

How to cope in a crisis



At some point in our lives, we will be exposed to a crisis situation. Often unexpected, a crisis can cause significant stress and, if we are not well enough prepared to deal with them, both the short-term and long-term effects of crises on our mental health can be significant.

A crisis is any traumatic experience where an individual experiences emotional or physical shock or stress. This stress often appears soon after the event but it can take weeks, or even months, before it affects an individual.

Crises result in various reactions depending on the individual, but some of these include:

- **Intense reactions:** People who experience a crisis situation may feel intense anxiety, fear, shame, grief, horror, anger, and shock. This may result in sleep difficulties.
- **Numbness:** It is common for people to protect themselves with detachment and numbness in crisis situations. They can feel isolated from others and even their own emotions.
- **Depression:** People may feel depressed or lose their zest for life.
- **Flashbacks and nightmares:** People often re-experience the traumatic events and feel out of control. It is common, too, for these individuals to have nightmares.

It can be difficult to get back to a normal state, but here are two tips to remember:

- **Don't ignore your feelings:** Expressing your emotions in times of crises is an important coping mechanism and will help you to

build emotional resilience. Write down your thoughts and feelings, talk to a friend, or make an appointment with a counsellor.

- **Get support:** Draw on your support network to help you through. Try to connect with others, especially those who may have shared the same stressful experience as you, and consider joining a support group.

Keep your cool in a work crisis

Here are some tips from Dr Tracie O'Keefe, a crisis recovery specialist and corporate health and wellbeing trainer:

- **Get the facts:** Gather all the information about the situation.
- **Consider pre-existing systems:** Check to see if there are any systems in place to handle the emerging circumstances.
- **Practice relaxation techniques:** Stay calm – breathe slowly.
- **Look forwards not backwards:** Focus on solutions rather than the problems.
- **Consult experts:** Seek advice from others, particularly from those qualified in the areas of crisis management before taking action.
- **Delegate tasks:** Share the load – give your colleagues investment in problem-solving.