

Dealing with Traumatic Events

Over the next few weeks, you may experience a number of reactions to the current traumatic event (called a critical incident). It is very common, in fact quite *normal*, for people to experience stress reactions when they are impacted by a critical incident. Sometimes the stress reactions occur immediately after the traumatic event, but more commonly, the stress reactions will appear a few hours or a few days later. Following is a list of typical reactions to stressful events and situations.

Physical Reactions

Fatigue/exhaustion
Sleep disturbance
Underactivity/overactivity
Change in appetite
Elevated blood pressure
Muscle tension
Headaches
Thirst

Cognitive Reactions

Confusion
Difficulty concentrating
Intrusive images
Difficulty making decisions
Memory disturbance
Preoccupation with the event
Lowered attention span
Hypervigilance

Emotional Reactions

Anxiety and fear
Depression
Grief
Guilt
Feelings of helplessness
Agitation
Anger and blaming
Tearfulness

*Any of these symptoms may indicate the need for medical and/or psychological assistance. If the above symptoms are overwhelming or persist for several weeks, we strongly recommend that you consult with a medical or mental health professional. UNLV students can receive assistance from Student Counseling & Psychological Services at 895-3627 or the Student Health Center at 895-3370. Faculty and staff can contact our employee assistance program, Behavioral Healthcare Options, at 364-1484.

Again, these are *normal reactions* by *normal people* to *abnormal events*. Although painful, they are part of the recovery process. While there is little anyone can do to take away these uncomfortable feelings, there are several things you can do to speed up the recovery process.

Things to try:

1. Within the first 24 to 48 hours, periods of appropriate physical exercise alternated with relaxation will generally alleviate some of the physical reactions.
2. Structure your time. Keep busy and keep your life as normal as possible.
3. Don't berate yourself for having these reactions. After all, they are signs of your humanity.
4. Talk to people about your feelings and reactions – talking has a powerful healing effect.
5. Be aware of and avoid attempts to numb your emotional pain with drugs or alcohol.
6. Help your friends and colleagues by sharing your feelings and asking how they are doing.
7. Don't make any big life changes – wait a month and see if it still seems wise.
8. Eat well-balanced and regular meals.
9. Keep a journal. Write your way through those sleepless hours.
10. **Contact the UNLV Critical Incident Response Team for assistance**

What is the UNLV Critical Incident Response Team?

The Critical Incident Response Team (CIRT) was formed to support the most important resource we have at UNLV – our human resource. The CIRT provides assistance to UNLV students, staff and faculty who may be impacted by traumas or critical incidents. The team's primary goal is to facilitate the restoration of emotional equilibrium in normal individuals affected by abnormal events.

What is a critical incident?

A critical incident is any traumatic event that has sufficient emotional power to overwhelm a person's usual ability to cope effectively. Examples include:

- the death or injury of a student or faculty member
- acts of crime, violence, or terrorism
- natural disasters
- close calls

What does the UNLV CIRT do?

Members of the UNLV CIRT provide a variety of services to the campus community based on the unique needs of individuals and groups. With this perspective in mind, CIRT offers the following to the campus community:

- Educational presentations about recognizing & managing reactions to critical incident stress
- Training for community members interested in joining the UNLV CIRT
- Confidential structured group discussions about the critical incident, how individuals were affected, and how individuals can help manage their reactions, as well as, support each other
- Confidential one-on-one consultations about the critical incident, how an individual was affected, and how they can help manage their reactions
- Refer those needing greater assistance to the next level of care

The CIRT also provides special services to help traumatized students manage their education at UNLV. Services include:

- Notification of professors.
- Assistance in contacting and informing roommates and/or work.
- Assistance in arranging an incomplete or withdrawal from school.
- Assistance in meeting family needs when they visit campus

Who Can Call the CIRT?

Anyone familiar with the needs of UNLV students, staff or faculty may initiate a request for intervention. There are no fees for this service. If you are unsure if an incident is appropriate for CIRT services, please call for a consultation at any time.

How Do I Contact the CIRT?

A request for assistance may be made by contacting Dr. Jamie Davidson at 895-3627. Be prepared to discuss what happened, to whom, and how this individual or group is responding. Dr. Davidson will work with you to determine the most appropriate assistance (educational information, group discussion, referral, etc.) based on the situational factors. **Note:** It is important to understand that participation is voluntary, the services provided by the CIRT are not psychotherapy nor are they intended to replace psychotherapy, and the interventions are most effective when provided 2 to 14 days following a critical incident.