Critical incidents are unexpected, unusual events perceived by an individual as threatening or traumatic. They are often sudden, outside our normal frame of reference and a challenge to our ability to cope. If you experience a critical incident, you can have a wide range of reactions. It is important to remember:

- Your reaction is your reaction
- You might react differently to different situations at different times
- There is no right way to react

### Common reactions

**Emotional**
- Disbelief
- Anger or irritability
- Grief/sadness
- Fear
- Numbness
- Feelings of helplessness
- Guilt and/or feelings of shame
- Anxiety
- Yearning
- Loneliness

**Cognitive**
- Difficulty concentrating or loss of focus
- Intrusive flashbacks, memories of event
- Decreased trust
- Memory challenges
- Searching for blame or responsibility
- Ruminating on choices made
- Taking responsibility for things that weren’t known or within one’s control
- Searching for meaning

**Physical**
- Fatigue
- Physical Exhaustion
- Lack of energy
- Changes to appetite or weight
- Changes in sleep patterns
- Digestive upset
- Feeling dizzy or lightheaded
- Headache
- Heart palpitations
- Aches and pains

**Behavioral**
- Social withdrawal or isolation
- Dreams or nightmares
- Seeking closeness with loved ones
- Returning to old coping patterns
- Pacing/body agitation or restlessness
- Seeking people to talk to about the experience

**Spiritual**
- Seeking meaning of life and purpose
- Spiritual confusion and possibly estrangement
- Strengthened or renewed spirituality
- Feeling abandoned by spiritual connection

### Additional supports are needed when:
- Your reactions are feeling particularly strong and persisting over time
- Your reactions are increasing in intensity, rather than decreasing over time
- You feel out of control, or your activities of daily living are being negatively affected
- Your own coping and support resources aren’t helping you to find a resolution

### What you can do to help others:
- Listen with an open mind, acknowledge their thoughts and feelings
- Accept that they may need time and space
- Offer to lend a hand with everyday tasks
- Point out there are resources and supports available to help
- Respect their privacy, and only reach out on their behalf with their consent, or if you are concerned about imminent safety

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**Finding emotional and physical safety is important. Seek help early.**
On-campus resources

**Staff Wellness**
Staff Wellness leads a number of programs, resources and services, to help promote, support, and sustain the health and wellness of faculty, staff and post-doctoral scholars.
403.220.2918 | staffwellness@ucalgary.ca | ucalgary.ca/staffwellness

**Campus Security**
For all imminent life-threatening situations, call 911. For all other safety and security concerns, call Campus Security.
403.220.5333 | ucalgary.ca/security

**Sexual Violence Support Advocate**
The Sexual Violence Support Advocate offers confidential support and information regarding sexual violence to all members of the university community.
403.220.2208 | ucalgary.ca/sexualviolencesupport

**Office of Diversity, Equity and Protected Disclosure**
The Protected Disclosure serves as a confidential resource for individuals seeking information and advice on sensitive and diverse matters.
403.220.4086 | ucalgary.ca/odepd

**Student Wellness Services**
Faculty and staff can contact Student Wellness Services for information about assisting students or visit for walk-in medical appointments, chiropractic treatments, massage therapy and nutrition services.
403.210.9355 | ucalgary.ca/wellnesscentre

Off-campus resources

**Employee and Family Assistance Plan (LifeWorks)**
LifeWorks provides in-person, online, telephone, and email support at no cost to faculty and staff.
1.800.663.1142 | ucalgary.ca/hr/efap

**211 Alberta**
211 Alberta connects users to the right community and social services.
Dial 211 | ab.211.ca

**Access Mental Health**
Access Mental Health provides information, telephone consultation and referral over the phone to help you understand and connect with helpful supports.
403.943.1500 | 1.844.943.1500

**Distress Centre Calgary**
Connect to professional counsellors at the Distress Centre Calgary through their 24-hour crisis line, email, or online chat. Face-to-face counselling is also available.
403.266.HELP (4357) | distresscentre.com

Reference:
Crisis & Trauma Resource Institute. (2016). Critical Incident Group Debriefing: Common Reactions after a Critical Incident. ctrinstitute.com
Student Wellness Services. Understanding Grief: SU Wellness Centre. University of Calgary