



Oslo

Psychosocial Crisis Team



Photo: Unsplash, Tyler-Nix

Information and advice about crisis reactions



Photo: Pexels, Andres Ayrton



What is a crisis reaction?

A crisis reaction is a natural emotional response to something very bad or frightening. It's a sign that your body and mind are doing their best to understand and cope with what has happened.

Crisis reactions can be uncomfortable and scary, but they are not dangerous. The reactions often start out strong, but gradually become milder over time.

When do crisis reactions occur?



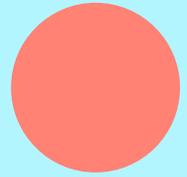
Crisis reactions can occur in response to:

- An accident
- Violence and crime
- Sudden and unexpected death
- When you lose someone you love
- War and conflict

This brochure provides information and advice about:

- Normal reactions to crises
- Immediate post-crisis advice
- Advice for daily life

What are normal reactions to a crisis?



People react differently to serious crises. Some may have very obvious reactions and show their feelings. Others keep their emotions bottled up inside. Some people take a while to react – a couple days, a week, or even a few months. All these ways of reacting are completely normal.

Shock

When something very bad or frightening happens, it can feel surreal. Many people describe it as being like watching a movie. This is because what has happened to you is too overwhelming to absorb. It is your body's way of protecting you. Over time, you will begin to understand what has occurred, and then you can start processing your emotions.

Anger

It is normal to feel angry or frustrated when something bad happens. This anger can negatively affect your family and close friends. You may experience sudden mood swings over the course of the day.

Your body is in a heightened state of readiness

In a crisis, it is normal to become more sensitive and jittery. You might jolt at the sound of a loud noise, or the way you move might change. This is normal. It happens because your body is trying to protect you. We call this being in a state of readiness. It is tiring to remain perpetually ready and on high alert. You may find that it saps your energy. Eventually, your body will usually manage to relax more.

Altered eating patterns

Your appetite may change, and you may find yourself eating more or less than usual. Many people don't feel hungry and forget to eat. Some get a stomachache, and others may suffer from diarrhoea or constipation.

Grief

Grief is a powerful feeling of sadness often brought on by the loss of a loved one. Anger and relief are other common reactions to death. You may also feel grief over a future that will not be as you once expected. Grief can last a lifetime, but over time it usually becomes easier to bear.

Concentration and memory

When you are in a crisis, it may be more difficult to focus on everyday tasks. A lack of concentration can affect your ability to work, study, or drive a car. Many people also find it hard to focus in social situations.

In a crisis, it's also normal to forget completely ordinary things. You may find it difficult to remember appointments or what was said in a conversation, or forget to get off the bus at your stop or what you intended to buy at the supermarket.

Physical reactions

When something serious or difficult happens, your body can react in different ways. You may start to feel shaky, sweaty, or nauseous. Sometimes you might feel faint or get a piercing headache. Your heart can start racing, and you may feel pressure in your chest.

Your neck or shoulder muscles may feel stiff or sore. This is completely normal. These are all ways that your body tackles a difficult situation.

Sleeping problems

It's normal to have sleep-related issues. Perhaps you wake up frequently in the night, have nightmares, or need to sleep more than usual. A brief period of bad sleep isn't dangerous. But if your sleeping problems last a long time, you should talk to your doctor.

What can help in the immediate aftermath of a crisis?

- Seek out the company of someone you trust
- Do something enjoyable with others
- Be careful about sharing details of the event. It's better to wait until the day after it happened
- Remember to eat and stay hydrated, even if you don't feel hungry or thirsty
- Wait to sleep until at least 6 hours after the incident. This will prevent bad memories of what has happened from taking hold
- It's normal to not get much sleep the first night. This is your body's way of processing the crisis. It isn't dangerous
- Be careful with intoxicating substances and medications
- Don't talk to journalists. Wait until you are in control and have had time to reflect
- Be careful about what you share on social media. It could be difficult to delete it later



Photo: Pexels, Cottonbro Studio

What can help you deal with daily life?

- Try to stick to the same daily routines you had before the crisis. Go to bed and wake up at the same times as before. Eat and hydrate at regular intervals, even if you don't feel hungry
- Be kind to yourself. Take breaks when you need them. Do things you enjoy, like going to the gym, hiking, or spending time with friends
- It's up to you to decide who you want to talk to about what has happened. Remember that friends can also help you take your mind off the incident
- Accept practical help and support from your loved ones
- Don't use drugs or alcohol to feel better. In the long run, they can wind up making you feel worse
- Go back to school or work as soon as you feel ready. Talk to your manager or teacher if you need extra support. It's okay if you can't handle everything at home, at work, or at school as well as you could before the crisis
- It's also normal for sad thoughts or feelings to come and go. With the support of those around you, daily life will gradually become easier
- If you continue to feel bad, you should talk to your doctor



How do children normally react to a crisis?

