

Managing Traumatic Events at Work Information Sheet

This leaflet is designed for anyone who has recently experienced a traumatic event or ‘critical incident’ at work. A **critical incident** can be defined as any event that has a stressful impact sufficient enough to overwhelm the usually effective coping skills of an individual. Following or during a challenging experience you may be faced with a number of different reactions. It is very common to experience strong emotions and stress reactions following a traumatic event.

Sometimes, the stress reactions appear immediately after the event and other times they may appear a few hours or a few days later especially if you are required to continue working after an incident. In some cases, weeks or months may pass before a stress reaction appears which is known as a ‘delayed reaction’.

Everyone responds differently following traumatic events. Most people will return to their ‘normal’ after a few weeks and find stress reactions are reducing however for some people the event can become ‘stuck’ and more support may be needed to work through the event in order to process it. This can happen for many reasons including the severity of the incident, timing of the incident, exposure to stressful events leading up to the incident or following it, own exposure to past trauma and ways of coping.

People working in health professions are often expected, and expect of themselves to be self-reliant and cope in the face of emotionally challenging work. However, if left unattended the impact of these events can have long lasting effects on the individual.

Here are some common signs of a stress reaction:

PHYSICAL	COGNITIVE	EMOTIONAL	BEHAVIOURAL
Fatigue	Blaming someone	Anxiety	Withdrawal
Nausea	Confusion	Guilt	Isolation
Muscle tremors	Difficult to make	Grief	Emotional outbursts
Rapid heart rate	decisions or	Denial	Suspiciousness
Aches and pains	concentrate	Fear	Increased use of
Headaches	Heightened alertness	Uncertainty	alcohol
Visual difficulties	Poor	Loss of emotional	Inability to relax
Dizziness	problem-solving	control	Startle response
Sweating		Depression	Pacing
Shock symptoms		Feeling overwhelmed	Difficulty sleeping
		Intense anger	Avoidance of
		Irritability	situations/ people/
		Agitation	objects

Helpful Hints for Managing a Traumatic Incident

Tips for yourself:

- Give yourself time to process the incident.
- You may find yourself feeling emotionally and physically drained - rest when you need to.
- Speak with family and friends or people that you feel safe with or try keeping a diary of how you are feeling.
- Re-occurring thoughts, dreams or intrusive visual images of the event are normal - they are your brain's way of trying to process the experience. If this is distressing try to ground yourself in the present moment by looking around and noticing what you can see, hear, smell and touch or try some slow deep breaths.
- Focus on your basic needs, eat well balanced and regular meals (even if you don't feel like it).
- Do things that feel good to you, for example, go for a walk, listen to music, take baths, read, exercise and spend time with people who make you feel safe. It is likely you will need to engage more in looking after yourself at this time.
- Try to keep a reasonable level of activity - physical exercise is often helpful.
- Re-establish a normal a schedule as soon as possible e.g. eating meals at regular times, going back to work (if that's right for you), or daily responsibilities at home.
- Allow yourself to cry, rage, etc. and express your feelings when you need to.
- Try not to numb your feelings with alcohol, drugs as this will only complicate the situation.
- Avoid making major life decisions as this time as this will only add to the stress you may currently be feeling.
- Have a look online: <https://secondvictim.co.uk/>

If symptoms last more than four weeks or are particularly severe then seek help via:

- **LTHT Staff Psychological Support Service.** Email: leedsth-tr.staffsupport@nhs.net
- **LTHT Embedded staff support Psychologists** can be contacted through the respective CSUs or email leedsth-tr.staffsupport@nhs.net to find out if you have a staff psychologist embedded in your CSU.
- **LTHT Employee Assistance Programme (Care First)** - confidential telephone counselling 24/7 and face to face sessions - call 0800 174319.
- **West Yorkshire Mental Health and Wellbeing Hub for staff:** <https://wystaffwellbeinghub.co.uk/> or call 0800 183 1488
- Your GP

More information on Trust support services is available on the staff intranet.

Tips for colleagues or friends:

- Offer your assistance and a listening ear but don't put pressure on them to talk. You are unlikely to be able to 'fix it' for them or take away their difficult thoughts and feelings but listening and being there for them can still be very valuable.
- Spend time with the person. Follow their lead in what they want to do or talk about.
- Reassure them they are safe.
- Help with everyday tasks that may have become difficult.
- Give them space when they need it.
- Try not to take their anger or other feelings personally.
- If you can, help them to work out where to get further support if they need it.