



Faculty & Employee  
**ASSISTANCE  
PROGRAM**

Trauma Informed

# CRITICAL INCIDENT RESPONSE

Guidance for Leaders and Managers

Developed by FEAP



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# Critical Incident Response

**Critical incident:** Any event that has the power to overwhelm our usual effective coping mechanisms.

The organizational system and individual employees are affected. Impact may extend outside of the workplace to communities and families.

## RESPONDING TO CRITICAL INCIDENTS

### The Role Leaders & Managers Play:

The way organizations support people during and following traumatic incidents is uniquely powerful, and the implications are long-lasting. Employees look to leaders for guidance, information, direction, and support. Leaders restore a sense of order, control, and safety, setting the trajectory for resilience and recovery.



FEAP recommends these actions for leaders to help make their employees feel safe and supported after a critical incident: provide safety and stabilization measures; provide organized, clear and consistent communications and support resources; stay present and engaged.

### STAGE ONE: SAFETY & STABILIZATION

*Immediately following event*

Leader & Manager Action:

- Clarify what happened and who was involved. How has safety been restored? What is the immediate impact on operations?
- Identify and address physical and emotional needs of your team members, e.g., medical and/or emotional care, an immediate break from work tasks, time to make connection with loved ones/support systems. Monitor employees by simple conversation and observation.
- Contact FEAP for consultation & include FEAP in relevant meetings.

### STAGE TWO: COMMUNICATE & SUPPORT

*Within hours of event*

Leader & Manager Action:

- Communicate with team often to update facts and clarify misperceptions, validate all emotional reactions, reinforce healthy coping strategies, and identify need for further follow up.
- Partner with FEAP to empower leadership and address team needs.
- Consult FEAP's trauma-informed experts who can support navigating the incident by offering recommendations and resources. FEAP will assist in assessment and in developing a plan for individualized and team support. (See section "FEAP Consultation & Assessment").

### STAGE THREE: STAY PRESENT & ENGAGED

#### *24-48 hours after event*

##### Leader & Manager Action:

Continue to be present and accessible. Check in with your team members, listen, and acknowledge what is shared so they feel genuinely heard. Acknowledgement creates connection and understanding in a time of crisis and can be as simple as saying "Thank you for telling me" or "I appreciate you sharing your feelings and concerns." Simply being present and listening is a powerful way to convey understanding and initiate early stages of healing and recovery.

- FEAP can offer guidance and support. (See section "What to Expect After an Incident").
- May utilize interventions that require planning and preparation, i.e., on-site 1:1s, resilience or bereavement groups.

#### **What Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs) Do:**

The goal of an EAP critical incident response is continued stabilization and fostering resilience.

EAP services complement organizational processes. They are designed to build upon the actions of leaders and set the stage for supportive interventions to come.

An EAP is not an emergency service. Before FEAP coordinates a response, we collaborate with leaders and managers to determine the best response. **FEAP recommendations are based on research-based standard practices, current assessment of situational needs, and stage of recovery.**

*See next page*



# FEAP Consultation & Assessment

Following stabilization of the situation, contact FEAP for consultation with our critical incident response experts. Involving FEAP early in the process allows the response to be based on assessment rather than reaction. Not fully understanding the situation can lead to further injury or delayed movement towards a resilient outcome for both employees and organizations.

A thorough assessment helps provide the appropriate assistance to those who need it. FEAP's assessments are based on expertise in crisis intervention, stress and trauma response, bereavement, and resilience as well as our experience consulting and responding in all stages of crises.

## Monday through Friday between 8 am and 5 pm:

- Call FEAP Crisis Consultant at 434-995-8305 or call FEAP office at 434-243-2643.

The expected FEAP response time to consult is within 10 minutes.

## After hours, weekends, and holidays:

- Call FEAP office at 434-243-2643.
- Your call will be answered by a behavioral health specialist. Ask them to call the FEAP on-call for consultation and response to an organizational crisis.

FEAP's expected response time to consult is within 20 minutes.



FEAP Recommends: *“Any early intervention approach should be based on accurate and current assessment of the need prior to interventions” (International Society of Traumatic Stress Studies, 2009).*

## FEAP may ask:

- What happened?
- Who was involved? How much time has elapsed?
- How was safety restored?
- What was the impact on employees and on operations?
- What actions have leaders employed? What messaging has been shared?
- What resources have been brought in?

## What to Expect After an Incident

FEAP will provide guidance and recommendations on how we can support your team in continuing to move forward. FEAP will collaborate with you to create a preliminary plan.



FEAP may recommend the below interventions, which offer the flexibility to adapt to each situation:

- **Participation in Leadership Meetings:** FEAP connects with leader(s) to assess current needs, recommend a plan for organizational and individualized support, and provide leaders with information about services and ongoing resources.
- **Participation in Briefings:** Briefings position management “out front” and in control, delivering the facts, support, and resources. FEAP is represented as a resource and may offer general guidance. FEAP’s role is to complement and further empower leadership in their position of control, provide brief education, tips, and, together with management, outline the interventions available.
- **Providing 1:1s:** Voluntary opportunities for individuals to meet with a FEAP counselor. These sessions are focused on crisis intervention, safety, resilience, and work. Meetings are typically between 5 and 20 minutes and require a confidential space.

While group meetings may be useful, these require more extensive coordination and a cooperative effort to create the time, place, and communications.

The extent of coordinating groups may conflict with operational demands and routines. Groups also risk additional exposure to trauma. Speaking about how trauma impacted an individual before they are psychologically ready can be harmful outside of a treatment setting.

## Helpful Resources

The following resources may be helpful, and can be found on the FEAP website:

- [Providing Support After Traumatic Events](#)
- [When Difficult Things Happen](#)
- [Trauma-Informed Workplaces Toolkit](#)
- [A Trauma-Informed Approach to Workforce](#)