



Support during criminal prosecution

Rarely, individuals may be asked to testify to what they saw during an incident. If this happens, know that you will be provided with the support you need to present whatever knowledge you might have of the incident. Victim Services or the courts will assign you someone who will:

- Provide you with all the necessary resources and supports to appear in court
- Explain the criminal process to you
- Review any previous statements you may have made or any documents pertaining to the case
- Answer all of your questions regarding your role, the courts system and your rights

When should I get help?

The information offered in this brochure is a reference point to help you understand some of your responses to a mass casualty incident. If, at any time, you feel overwhelmed and unable to cope it is important to seek out additional assistance.



If you are experiencing some of the following concerns, it may be time to seek help from a health professional such as a psychologist, social worker, counselor, spiritual care advisor.

- “I can’t return to a normal routine”
- “I feel helpless/hopeless”
- “I have thoughts of hurting myself or others”
- “I am drinking too much or excessively using other drugs”

Possible resources in your community

- Crisis centres, employee assistance programs
- Family services or social support agencies
- Someone you trust
- Faith based or community groups

“Did I Do the Right Thing?”

Heroes Suffer Too

Civilian Responders to a Mass Casualty Incident



Thank You!

You jumped in when others might not have. You may have risked your own life to rescue others even though you may not have had the necessary training to ensure your own safety. You put others' needs before your own. You are special. Thank you for your heroic actions.

Typically, people like you downplay the event and the risks they took. It is also common for people to dismiss or downplay any injuries they may have had.

Civilian responder

"I just did what anyone would have done."

What is a Mass Casualty Incident (MCI)?

An MCI is any event where people have been through a traumatic event involving multiple casualties. This could be after a major transportation accident, an earthquake, a mass shooting or other event. People's lives may have been threatened; there may or may not be injuries, or deaths.

Because there is little advance warning, there is little time to prepare emotionally to cope with the stressors related to involvement in a MCI.

Physical injuries are easy to see and the healing process is visible. But some of the emotional or psychological impacts of having taken an active role in attempting to, or actually saving lives, are not so visible.

Regardless of the outcome, assisting in an incident and seeing other people in pain, traumatized, scared or anxious can result in you sharing some of their reactions.

How come I feel differently?

People are socially and emotionally connected. Studies show that when we see other people in pain, or emotionally traumatized, our brains react as if we were experiencing the same reactions. These feelings of compassion and empathy were what drove you to help others in need. However, these feelings can be also overwhelming and confusing. Even though we may not have been directly involved in the incident, hearing, seeing, and even smelling distressing scenes at the site can result in **Vicarious Trauma**. This happens when you feel like you experienced the event first hand, even though you were not directly involved.



Vicarious Trauma: physical or psychological changes that occurs in individuals who witnessed the pain or suffering of others

Symptoms include:

- Mood swings
- Sleep difficulties
- Invasive thoughts
- Flashbacks
- Panic attacks
- Depressed mood
- Social withdrawal

It's important to know that **these are very**

normal responses to abnormal circumstances.

I did the best I could? Or did I?

Often, after a mass casualty incident, civilian responders like yourself can feel very confused. You may be having thoughts like:

- Did I do the right thing?
- Did I do enough?
- Did I cause harm to others?
- Why did I survive when others didn't?

These questions are common and it may be hard to shake them off. Remember that your actions are appreciated and that under challenging circumstances, you did the best that you could.

"It's life altering in a way that you can't

fathom, and to be open to that, nothing

goes back to the way it was before, but it can

still be good, you can still have a great life,

it's just different."

Civilian responder at the scene of an air accident

Should I reconnect with others who experienced the event?

Mass casualty incidents can be traumatic, and often, people witnessing these events develop meaningful relationships with those who were also there. After an incident, you may have the desire to reconnect with others and share your stories. Studies have shown that this can be a very helpful experience, often providing the opportunity for closure and expressing appreciation.

If it feels appropriate for you, there may be programs in place that could help you reconnect with others who witnessed the incident.