

Behavioural reactions: Changes in behaviour are not uncommon as people try to cope with the impacts of the event. Changes include:

- irritability
- angry outbursts
- increased risk-taking
- blaming
- restlessness
- abuse of drugs and alcohol
- withdrawal
- feeling misunderstood or disconnected
- becoming controlling or over-protective
- general sense of feeling unwell
- higher levels of stress

Spiritual Reactions: MCIs can have a profound impact on people's spirituality. Some people may abandon their faith, while others may turn to faith. People may start to question their purpose in life, experience a loss of trust or become more cynical.

What is the difference between post-trauma stress and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)

Anyone who has experienced a MCI or traumatic event will have some stress reactions. These reactions may be called post-trauma or critical incident stress.

PTSD is often a misused term. PTSD is a diagnosable medical condition that can only be made 30 days after the event. Acute Stress Disorder (ASD) describes a set of trauma symptoms prior to the 30 days.

A person with PTSD will be experiencing significant distress or have difficulty functioning socially or at work. Before a person can be

diagnosed with ASD or PTSD, they have to meet the criteria and experience symptoms within four categories.

1. Flashbacks or disturbing memories
2. Withdrawal from your typical activities
3. Negative changes in thinking
4. Negative emotional changes

What can I do?

The first thing that you can do is acknowledge the incident and that it will take some time for the person to adjust. Don't pester the person with questions, but make it clear you are available to listen when the person is ready to talk.

Avoid putting on the TV or listening to the news media talking about the event. Carry on with normal day-to-day events but avoid loud, or new and challenging activities.

Be prepared for ups and downs as the person adjusts to the event. These events are life-changing – life afterwards is never again quite the same. That doesn't mean it is worse or better than before, but it will be different. This is sometimes described as the "new norm."

If you notice that the person seems to be having difficulty coping (e.g., drinking more alcohol than usual, not sleeping, withdrawing from family activities) then you should encourage the person to get some professional help before patterns set in. Usually, short-term help is all that is needed

When a Family Member Experiences a Mass Casualty Incident



"I was not prepared for what I saw...or did"

MCI Survivor

This information is general in nature; always check with your family doctor or trained professional to answer specific questions

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.

Criminal activity may be suspected and if so, the area becomes a crime scene and all those involved become potential witnesses in criminal justice processes.

Who is affected by a MCI?

It will be normal for people to feel very anxious after such an event. 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 kinds of things will impact people?

The things that are most likely to result in negative impacts for people are situations when:

- one's life was threatened, or there was a real threat of death or serious injury
- there was little time to mentally prepare for the event (e.g. an earthquake or an active shooter)
- people felt helpless or unable to control the situation
- the situation involved wounded or dead persons, particularly children
- individuals witnessed others experiencing pain or fear and they were unable to help

These are some of the factors affecting people in MCIs. However, it is very important to recognize that what may appear at the onset to be a relatively benign event may have unexpected consequences depending on someone's past experiences.

What kinds of reactions will people have?

Some reactions may occur very shortly after the MCI while other reactions may only appear days, weeks, months or sometimes years after the event. Fortunately most reactions will be relatively short-term and will dissipate with time.

Sometimes, reactions may dissipate over time, but could be triggered again, as a result of the anniversary date of the event or by sounds, smells or visual cues that remind one of the actual event. People who have experienced a MCI may have many reactions including:

Physical reactions:

- shaking or trembling.
- upset stomach or nausea,
- heart palpitations or excess sweating
- fatigue
- difficulty sleeping or nightmares

Emotional reactions:

- crying
- anxiety or helplessness
- anger about the event and what others experienced
- mood changes or mood swings
- a deep sense of sadness or grief
- guilt, or self-blame about not having done more
- depression or apathy
- hypervigilance (always being on edge, not able to relax).
- in extreme cases: suicidal tendencies

Cognitive reactions:

- confusion or difficulty concentrating
- difficulty making decisions
- memory loss
- flashbacks or replaying the events in one's head

