



COPING WITH

Major Incidents

What to Expect and What to do

This PASTOR'S GUIDE SHEET was developed by Dr. Joe K. Taylor, Senior Pastor, South Reno Baptist Church, Reno, NV • jtaylor@southreno.com • Quotes and all primary sources are footnoted.

Introduction

The purpose of this handout is to help you *initially* negotiate with the major incident that has affected your life. This crisis has interrupted you as a person, a family, or a group. This major event could be a death, divorce, accident, decision, diagnosis, disaster or some other event that has caused significant disruption in your life. Let us talk about **what to expect** and **what to do** *initially* when a critical incident takes place.

What to expect

<p style="text-align: center;">Physically</p> <p>These are normal reactions to major incidents:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased heart rate, respiration, and blood pressure • Nausea, upset stomach, and diarrhea • Soreness of muscles • Fatigue • Reflux • Appetite change <p>These are reactions that need addressing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chest pains (Call 911 immediately) • Fainting/Dizziness (medical check required) • Debilitating headaches (medical check required) • Bleeding in the stool (medical check required) 	<p style="text-align: center;">Cognitively</p> <p>These are normal reactions to major incidents:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Memory problems in naming common objects • "Slowness" in thinking • Difficulty in using logic in decision making • Difficulty in problem solving/making simple calculations • Poor concentration • Limited attention span <p>These are reactions that need addressing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An extreme loss of objectivity (becoming subjective)* • Extreme mental confusion* • Loss of awareness of long periods of time* <p>* Please seek out a mental health professional, pastor or chaplain</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Emotionally</p> <p>These are normal reactions to major incidents:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sadness, grief, depression, moodiness • Apathy and diminished interests • A sense of being overwhelmed • Feeling guilty about not having done enough ("What ifs") • Reoccurring dreams and sleep disturbances • Excessive worry about the safety of others • Euphoria, feeling high, euphoric <p>These are reactions that need addressing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feeling you "can't go on"* • Anger that endangers you or others* • Extreme detachment from the world <p>* Please seek out a mental health professional, pastor or chaplain</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Behaviorally</p> <p>These are normal reactions to major incidents:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Change in sleep patterns • Decreased efficiency • Periods of crying • Change in bathroom patterns • Difficulty in communicating • Changes in appetite • Feeling of sense of "I need some space" <p>These are reactions that need addressing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased use of tobacco, alcohol, or drugs* • Extended periods of crying* • Withdrawal or "distancing" that is not healthy <p>* Please seek out a mental health professional, pastor or chaplain</p>

Spiritually

Once you have experienced a critical incident, you may experience many things "spiritually" (i.e., Anger at God, questioning God, feeling distant from God, etc.) The reality is that people will do one of two things following a crisis: (1) You may turn from God or (2) You may turn to God for strength and help. We live in a "fallen world". It will never be "Heaven on Earth"; it is never going to seem completely fair or always be "right". Tragedy does happen. It will seldom make sense—especially in a crisis. Please, make the decision to reach into your faith. "Reach for faith, not fear." God is not the author of evil. He is the one who brings "good out of bad" (Romans 8:28). Reach out to God! He is *the* Higher Power that you may need most in a crisis. Let God stand with you in this moment. Pray, read your Bible, ask others to pray for you or find a good, relevant spiritual resource. *Make the needed decision to reach out to God in this stressful time!*

What to do *initially*

1. **You need to talk it out.** The most important thing you can do in the *initial* stages following a crisis is “talk it out”. Do not isolate yourself from family, co-workers, friends or helpers.
2. You need to **eat, exercise, drink plenty of water** and reduce caffeine, fat and sugar.
3. **Do not use alcohol, illegal drugs or misuse prescription drugs to cope with a crisis**—it only leads to more pain.
4. **Give yourself permission to hurt.** Expect the incident to bother you.
5. **Give yourself time to heal**—do not set unrealistic expectations for recovery.
6. **Reduce your schedule** and responsibilities if possible.
7. Make **no “major” decisions** following a critical incident.
8. **Let people know you are hurting.** Family members, co-workers, church members, and friends would want to know. You need a healthy support system during this time.
9. Develop good recourses on **grief management** and **stress management** (i.e., take a course, read a book, download a podcast, or download a good article—this is needed and important).
10. Initially, you need some idle time but **transition back to activity as soon as you feel you can.**
11. **Watch for fixation on the incident.** Limit your time seeking news and media updates.
12. **Do not become obsessed with finding reasons** for the tragedy. *Answers do not heal our hearts!*
13. **“Watch the crowd.”** Too many people around you can drain you. Know yourself. Do not let yourself be angered when people who do care make stupid statements to you—they do not know what you are going through.
14. **Do something that will help!** Consider journaling your feelings, find a truth for your life, honor a life in some way, help someone else, write a book, write a letter, cook a meal for someone, leave a flower, paint a picture, plant a tree, donate blood, raise money for a cause, tell a story, remember the loss, make a memorial, build an altar—do something to manage the stress of this moment. Memorialize this event in a tangible way.
15. **You are not alone in this**—please, do not act like it. You need others; they need you. Find other people and minister to them. It may help you both/all.
16. **“Watch your stress voices.”** What does your body do to tell you that you are under stress? (e.g., legs ache, diarrhea, fatigue, irritability, appetite changes, etc.) **If you need professional help*, seek it, it is okay!** Contact a counselor, pastor, and/or chaplain. *You will be glad you did!* If I (Pastor Joe) can help, call me at 775.827.3227 or email me at jtaylor@southreno.com. I would love to visit with you.

* 10 Ways to Recognize POST-TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER:

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The symptoms discussed in this document (on the other side) are in many ways *normal responses to abnormal situations*. Sometimes, however, other, more severe symptoms (listed below) may surface several weeks or months after the tragedy. This is called POST TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER (PTSD). If you experience these symptoms longer than a few weeks following a major event, you need to strongly consider getting appropriate treatment. Contact a counselor, pastor, or chaplain soon:

1. Re-experiencing the event through vivid memories or flash backs.
2. Feeling “emotionally numb”
3. Feeling overwhelmed by what should normally be considered an everyday situation and diminished interest in performing normal tasks or pursuing usual interests.
4. Crying uncontrollably.
5. Isolating oneself from family and friends and avoiding social situations.
6. Relying increasingly on alcohol or drugs to get through the day.
7. Feeling extremely moody, irritable, angry, suspicious or frightened.
8. Having difficulty falling or staying asleep, sleeping too much and experiencing nightmares.
9. Feeling guilty about surviving the event or being unable to solve the problem, change the event or prevent the disaster.
10. Feeling fears and sense of doom about the future.