

COPING WITH CRISIS SITUATIONS

Crisis situations, such as the recent wildfires in BC, can be overwhelming and life-altering. Many of these events disrupt normal day to day functioning and therefore can lead to heightened stress and other psychological responses. A crisis can show up anytime and will often do so unexpectedly. It is therefore important to have a basic understanding of how a crisis can affect us and how we can manage our responses to it, so that we are better prepared the next time we face a critical situation.

What is a Crisis?

A crisis situation can be described as an adverse, often traumatic, event or situation that disrupts one's normal day to day life and coping mechanisms. Many people think of major events, such as disasters or the current wildfires in BC, as the most obvious forms of crisis situations. However, there are many other common types of crises that an individual may experience throughout the course of their lifetime.

Some examples of crises are:

- personal crises, such as loss of job, divorce or failure of a relationship, death of a loved one
- anything that threatens one's sense of safety and well-being such as accidents, abuse, violent acts, major or life-altering injuries
- disasters, evacuation or displacement, loss of home, war/conflict



Symptoms or Responses to a Crisis Situation

It is completely normal and common to experience negative physiological and emotional symptoms when faced with a critical situation or life event. There is even a common adage that many health care professionals and counsellors refer to, especially when speaking of trauma: trauma (or any other stress-related symptom) is a normal response to an abnormal event. These symptoms can last anywhere from a couple of days, to a few weeks, and in some cases, months.

Some common responses to crisis situations are:

- heightened emotions, such as anger, anxiety, guilt, extreme sadness, fear
- feeling numb, i.e. "not feeling anything"
- sleeping problems and other physical ailments such as gastrointestinal issues, loss of appetite, feeling sick and fatigued
- intrusive thoughts regarding the incident or constantly reliving the event
- avoiding situations or places that remind one of the event

According to the Canadian Red Cross, these responses to crisis events can be mitigated by having a basic understanding of what causes these responses, being aware of common symptoms of trauma, and being equipped with some tips on how to manage these responses. We will further add that the practice of building resiliency in one's daily life (prior to facing the critical situation) can help one bounce back from a crisis more reasonably and more quickly.

Tips on Building Resiliency in One's Daily Life

In his book, *Roadmap to Resilience: A Guide for Military, Trauma Victims and Their Families*, Donald Meichenbaum, PhD, recommends:

- taking care of your health by practicing healthy eating, getting enough sleep, staying physically active, avoiding drugs and alcohol
- maintaining emotional fitness by learning tools such as mindfulness and relaxation techniques
- cultivating positive relationships, which involves good communication and conflict management skills, being willing to accept help and help others in their time of need
- adopting a resilient mindset, which involves being optimistic, engaging in constructive thinking, and avoiding "thinking traps" such as black and white thinking or catastrophizing

Tips on Coping with a Critical Situation

- The tools above that help build resiliency are just as important to practice when facing a crisis.
- Try to maintain daily routines as much as possible to maintain some sense of normalcy.
- Accept your feelings as normal responses to an abnormal event and allow yourself to feel sad or mourn.
- Accept help from loved ones and community members and, if you are able to, find ways to help others or volunteer in the community.
- Spend time with and talk to family and friends.
- Spend some time engaging in activities that you enjoy, which will help take your mind off the situation.
- Know that there are various community resources for mental health that are available to you, such as local Mental Health and Crisis Centres and Help Lines (e.g. BC: 310-6789, Alberta: 1-877-303-2642)
- If your stress or trauma symptoms do not subside after a couple of weeks, speak to a counsellor or health care professional. Call your EFAP.
- Children may be even more negatively impacted from a critical situation and may require more care and attention than adults. It is important to talk to them about what happened, reassure them that they are safe, and encourage them to express their feelings.



Disaster Preparedness

In case of a disaster situation, having a basic level of preparedness and access to information can help ease anxiety and stress.

- Have an emergency kit ready with basic necessities such as food, water, AM/FM radio, first aid kit, medications, clothing etc. (see www2.gov.bc.ca, *Emergency Preparedness, Response & Recovery* for more details on the full kit).
- Visit your city or province's website for resources and information regarding reception centres, emergency protocols, emergency preparation tips, safety tips etc.

YOUR LOGO HERE

For confidential assistance
BCI Consulting Inc. 1.800.668.2055
www.bciconsulting.ca