

# Micro-Skills with Big Impact During and After a Critical Incident

*Stephen Thompson, MA, CCWS, CHRS, EdD(ABD)*

Director of Global Programs & Impact

In the wake of a critical incident, whether a sudden traumatic event, emergency, or a challenging workplace experience, our mental and emotional resilience is often put to the test. Small, intentional actions—or "micro-skills"—can have a powerful impact on your ability to manage stress and support your well-being during and after such incidents. This guide offers simple, practical skills that you can use to support yourself and others in maintaining resilience and promoting recovery.

## Micro Skills for During a Critical Incident

### 1. Focus on Your Breathing

- Take slow, deep breaths to help calm your nervous system. Focus on inhaling through your nose, holding briefly, and exhaling slowly through your mouth. This technique helps manage immediate stress and maintain clarity.

### 2. Ground Yourself

- Engage your senses to bring yourself to the present moment. Notice and name things you can see, hear, touch, or smell. Grounding techniques reduce feelings of overwhelm and promote a sense of control.

### 3. Use Self-Talk to Maintain Calm

- Reassure yourself with phrases like, "I can handle this" or "I am doing my best in this moment." Positive self-talk can help manage fear and anxiety, allowing you to stay focused on what needs to be done.

### 4. Take Brief Physical Actions

- Stretch, stand up, or move around if possible. Small physical actions can release built-up tension and improve your focus.

### 5. Reach Out for Immediate Support

- If you're able, connect briefly with a trusted colleague or friend. Even a short conversation can provide safety and validation during a critical moment.

## Micro Skills for After a Critical Incident

### 1. Practice Reflective Breathing

- Continue with deep breathing exercises to help process the emotional impact. Set aside time to focus on your breath, even if it's just a few minutes daily. Reflective breathing can aid in emotional release and mental clarity.

### 2. Decompress with Grounding Exercises

- After the incident, grounding can help with the emotional and mental impact. Practice mindfulness by focusing on your environment's sounds, textures, or sensations. Grounding helps in resetting and staying connected to the present.

### 3. Talk About Your Experience

- Contact a trusted colleague, friend, or mental health professional to share your feelings and experiences. Talking about the incident can provide emotional relief and validation, allowing you to begin processing it.

### 4. Reframe with Positive Self-Talk

- Remind yourself of your strengths and abilities. Statements like "I managed this as best as possible" or "This experience doesn't define my ability" can support your resilience and self-esteem.

### 5. Take Gentle Physical Actions

- Engage in low-intensity physical activities like stretching, walking, or yoga. Physical movement can help release stress and restore energy after a critical event.

### 6. Prioritize Restorative Rest and Recovery

- Ensure you get sufficient sleep and take breaks as needed. Rest is critical for mental and physical recovery, helping your body and mind process the experience and restore balance.

### 7. Practice Self-Compassion

- Remind yourself that feeling a range of emotions after a critical incident is okay. Treat yourself with kindness and patience as you work through these feelings.

### 8. Reconnect with Purpose and Values

- Reflect on your core values and the purpose that drives your work. Remembering why you do what you do can provide a sense of direction and help with resilience after difficult experiences.

### **9. Set Small, Achievable Goals**

- Re-establish your routine gradually by setting small, manageable tasks for yourself. This can help you regain control and normalcy in the days following a critical incident.

### **10. Engage in a Calming Activity**

- Dedicate time to activities that help you relax and recharge, such as reading, journaling, or listening to music. These actions provide mental space to process the experience and promote emotional well-being.

## **Conclusion**

Using these micro-skills during and after a critical incident can greatly impact your resilience and recovery. These small actions help build a strong mental and emotional well-being foundation, empowering you to manage challenges effectively. Remember, resilience is not about avoiding stress but learning how to navigate it in a way that supports your overall health.

If you found this resource helpful and believe you or your organization could benefit from further support on these topics, the Headington Institute offers a range of services to meet your needs. We provide in-person and virtual workshops, webinars, psychological consultations, and leadership consultations tailored to help teams navigate high-stress environments and foster resilience.

For more information, visit our contact page at <https://www.headington-institute.org/contact/>. Current clients can email us directly at [support@headington-institute.org](mailto:support@headington-institute.org). We're here to support you.