Children's reactions to a crisis are often different than adults'. They may react by vacillating between seeming happy and suddenly becoming sad or angry. When a child doesn't completely understand what has happened, this can cause strong reactions. It can sometimes take time for a child to show their reactions. All kids are different. There's no "right" or "wrong" here.

Some children may regress and act the way they did when they were younger. They might talk less, start having potty accidents, or forget things they once knew how to do. They can also develop sleeping problems or have bad dreams and nightmares.

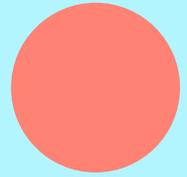
Give the child an opportunity to attend a funeral or memorial service, so that they can say goodbye or understand that someone has died. Explain to the child how such an event will unfold. This will make them feel more secure in the situation. Also talk to the child afterwards about how it felt to participate. Answer any questions they have.

Children are good at adapting and getting through tough times. The most important thing is that they feel secure and have adults who look after them. If you are finding it difficult to take care of your child in the wake of a crisis, ask for help.

What can you do to help a child feel secure?

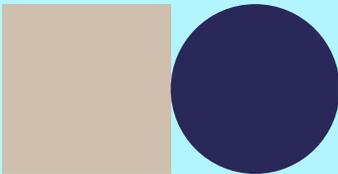
- Act calm around the child
- Allow the child to spend time with people they trust, especially when you need a break
- Give the child a simple explanation of what has happened. You don't need to tell them everything, but be honest
- Answer the child's questions
- Children can handle seeing that adults are sad. Explain why
- Keep track of how the child is doing. Talk about thoughts and feelings
- Tell the child that it is not their fault that something bad has happened
- Stick to daily routines. Allow the child to attend school and participate in leisure activities
- Have a dialogue with the child's preschool, health centre, or school, so you can team up to support them
- Allow the child to participate in funerals or memorial services, if they want to

How do adolescents normally react to a crisis?



Adolescents can react both like adults and like children. It can take time before they understand what has happened and manage to sort out their thoughts and feelings regarding the crisis. For adolescents in crisis, it can be difficult to spend time with friends, concentrate on schoolwork, or participate in activities the way they did before. Adolescents try to handle most things on their own. Still, it is important that adults show them care and offer support, even if they don't ask for it.

Adolescents need clear information about a crisis. It can be a good idea to help an adolescent shield themselves or take a break from the news and social media. Be there for them, talk together, and answer their questions honestly. If you're worried about an adolescent, it can be wise to contact someone who can help, such as their doctor or the school health service.





How can you help adolescents feel secure?

- Tell the adolescent what has happened in a way they understand
- Listen to what they share about their feelings and thoughts
- Answer all their questions honestly
- Show the adolescent that you care and are there for them
- Stick to daily routines
- Keep track of their sleeping habits and make sure they are eating
- Encourage physical activity. It helps alleviate stress and anxiety
- Be patient
- Talk to the adolescent about what they read and write on social media
- Advise them against listening to or spreading information that may be false
- Talk to their teacher or school counsellor, so you can support the adolescent together. Remember that the adolescent must give their consent



What is important for family and friends to keep in mind when supporting a person in crisis?

Family and friends should contact the person in crisis themselves and cooperate to support and care for them. It can be good to know there is someone who can help when needed. For example, you can make everyday life easier by helping with practical chores, such as housework, making meals, shopping, picking up a child from preschool, or accompanying them to a leisure activity.

Friends and family may sometimes find that the person in crisis doesn't want to interact with them. In such cases, it is important to be patient and try again a little later. Don't wait too long to re-establish contact.

People going through a crisis often find that the people start paying less attention to them as time goes on. Many then find themselves alone with their grief and emotions. At times like this, support from family and friends is especially important.







Contact information

The Psychosocial Emergency Service is Oslo Municipality's Psychosocial Crisis Team. We also offer local crisis follow-up in all the city's municipalities.

Psychosocial Emergency Service

Telephone: 23 04 05 00

Location: Legevakten Trondheimsveien 233, Building 40

The Psychosocial Emergency Service at the Oslo Accident and Outpatient Clinic (Legevakten) and our local psychosocial crisis teams offer people involved in crises, their relatives, witnesses, and helpers advice, guidance, and counselling. No physician's referral is needed, and the service is free of charge.

For information and advice about how to handle reactions in the aftermath of a crisis, visit our website.

www.oslo.kommune.no/kriseteam

www.kriser.no

www.ung.no/psykisk/Sorg-og-krise

Download the SMART stress management app

www.rvtsost.no/verktoy/smart-appen

