explore our reactions to an incident can lead to physical symptoms or emotional problems which develop later. Sleep disturbance, mood swings, irritability, anxiety attacks, increased drinking, declining job performance and absenteeism are common examples of the long-term difficulties which appear. People who have also experienced a recent personal crisis are more vulnerable to developing symptoms.

### How EAP can help

#### Debriefing Sessions:

“Debriefing” meetings, facilitated by EAP, can help employees deal with the effects of the critical incident and understand how it may affect them individually or as a group.

Research has shown when given an opportunity to debrief, people are less likely to develop symptoms.

#### Consultation:

EAP is available to assess whether a debriefing is appropriate to various situations that occur in the workplace. A consultation helps meet some of the organizational requirements of debriefing meetings, taking into consideration the type of incident that has occurred, the numbers of employees involved, when and where the debriefing should be held and who will assist in organizing the meeting in the workplace.

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