

Being a member of the Surf Life Saving movement by its very nature may mean that at some stage you might be involved in a critical incident.

**In Surf Lifesaving these incidents may take the form of:**

**Rescues, drowning, abuse, aggressive behaviour, violation of safety rules, needle stick injuries, stings, heart attacks, fin chops or asthma attacks and other serious events.**

Not all people will experience a stress reaction to a critical incident. Keeping in mind the uniqueness of each individual person there are some common reactions to trauma. The purpose of this brochure is to provide education about signs and symptoms of stress/trauma and what might be done to help.

Sometimes the stress reactions may be experienced immediately after the event, sometimes it may take weeks before any reaction appears, if any at all. Reactions are uncomfortable but are an important part of recovering and getting on with life. Symptoms will usually reduce over a 4 to 6 week period.

Should the critical incident bring up any past issues for you emotionally then do seek professional assistance from a GP or a Mental Health professional as well as your Peer Support person who may assist you with a referral.

## Physical

- ▲ Headaches
- ▲ Tiredness
- ▲ Vomiting/shakiness
- ▲ Increased heart rate
- ▲ Shock
- ▲ Difficulty breathing
- ▲ Appetite changes

## Thoughts

- ▲ Concentration difficulties
- ▲ Confusion
- ▲ Nightmares
- ▲ Hyper vigilance
- ▲ Intrusive images of the incident
- ▲ Intrusive thoughts of the incident
- ▲ Difficulties making decisions
- ▲ Problem solving ability reduced
- ▲ Increased or decreased awareness of surroundings
- ▲ Memories of previous events
- ▲ Self-blame

## Emotions Feelings

- ▲ Fear
- ▲ Guilt
- ▲ Grief
- ▲ Anxiety
- ▲ Denial
- ▲ Numbness
- ▲ Anger
- ▲ Depression
- ▲ Agitation
- ▲ Feeling Abandoned
- ▲ Sadness
- ▲ Frequent mood swings
- ▲ Feelings of isolation

## Behaviour

- ▲ Withdrawal from others
- ▲ Avoidance and fear of the situations that may remind you of the incident
- ▲ Emotional outbursts
- ▲ Decline in work performance
- ▲ Sleep disturbance
- ▲ Change in social activity
- ▲ Changes in usual communication style
- ▲ Increased use of alcohol, caffeine or other stimulants

## It may help to:

- ▲ Alternate periods of appropriate physical exercise with relaxation during the first 24-48 hours
- ▲ Structure your time - keep busy
- ▲ “Do” allow yourself to have feelings
- ▲ “Do” make as many routine, daily decisions as possible which will give you a feeling of control over your life
- ▲ “Don’t” adopt an “I’m a man” or “I’m tough” attitude - this will not help you in the long term
- ▲ “Don’t” make any big life changes or decisions.
- ▲ Take care not to increase your normal intake of alcohol, caffeine or other stimulants - try to cut down for a few days - increased amounts of the above will only delay the healing process
- ▲ Maintain as normal a schedule as possible
- ▲ It’s ok to not want to return to Patrol or the beach for a while. Just talk to your Patrol or Club Captain or your Peer support person about it. Rosters can be changed!
- ▲ Talk to other Lifesavers and check out how they are doing but don’t compare yourself to them, this can lead to judging your reaction as wrong
- ▲ If you are having difficulty sleeping - get out of bed, make a hot drink, do some writing, watch television, don’t just toss and turn for hours
- ▲ Eat well balanced meals even if you don’t feel like it
- ▲ Talk about what is happening to you
- ▲ Seek further assistance from your Peer Support person, GP or other health/ mental health professional

## For Families and Friends:

- ▲ Be available to listen if the person wants to talk, encourage but don’t pressure them
- ▲ Reassure them that their reactions will usually subside over time. Try not to take emotional outbursts personally
- ▲ Ask them if they need any assistance with everyday tasks
- ▲ Give them private time, avoid saying things like “lucky it wasn’t worse” and avoid telling stories about other incidents. Instead tell them that you are sorry that such an event occurred and you want understand and to assist them
- ▲ Don’t be afraid to ask what you can do that would be helpful.
- ▲ Try to be patient and offer caring support.

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**If your symptoms have not begun to subside after 1-2 weeks contact your Branch Peer Support Person who will assist you in finding appropriate counselling and support. Chaplains can be arranged as part of the Support process**

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*The following referral agencies may be helpful for 24 hour emergency support.*

*They are all answered by trained professionals and Counsellors.*

**Beyond Blue 1300224636**  
**Kids Help Line 1800 551800**  
**Lifeline 13 1114**

**Keep in mind, a stress reaction may not occur until weeks after the event - if at all.**

**Remember all people manage a reaction differently - all is ok!**



Surf Life Saving

# CISM

## Critical Incident Stress Management

# TIPS

## Traumatic Incident Peer Support

**“Critical incidents are unusually challenging events that have the potential to create significant human distress and can overwhelm one’s usual coping mechanisms” ICISF**

Your Peer Support contact person is:

Contact No:

**For more information call SLSSNB 02 9913 8066**  
[www.surflifesaving.net.au/](http://www.surflifesaving.net.au/)