

## For Leaders: supporting others through critical incidents

As a leader you have a duty of care to help keep your team members physically and psychologically safe.

Supporting teams through critical incidents involves preventing unnecessary exposure where possible, preparing your team, responding supportively and remaining engaged if your team member is struggling.

While trauma isn't caused by leadership, the facts are that your leadership and support may be the most significant factors in preventing mental health challenges when operational exposure is high.

Here are the actions you can take to Prevent, Prepare, Respond and support Recovery. If you would like further advice or guidance to navigate a complex situation or event, please contact:

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**FESSN**  
Fire & Emergency Services  
Support Network

### PREVENT

Minimise or limit the amount of exposure where possible to traumatic scenes. This can include the proximity or duration of time spent exposed to trauma. Work on building trusting relationships with your team before critical incidents, then rely on them after the event to provide better quality support.

- Invest time in building trusting relationships with your team.
- Have regular conversations about wellbeing (not related to a critical incident).
- Put wellbeing as a standing agenda item on meetings.

*“If you don't need to be at the forefront of the scene right now make sure you minimise your exposure where possible.”*

*“How are things going with you in general? How are you travelling?”*

### PREPARE

Be aware of the types of incidents that your team have been exposed to – for example, if a person in your team has experienced three jobs that meet the mandatory reporting criteria in a one-month period then they really should have a check-in (even if they seem fine).

- Familiarise yourself with how and when to activate support for your team.
- Talk openly about operational resilience and self-care.
- Role model prioritising physical and emotional resilience.
- Take into account events or challenges that your team are facing that may impact on their resilience.
- Be aware of the early warning signs of distress and act early.

*“It can be challenging when you have got a lot going on outside of work to also be faced with critical incidents. Let me know how I can best support you.”*

*“Did you know about the support options available?”*

*“We need to put time and effort into building our resilience so that we are at our best when we face challenges in our job.”*

### RESPOND

Recognise that members have been through a stressful event. Make contact with members involved in an incident regardless of PSO activation (PSO contact does not replace leader conversations). Don't make assumptions based purely on the nature of the incident but rather focus on the impact on the individual.

- Let the team know it is okay to experience a reaction after an event.
- Focus initially on the immediate practical needs (Safety, Calm, Hope, Connection, Self-efficacy).
- Remain calm yourself and listen to the individual needs of your team members.
- Encourage team members to connect with family, friends, colleagues when they are ready to do so.
- Engage FESSN support for those identified as requiring support.

*“That was a tough job yesterday ... I am just checking to see how things are going?”*

*“It's not unusual to have a reaction after these sorts of events so let's focus on what is going to help you right now.”*

*“What is important for you now? What can I do to assist?”*

### RECOVER

Continue to check in on members' wellbeing.  
Encourage early access to escalated support options if required.  
If you feel comfortable, share your own experience of recovery after critical incidents and how you look after yourself.

- Let team members know that you want to best support them to recover.
- Ask what is needed from the workplace to best support their recovery.
- Maintain regular open conversations about how they are travelling.

*“You don't seem yourself. It would be good to take the first step and reach out for some more support. I will catch up with you in a couple of days to see how you are going and if you need anything.”*

*“I know it is coming up to a year from when that critical incident happened and I just wanted to see how you are going.”*

*“I can show you what is available to QFES members.”*