

Psychological first aid can help reduce the anxiety that individuals are experiencing after going through a traumatic event. Once they are calmer, witnesses can **focus** their thoughts more precisely and discuss the event more effectively with interviewers.

Tips for interviewing witnesses

- Remember that they will have a mixed range of memories – some clear, some unclear
- Try to understand the witness' state of mind – remember that they are likely traumatized
- Focus on establishing trust
- If possible, engage in a slower, free narrative style of questioning Remember that you are in a position of authority and aim to minimize power dynamics
- Provide calm by reuniting witnesses with family or friends - **reconnection is critical**
- Cross-contamination of evidence is not as critical as one might think – allow witnesses to talk to others who have experienced the event



After the incident

After the incident offer dedicated support and follow up support services.

Victims are likely to feel:

- Numbness
- Detachment
- Anger
- Sadness
- Depression
- Shock
- Survivor's guilt (feeling responsible)
- Physiological responses
 - Stomach pain, headaches, dizziness, chest pain, cloudy thinking

Individuals involved in mass casualty events can be further traumatized by being left alone when they need the support the most.

Create opportunities for those who were involved in the incident to **reconnect** and **express gratitude** to those who helped.

Self care

First responders are not immune from what they have experienced during a major incident.

Remember to take care of yourself, following an incident. Take time off if you need and find ways to reconnect with loved ones and rest

Check in with colleagues. See how they are coping and provide support, if you can.

Employers can support first responders by:

- Providing time off
- Conducting debriefings
- Promoting Employee Assistance Programming

Target Red Training Video Outline



Responding to Mass Casualty Incidents

Every community should prepare for dealing with Mass Casualty Incidents (MCI) and for the provision of **psychosocial support** for those affected both during and after the event.

What is Psychosocial Support?

Psychosocial Support focuses on enhancing individual resiliency and encouraging community recovery and adaptation following an emergency



Psychosocial support emphasizes 5 key intervention principles:

- Promote a sense of safety
- Provide calming
- Create a sense of self and community worth
- Promote a sense of connectedness
- Provide hope

Arriving at the Scene & Dealing with Family and Friends

When arriving at the scene, first responders will have to respond to a chaotic set of circumstances while trying to determine who is involved and what has occurred.

Victims may feel traumatized, scared, angry, and may possibly feel responsible for causing the event.

In most cases, **family** and **friends** of those involved will be anxious to know the status of their loved ones. The victims' family will have limited control over when or how they will get information, and when they will be able to connect with their loved ones. They may feel panicked or scared and these feelings may be taken out on the first responders supporting them.

Psychological First Aid: Provision of assessment, one-to-one support and crisis counselling during emergencies”

Those that provide psychological first aid can offer quiet competence, paying attention to how individuals are coping, hear what they are saying, and link individuals with resources to cope.

Victim Services/Disaster Psychological Services:

Victim services personnel that are trained in psychological first aid can respond to those involved in mass casualty events, providing safety and information.

Communication between victim services personnel and incident command is critical. Victim Services can provide prompt information to the various groups involved, reducing stress and lessening the impact of the event.

Dealing with Casualties and Witnesses: Interviews:

First responders have a duty formally placed upon them to rescue, find safety and start the recovery process for the victims. Police have the added duty to gather evidence for the legal process.

Criminal Cases

In criminal cases, supporting a crown witness during a trial involves:

1. Assessing the witness to ensure that proper support systems are in place
2. Explain the criminal process to the witness (e.g. visit the court room, outline the process of testifying)
3. Review previous statements or documents with the witness and discuss the substance of the evidence

Psychological first aid is a strategy integral to moving a victim from emotional crisis to safety, from emotional injury to recovery and can be administered without inappropriately influencing their recall of the event. To not do so, is to not comprehensively fulfill one's mandate.

