



## WHEN A CRITICAL INCIDENT OCCURS

This information is to help you understand some of the feelings you may have and some of the reactions that may occur during a critical incident, and in the days and weeks to follow. It is important to remember that your experience is individual and unique to you, so you may identify with some of the feelings described here or you may not experience them at all. There is no right or wrong way to feel. Every person is different and will respond differently depending on their own background and life situation.

The first reaction is often shock or disbelief: "I can't believe this is happening". Time and space may also seem distorted -- minutes can seem like hours and hours can seem like minutes. After this, people commonly experience fear, vulnerability and/or hyper-vigilance: you may feel anxious or afraid of things that normally you would not notice; you may feel jumpy, irritable and restless. You may feel you will never be safe again, anywhere. These are normal reactions that lessen over time.

During the healing process, you may begin to feel angry with others for not helping or protecting you if your sense of safety has been violated. You may feel a sense of powerlessness for either yourself or the injured party. You may replay the incident several times in your mind. As you heal your life will begin to feel more in control again, feelings of anger and fear tend to subside, and you will start to put the incident behind you.

### Personal Coping Strategies:

- Use all the support systems around you – friends, family members, co-workers, EFAP.
- Try and maintain as much of your normal routine as possible.
- Practice stress management – relaxation, exercise, proper meals, setting priorities.
- Pay special attention to your children – they may need reassurance and comfort. Maintain their routines.

### Information for Family Members & Friends:

Family members and friends are an important means of support during this time. It is often hard for them to understand how this impacts you. Sometimes in an attempt to help you they say "forget it; don't think about it; get on with your life." This can be very upsetting for you, even though they mean well. To help them understand how they can best provide support, either share this handout or ask your family members and friends to:

- acknowledge the event and your reactions and control their own reactions;
- listen carefully and not ask a lot of questions -- let you set the pace;
- spend time with you to reassure you that you are safe, as well as give you some private time;
- offer assistance even if you have not asked for help – often people need just a listening ear, not necessarily someone to make things better;
- give practical support – help with everyday task such as cleaning, cooking, childcare, etc.;
- understand not to take the strong emotions you may be feeling personally;
- tell you they are sorry this event has occurred -- that they want to understand and assist you, and not to say that you are "lucky it wasn't worse".

Remember, if you need any additional support during this time the EFAP counsellors are available to help you. Do not hesitate to call: **604-872-4929 or 1-800-505-4929**