

# Taking Care of Yourself Following a Critical Incident

In the aftermath of a critical incident, it's essential to prioritise your wellbeing. This booklet provides valuable information and strategies for self-care following such events. Understanding normal reactions and recognising vicarious trauma is crucial for your recovery and resilience.

## What is a critical incident

A critical incident is an unforeseen and potentially traumatic event that requires immediate attention and response. These incidents encompass natural disasters, accidents, violence, or other high-stress situations that impact individuals directly or indirectly.



## Normal reactions

It's important to acknowledge that reactions to critical incidents vary widely among individuals. No one involved in a critical incident remains untouched by it. Profound sadness, grief, and anger are normal responses to an abnormal event. These reactions may occur during or soon after the incident, or they can be delayed for a few weeks. Common responses include:



### Physical reactions

- Increased heart rate
- Shaking or trembling
- Difficulty breathing
- Fatigue



### Emotional reactions

- Shock
- Fear
- Anxiety
- Sadness
- Anger



### Cognitive reactions

- Confusion
- Difficulty concentrating
- Intrusive thoughts or memories

## Self-care strategies

Taking care of yourself is paramount in the aftermath of a critical incident. Here are some strategies to support your wellbeing:



### Prioritise physical health

Ensure adequate rest, nutrition, and hydration.

Engage in regular exercise to alleviate stress and promote overall wellbeing.



### Emotional wellbeing

Allow yourself to express and process emotions.

Seek support from friends, family, or mental health professionals.



### Establish routine

Create a daily routine to provide stability and structure.



### Limit exposure to triggers

Identify and minimise exposure to triggers that may exacerbate distress.

## Vicarious trauma

Vicarious trauma refers to the emotional and psychological impact of indirectly experiencing a traumatic event through the experiences of others. This phenomenon can affect individuals involved in responding to critical incidents, such as first responders, healthcare professionals, or support personnel.

## How to recognize vicarious trauma



### Emotional exhaustion

Feeling drained, emotionally overwhelmed, or constantly fatigued.



### Nightmares and intrusive thoughts

Experiencing disturbing dreams or recurring thoughts about the incident.



### Changes in mood

Unexplained changes in mood, irritability, or heightened emotional sensitivity.



Seek support:  
Medical School  
Student Support

*Taking care of yourself following a critical incident is not only essential but also a responsible step toward recovery. By understanding normal reactions, recognising vicarious trauma, and implementing self-care strategies, you can foster resilience and promote your overall wellbeing. Remember, seeking help is a sign of strength, not weakness.*



## Seeking professional support

If you find it challenging to cope with the aftermath of a critical incident, seeking professional support is a crucial step in your recovery. Reach out to mental health professionals, counsellors, or employee assistance programs for guidance and assistance.



### Professional support for staff

Seek support from mental health professionals or Employee Assistance Program (EAP).

Establish a network for sharing experiences and coping strategies with colleagues.



### Support options for MD students

Book an appointment with UQ Counsellors or try some of the resources specifically designed for MD students.



### MD resources and fact sheets

Read our 20+ strategies to help you cope with anxiety, manage difficult feedback, stay motivated, strengthen your confidence and more!



### Self-help resources

Learn self-help strategies to help improve your mental health, personal relationships and physical health.



### UQ Counselling and wellbeing

UQ offers a range of counselling services to suit your needs including individual support, tailored wellbeing program and e-mental health.



### Consider further support to assist you in your studies

Consider exam adjustments, extensions for assignments, occasional absences to attend medical appointments and any other that may be relevant to support you during rotations.



### Phone

Doctor's Health Advisory Service 24/7  
Helpline for doctors and medical students: **07 3833 4352\***



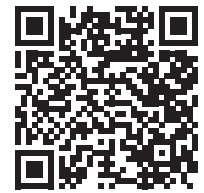
\* To get a Student Access Plan (SAP) and exam adjustments, you will need to make an appointment with a Student Adviser.

## External Supports



### [Beyond Blue](#)

Provides Australians with information and support to improve their mental health. Call 1300 22 46 36 or visit [beyondblue.org.au](http://beyondblue.org.au) for more information.



### [Lifeline Australia](#)

Provides Australians experiencing a personal crisis with access to 24-hour crisis support. Call 13 11 14 or visit [lifeline.org.au](http://lifeline.org.au) for more information.



### [GriefLine](#)

Listens, cares and supports people experiencing loss and grief, at any stage in life. Call 1300 845... 8am to 8pm AEST, weekdays.



### [MensLine Australia](#)

Is a professional telephone and online support and information service for Australian men. Call 1300 78 99 78, 24 hours / 7 days a week.



### [Kids Helpline](#)

Is a free 24/7, confidential and private counselling service Australia wide specifically for children and young people aged 5 to 25 years. Call 1800 55 1800.

