



Critical Incidents and the Role of the Trauma Recovery Team

One of a series of fact sheets for staff

C O N T E N T S

- What is a critical incident?
- The nature of a critical incident
- Managing critical incidents at UTAS
- What is the TRT?
- What is the role of the TRT during a critical incident?
- After the TRT is stood down
- Contact details

WHAT IS A CRITICAL INCIDENT?

A critical incident is an event that overwhelms the usual coping strategies of an individual and tends to be outside 'ordinary' human experience. Such incidents typically include loss of life or threat to physical safety such as a suicide or serious fire on campus.

THE NATURE OF A CRITICAL INCIDENT

Exposure to critical incidents commonly causes strong emotional responses in victims, helpers and observers and have the potential to cause significant traumatic stress. If they are not effectively managed, such reactions can severely interfere with people's ability to function as they were prior to the incident.

People who may be affected by critical incidents include:

- People directly exposed to the incident – those who suffer intense trauma including injuries.
- Relatives and friends – those who are grieving for the injured and affected.

- People with previous trauma or grief – those who are not directly affected by the incident but who may be affected because of a previous incident.
- Helpers, recovery or support personnel – those who are required to maintain functional efficiency during the incident and to provide immediate emotional support to those affected for example staff, counsellors and administrators.
- Community and people not directly involved – those from neighbouring workplaces and those who would have been directly involved but were not because of chance or circumstances.

MANAGING CRITICAL INCIDENTS AT UTAS

The majority of incidents will be managed by the Campus Emergency Coordinators using established emergency procedures. More serious critical incidents may require the intervention of the University Critical Incident Management Team (CIMT). This team consists of high-level management who guide the response to an incident.

WHAT IS THE TRT?

The Trauma Recovery Team (TRT) can be activated by the CIMT, or by the Manager of Student Services when needed. The TRT focuses on the emotional and psychological health of the University community (staff, students and visitors) assisting in the recovery from a critical incident.

Members of the TRT are University staff or consultants who have backgrounds in the welfare/counselling disciplines. They are trained in psychological trauma response.

WHAT IS THE ROLE OF THE TRT DURING A CRITICAL INCIDENT?

The TRT will usually respond in four specific ways:

- assessment
- intervention
- follow up
- closure

The establishment of a support room is an example of a potentially useful intervention. This is established soon after an incident where those affected can find support and information.

It is recognised that in the relatively new field of trauma recovery, interventions are continually developed and changed. No one intervention is useful in all situations.

Working closely with management and heads of school as a resource and support is vital to the successful management of such incidents.

AFTER THE TRT IS STOOD DOWN

The TRT has a finite life. Once the team is stood down, regular services would be used to deal with ongoing psychological/welfare issues that may continue or arise. This would include such services as staff counselling, HR, chaplaincy and Student Services.

CONTACT DETAILS

For more information regarding the role of the TRT or the issues surrounding management of a critical incident, please contact Stephanie Taylor, Manager of Student Services, on 6226 2697.