

## Critical incidents in Surf Life Saving NSW

The environment in which Surf Life Saving operates has the potential for members to be involved in incidents of a traumatic nature.

Members are affected differently by incidents, and it is the reaction of the individual which makes the incident critical for that person, not necessarily the size or nature of the incident.

SLSNSW is committed to lessening the impact of critical incident stress on members, staff and their families by providing best practice support following an incident.

## Assure Programs

Assure Programs is SLSNSW's Employee Assistance Program (EAP) provider. If you are involved in a critical incident, you are automatically able to access their team of professional psychologists trained in critical incident management 24/7.

You can call them at any time, day or night, on the weekend or on public holidays for immediate support and advice. This service is provided at no cost to members.

Phone 1800 808 374  
[www.assureprograms.com.au](http://www.assureprograms.com.au)



## What you can expect

If you are involved in a critical incident whilst volunteering for SLSNSW, you can expect to receive the following support:

- ✓ An onsite briefing delivered by a Duty Officer outlining the support and resources available to you.
- ✓ Three well checks conducted in the month post-incident.



- ✓ Access to professional psychological support if required.

Your club or branch may have additional support people or networks in place who can be contacted for support, such as chaplains or peer support networks.

## Well checks

In the days and weeks following an incident, reactions can change. They may improve, worsen or new reactions may appear.

Well checks are conducted multiple times on a one-to-one basis to ensure that any support needs are identified if and when they develop. Well checks are not professional counselling; they are an opportunity to see how you are going and to signpost additional support if needed.



## Where to go for support

You don't have to wait for a well check to seek out support. If you are experiencing any negative mental health outcomes after an incident which have not improved after trying some of the coping strategies outlined in this leaflet, consider one or more of the following:

- Talking to a local chaplain or peer support officer
- Talking to your GP
- Talking to a psychologist

If you're not sure who to speak to, contact:

**SLSNSW Member Welfare Officer**  
(02) 9471 8000 or  
[memberwelfare@surflifesaving.com.au](mailto:memberwelfare@surflifesaving.com.au)

**Assure Programs**  
1800 808 374



**Lifeline**  
13 11 14

**MensLine Australia**  
1300 78 99 78

**Kids Helpline**  
1800 55 1800



**Lifeline**  
13 11 14



# NEW SOUTH WALES

Assure Programs 1800 808 374  
Confidential, no cost, professional support  
SLSNSW Member Welfare  
[memberwelfare@surflifesaving.com.au](mailto:memberwelfare@surflifesaving.com.au)

## Reactions following an incident

People are affected differently by critical incidents. If you are involved in a critical incident in Surf Life Saving you may experience some, none, or all of the responses below. For most, these responses are short-lived and will subside within a few days or weeks.

- Avoiding reminders of event, such as the place it occurred, or people involved
- Constant negative thoughts and feelings
- Trouble sleeping or concentrating
- Displaying anger and irritability or sweating
- Being easily startled, constantly vigilant or highly strung
- Withdrawal from friends and family or a loss of motivation
- Feeling low and / or tired all the time
- Changes in appetite, sleep, weight or increased alcohol or drug use

## Coping strategies

Recovering from critical incidents doesn't mean forgetting your experience or not feeling any emotional pain. Recovery means reducing your distress and increasing your ability to cope over time. Ways you may cope and look after yourself after exposure to an incident include:



Recognise you have been through an extremely stressful event and it is normal to have an emotional reaction to it



If you feel like it, talk about your feelings to someone you trust. This may help you to process what has happened



Get plenty of rest (even if you can't sleep), regularly exercise and eat regular, well-balanced meals



Get back to your normal routine as soon as possible, but take it easy. Don't do activities just to avoid painful thoughts or memories of the incident



Don't bottle up or block out your thoughts and feelings. Recurring thoughts, dreams and flashbacks are unpleasant, but they are normal, and will decrease with time



Try to plan one enjoyable or meaningful activity each day



Even if you don't want to talk about your experience, spend time with people you care about. It's also okay to want to be alone at times but avoid isolating yourself



Make time for relaxation

If you've tried these strategies and things still aren't improving after a couple of weeks, or if you are having trouble coping with work or with relationships – please seek further support.

# Member Welfare Guide

A support guide for Surf Life Saving NSW members involved in critical incidents



SURF LIFE SAVING  
NEW SOUTH WALES