

What does a Peer Supporter do?

- Supports BSAR personnel either as groups and/or individuals following involvement in a critical incident. This support may occur immediately after an incident or within a few days.
- Maintains strict confidentiality regarding any matters discussed.
- Provides a referral system for professional counselling if required
- Provides support to you at any time

A Peer Supporter may:

- *Initiate contact with you as soon as practical after the incident and provide follow-up if needed thereafter*
- *Provide practical support*
- *Provide information on positive coping strategies and the importance of social support*
- *Tell you about the availability of other sources of help*
- *Take time to have a coffee, a chat, or be with you when you need it*
- *Provide support to the family of an affected searcher*
- *Be available to searchers on site at an incident*
- *Provide one-on-one support over the phone or in person*

A Peer Supporter will not:

- *Provide counselling*
- *Be judgmental*
- *Contact anyone without your consent unless there is a clear threat to your well-being*
- *Make decisions for you without your consent*

**Peer supporters are available
whenever support is needed**

BSAR are able to provide to peer support for you at any time.

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Bush Search & Rescue Peer Support Group

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Critical
Incident
Stress
and the
Peer
Support
Program

Psychological First Aid

What is a critical incident?

Critical incidents involve exposure to potentially life threatening events. These can include exposure to deceased or severely injured people or threats to the safety of self and colleagues. "Near miss" incidents can also be regarded as critical incidents.

What is Critical Incident Stress?

Stress is a normal reaction that helps us function at our best. From time to time search and rescue personnel may be involved in incidents that put strain on their normal ability to cope. The impact of any particular event will depend on a number of factors and vary from one person to another.

Peer Support

The peer support program is a formal structure that enables peers to provide support to co-workers. Peer supporters are trained to help you if you would like to talk to them. They are not psychologists but they understand that you may be affected or disturbed by some event and may require assistance in dealing with or understanding its consequences.

Many organisations have peer support groups. We have members in BSAR who can provide this service.

Common stress reactions

It is common for people to experience a range of reactions to critical incidents in the short term. For most people these reactions will settle down within the first few days.

Reactions differ widely but can include:

- sleep disturbance
- nervousness
- anxiety
- poor concentration
- physical signs such as nausea, headaches
- feeling detached or cut off from family and friends
- irritability
- not feeling able to fulfil usual roles or responsibilities

How long will reactions last?

Most people will recover within the first few days while others may take longer. If the person doesn't seem to have bounced back within a week or two they should be advised to seek professional help.

When should I seek help?

Most people will experience some distress in the short term. However if the level of distress is very high or it persists, seek assistance from peer support or a health professional (GP or counsellor).

How can others help?

By following a few guidelines, it is possible to be a great help to others experiencing critical incident stress.

1. Spend some time with the person concerned and check in from time to time on how they are travelling
2. Offer a listening ear but don't intrude on the person's privacy
3. Help with any arrangements they may require
4. Don't take their emotions personally as this is probably part of their reactions to events
5. Don't tell them "lucky the situation isn't worse" as they probably won't feel lucky
6. Help them to re-establish a normal routine as soon as possible
7. Include them in the activities of others if they are willing
8. Explain that re-occurring thoughts and dreams are not unusual and they usually decrease over time.
9. Encourage them to be involved and active some way

Individuals have the right to choose the peer they wish to contact