

Helping yourself through critical incidents

It is not uncommon to experience physical and or emotional reactions after being involved in a critical incident. Responses can vary between individuals but it is important to remember that these reactions are normal. They are our mind and body coming to terms with the event. Some of these reactions may include and impact:

Mood or feelings

Shock, fear, sad, anger, numb, overwhelmed

Behaviour

Hypervigilant, increased substance use, avoiding reminders of the event, irritability

Physical

Racing heart, appetite changes, sleep problems, tension, easily startled

Thoughts

Frequent thoughts or images about the event, attempts to shut out painful memories, difficulty making decisions

Steps to help you through

There are small things that you can do before, during the incident, and after the incident to help you cope better. This does not mean that you will not experience a reaction, but that you are equipped to deal with these reactions.

| PREVENT | PREPARE | RESPOND | RECOVER |
|---|--|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Limit your exposure to incidents as much as practical – for example: length of time, proximity. Know your self-care strategies and be intentional about building these into your regular routine. Maintain a healthy lifestyle – diet, exercise, social interactions. Have your local PSO meet your crew so you are familiar with how to access support. Familiarise yourself with the resources and the FESSN support options available. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Focus on the tasks that you can control – such as actions that can make the incident safe. Be aware of your physiological arousal levels – take a deep breath. Intentionally slow your thoughts down. Focus on your physical surroundings and the steps that you need to take. Be conscious of your thinking – for example: ‘I have been through difficult situations in the past and managed. I will be okay.’ Mentally prepare yourself on route for the incident and tasks required. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Make space and time to check in with yourself and others. Spend time with people you care about. Try not to increase the use of alcohol, sugar and stimulants such as caffeine. Try to return to your regular daily routine as soon as you feel able to. Recognise that you have been through a stressful event and give yourself permission to experience reactions even if they are uncomfortable. Look after yourself by getting rest, eating well and spending time on your self-care by doing things you enjoy. Request Peer Support services. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reach out for extra assistance if you notice lasting or uncomfortable changes in: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the way you feel your view of your work and colleagues your alcohol or substance usage your ability to manage interpersonal relationships your drive to do the things you used to enjoy your work performance – for example: increasingly late or absent, feeling pressured, avoiding workmates, avoiding particular tasks Take action to participate in the activities you know help you recover even if you don't feel like it at the time. |

If you would like further advice or guidance to navigate a complex situation or event, please contact:

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 Level 1, Block B
 125 Kedron Park Road
 Kedron QLD 4031
 Phone: 1300 309 508
 Email: FESSN@qfes.qld.gov.au



FESSN
 Fire & Emergency Services
 Support Network

FESSN offers a range of free, confidential counselling services to QFES personnel. For further information on how FESSN may assist you, please contact:

- your local Peer Support Officer or
- FESSN on 1300 309 508 or visit: www.qfes.qld.gov.au/fessn

For confidential 24-hour telephone counselling Free Call 1800 805 980*
 *This service is pager operated. Please leave your name and preferred contact details – a FESSN Counsellor will return your call as soon as possible.

