



News Release

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Experts Offer Advice for Employees Coping with Tragedy

Tampa, Fla. (September 13, 2001) —Wood & Associates, a Tampa-based employee assistance and behavioral health consulting firm, has seen an increased use of its services since the terrorist attacks on New York and Washington, DC.

“We’re on high alert,” said Patricia N. Alexander, Ph.D., a licensed mental health counselor with extensive training in critical incident stress management. “People in the Tampa Bay Area have lost family members or friends, or are still waiting to hear about missing loved ones. We always advise people in these situations to reach out and speak to someone who has experience treating grief and loss, particularly traumatic loss.”

“Even people who are not directly affected can begin to experience distress, through constant exposure to news and as they try to explain the tragedy to their children,” added Gary L. Wood, Psy.D., clinical occupational psychologist and founder of Wood & Associates. “In some cases people may feel it’s more than they can handle on their own. Through our employee assistance program (EAP) relationships with employers, we are able to provide counseling to these individuals and their families.”

A critical incident is defined as an event where normal people are exposed to abnormal situations, said Alexander. There are two basic types of reactions—a grief reaction and a potential trauma reaction.

“Initially,” said Alexander, “people will experience feelings of numbness, shock, denial, a sense of disbelief, a feeling that ‘this can’t be happening.’ At this point they put an emphasis on physical safety and seek to

reconnect with loved ones, look after their physical well being, and take care of basic needs.

Following these initial reactions, people may begin to experience additional emotional, mental, behavioral and physical effects.” There is also a spiritual dimension to a traumatic experience, she said. “Many people will question the meaning of life at times like this, and wonder how God could let something like this happen. It’s important to understand that these doubts and questions are normal.”

Emotional signs of trauma may include anxiety, loss of emotional control, lack of capacity for enjoyment or feelings of helplessness. Among the signs that may indicate mental functioning is impaired are confusion, poor concentration, nightmares and the inability to make decisions. Behavior changes may include withdrawal from others, substance abuse, decreased personal hygiene and appetite disturbance. Physical symptoms such as fatigue, rapid breathing, chest pain, headaches or dizziness may also signal a stress reaction.

Tips for Getting Through Trauma

Alexander offered tips for individuals who may find it difficult to deal with the emotional aftershocks of critical incidents.

- Recognize that having a roller coaster of emotions is normal following a traumatic event.
- Avoid the use of alcohol or drugs to self-medicate or numb your feelings.
- Participate in support activities (prayer services, counseling, stress management programs).
- Try to keep your routine as normal as possible and include recreational activities.
- Focus on nutrition and for a period of time, eat healthier. Reduce your intake of high-carbohydrate foods and sugar.
- Exercise as medically appropriate. This can reduce acute stress reactions.
- Try to reduce constant exposure to news media so you don’t re-live the crisis repeatedly.

- Do not isolate yourself.

(This information is not intended to serve as medical advice. If you have physical symptoms that trouble you, seek a physician's advice.)

When helping children deal with traumatic events, it's important to remember that they look to adults for cues on how to cope. This is the time to give them plenty of extra reassurance, said Alexander, and to keep explanations as simple and concrete as possible, in terms they can understand. Be aware, too, that children do not have the capacity to handle long periods of intense emotion, so try to get their schedules back to normal as soon as possible.

For many people, following basic advice will help stress symptoms subside. "The key is to understand that there is going to be a time frame where emotions will go up and down, and this is to be expected," said Wood. "But if the symptoms become too intense to handle, they should seek out an EAP with training and experience in helping people work their way through grief, loss and trauma."

Click here to go to 3 articles provided by the [International Critical Incident Stress Foundation \(ICISF\)](#) that will provide further information to help adults and children cope with the tragedy of terrorist attacks

About Wood & Associates

Wood & Associates is an employee assistance and behavioral health consulting firm that helps employers maintain productivity, safety and behavioral health in the workplace. Wood & Associates is a pioneer in the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) industry and has served employers and employees in the greater Tampa Bay area and elsewhere since 1982. The firm's diverse group of clients includes a number of major employers who also contract for its mental health and substance abuse services.

Patricia N. Alexander earned a Ph.D. in mental health counseling at the University of Florida. Trained in critical incident stress management through the International Critical Incident Stress Foundation, she is a Florida licensed mental health counselor and nationally certified counselor. Through her work experience she has addressed all types of critical incident situations, including explosions, multiple homicides, suicides, line-of-duty deaths, serious accidents and robberies. Alexander conducts training on stress management for law enforcement and businesses, and has developed peer support programs for law enforcement and industry.

Gary L. Wood, Psy.D., founder of the Wood & Associates consulting practice, is a pioneer in the field of Employee Assistance Program (EAP) services. Since 1979, his practice has centered on providing solutions to employee and organizational problems. Wood is a licensed clinical psychologist, a member of The National Register of Health Service Providers in Psychology, and a graduate of Rutgers University, West Georgia College and Mercer University.