

After a Critical Incident

What you might notice at home, and what actually helps.

01 Your Role Matters

When your loved one is involved in a critical incident, the stress does not stay at work. It often shows up at home. What you are seeing may not be about you. It may be their nervous system still trying to come down from survival mode.

What you might notice in the first days to weeks

- Irritability or short temper
- Emotional distance or quiet withdrawal
- Trouble sleeping or nightmares
- Being easily startled or on edge
- Needing more alone time
- Less patience with noise or chaos
- Increased protectiveness
- Fatigue or emotional numbness

These are common stress responses after high-adrenaline events.

02 What Helps

1. Lower the pressure

- Keep home routines predictable
- Avoid major confrontations early on
- Give space without withdrawing connection

2. Do not force processing

- Avoid "You need to talk about it."
- Avoid "You're acting different."
- Avoid "Why won't you open up?"

Silence is often overwhelm, not rejection.

3. Protect sleep and routine

Sleep, food, movement, and simple routines help the nervous system reset. Routine tells the body: we are safe now.

03 Your Role Matters More Than You Realize

Family is often the strongest protective factor after a critical incident. While you cannot fix what happened, your steadiness, patience, and presence can significantly influence recovery. A calm, predictable home environment helps regulate a nervous system that has been in survival mode. You are part of the recovery process.

04 Signs It May Be Time for Additional Support

- Persistent anger or explosive outbursts
- Significant withdrawal from family
- Heavy increase in alcohol use
- Talking about hopelessness
- Emotional numbness lasting weeks
- Statements like "I should have done more," "I can't shut it off," or "I don't care anymore."