

Workplace crisis reactions and coping strategies

When a disturbing and unusual situation arises at work (such as the suicide of a colleague or an event involving some form of bereavement), we are all affected in one way or another. It's perfectly normal to feel a wide range of emotions, which can vary in form, intensity and duration depending on the individual.

A crisis can be defined as a moment of intense imbalance, characterized by a deep sense of vulnerability, disorientation or anxiety, affecting several people directly or indirectly.

Possible reactions include

- Feeling slow, having difficulty concentrating or making decisions.
- Keeping busy and immersing ourselves in our work to avoid feeling our emotions.
- Taking on an additional workload without considering our own limitations, fatigue or the fact that our current workload is already heavy.
- Feeling sad, anxious, fearful, ashamed, guilty or angry.
- Experiencing insomnia, nightmares, crying spells, intrusive thoughts, flashbacks or isolation.
- Having physical reactions such as headaches, fatigue, nausea, heart palpitations or difficulty breathing.

All these reactions are normal and do not always occur immediately. If we can identify and label them, they usually go away within a few weeks.

- Although it's natural to seek more information to try to understand why an unfortunate event has occurred, this can increase distress rather than bring comfort.
- When the emotions subside, and we are better able to distance ourselves from what has happened and get back to our daily activities, it means that we may be beginning to recover.

Is it possible not to react?

It's rare to have no reaction at all in these situations. Reactions can sometimes be delayed. We each have our own experiences, and an event can bring back painful memories. For some people, the impact may be minor. For others, the situation may provoke reactions that are difficult for those around them to understand. Even if we have been warned and are well prepared, some of us may still experience intense stress reactions, depending on the circumstances.

Coping strategies include

- Paying more attention to our own reactions than what has happened.
- Talking about our feelings with someone we can trust, who will listen, understand and support us. Before confiding in someone, we should make sure that they are receptive to what we want to share. If we discuss what has happened with colleagues, we should make sure that the conversation remains private.
- Refraining from judging our reactions. Being kind to ourselves and showing the same empathy toward ourselves as we would toward a friend under similar stress.
- Trying to temporarily lower our expectations of ourselves and eliminate non-essential tasks. Giving ourselves a break.
- Exercising, even lightly, and finding an activity that helps us take our mind off things, such as a hobby, pastime or manual activity.
- If others want to talk about what has happened but we would rather not, we let them know. If others are upset by what has happened, we can remind them that they have the option of seeking professional help.

We should ask for help if we

- Feel the need
- Have experienced a similar crisis in the past (suicide of a loved one, complicated grief or recent bereavement)
- See no way out, no way to get better
- Have or had suicidal thoughts
- Experience continuing or worsening reactions to what has happened after a few weeks

The QPHP offers group interventions to support teams in crisis.

If your community needs help, contact us at **1 800 387-4166** or info@pamq.org.

