

What if the police want to question witnesses right away?

If the person requires treatment at the hospital, the police officer will usually accompany the patient in the ambulance. If the patient is emotionally upset, Psychological First Aid only takes minutes and can be highly beneficial to you in ascertaining clearer and more concise information from a witness.

Work with a buddy



In most incidents, but especially during an MCI, it is important to work collaboratively. Always aim to have a buddy with you so that, as a team, you can work together to identify threats, observe the situation and monitor each other's physical and mental wellbeing. Taking care of yourself is key to your success during an MCI and checking in with your buddy can ensure that you are both doing good work.

Guiding principles for communication

As a responder, whether or not the person you are treating is a casualty or potential suspect, it is important and professional to build a relationship based upon a climate of trust, respect, empathy and justice.

As a firefighter you may be the first person in authority that the person has seen. If the person is a suspect, studies show that perpetrators are more cooperative with the police and are more likely to confess, if treated with empathy right from the first contact with a person in authority.

Casualties and civilians who assist at the scene of

an incident have stated that the initial words of a first responder have a major impact on their emotional recovery. As a professional, when you show respect and empathy for all those involved they feel valued and appreciated and this has led to a speedier recovery. When dismissed, when the efforts of civilians have not been acknowledged, it can have a long-lasting negative impact.

If you can't thank the person at the time, a follow-up communication will assist in reducing long-lasting negative impacts.

Things to say to victims/witnesses

- Provide clear information.
- Clearly state what you can and cannot do.
- Ask what the person is feeling or how they are doing.
- Tell the person that you feel touched or are moved by their pain or situation.
- Thank them (if appropriate) for the help they have provided to others.
- Help people focus on short-term goals. This will help them cope with the immediate reality more effectively.
- Be willing to accept people for who they are, what they say, how they express their concerns, and how they define their particular losses.
- Be tolerant if people repeat their stories. This is common. Remember that “time, talk and tears” are important elements of healing.
- Always try to get back to people if you say you will.
- Do not claim that you fully understand the person's situation.
- Do not try to tell people how they should or should not be feeling even if their feelings seem inappropriate to you.

Tips for firefighters after a Mass Casualty Incident (MCI)



The following tips can help you in treating and managing casualties and their families after an MCI. This information is general in nature; always check with your immediate supervisor to confirm how you should approach the situation and to answer specific questions.

What is a mass casualty incident (MCI)?

An MCI is any event where people have been through a traumatic situation 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.

Tips for arriving on scene:

- If possible, turn emergency lights and sirens off as you approach the scene. Victims may be frightened by loud noises or bright lights.
- Remember to use extreme caution as individuals may be fleeing the scene and may not be entirely aware of their surroundings
- Think about setting up an additional triage site outside the immediately affected area in order to start rapid retrieval, treatment and evacuation of casualties.

This was a pretty scary experience for people. What reactions will they be having?

It will be normal for people to feel very anxious after an MCI. People may feel confused, scared, angry or sad.

They may be crying or, conversely, appear exhilarated that they have survived. Some people may appear very calm or suppress their emotions. Everyone will experience the event differently – there is no “right” way to feel after such an event.

What will my role be?

You may be the first car or second car and thus you will join be part of incident command setup. Otherwise, typically, in an MCI a staging area for ambulances and fire engines will be arranged close to the scene.



If the MCI involves a crime scene, (e.g., an active shooter or terrorist event) then the police will be in charge of the scene.

Everyone is very upset. What can I do to help calm people down?

Victims Services Workers, or other trained persons can practice **Psychological First Aid (PFA)** with victims who have experience an MCI and affected families.

What is psychological first aid (PFA)?

Psychological First Aid is a quick, effective tool intended to be delivered in the immediate aftermath of a disaster or MCI. It has five key objectives:

1. Establish **safety** and **security**
2. **Connect** to restorative resources
3. **Reduce stress-related reactions**
4. Foster adaptive **short- and long-term coping**
5. **Enhance natural resilience**



Look

- Contact and engage
- Provide safety and comfort
- Stabilize



Listen

- Gather information
- Provide practical assistance



Link

- Connect victims with social supports
- Teach coping strategies
- Link with collaborative services

Deploying Victim Services (VS) or Disaster Psychosocial Services (DPS)

VS workers and/or DPS Volunteers may set up a Family Reunification Centre for family and friends waiting to hear from their trapped relatives. It will be important to have discussions with these support staff as to how best facilitate the eventual release of hostages or victims.

Victims and witnesses will want to reunite or talk to their families or friends as soon as possible and reassure them that they are okay. For many people, until they have made that contact it will be difficult for them to concentrate on anything else. They may want to wait for treatment until that contact has been made.

A Victims Services Worker can help them reunite with their family members in a safe way that will not affect or jeopardize their treatment by paramedics or any potential testimony for the police.