



# Responding To Traumatic Events

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Guide for Managers



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Whenever a traumatic incident occurs which impacts on employees, there will be many things to consider in response. Employees will react in different ways, and managers will want to provide appropriate assistance when needed. Your Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) is there as a resource to support you and your employees throughout. Here are some frequently asked questions which we can address:

## **1. As a manager, what should I do first?**

- Stay calm and try to maintain stability in this unstable and chaotic time. Follow your organisation's internal emergency or contingency plan if you have one, as this will activate appropriate staff and resources needed to address the incident. Keep information and communication lines open, as people will begin to deal with the emotional aspects immediately - and accurate information can assist that process.
- The first 24 hours are generally a "standing down" period where management should ensure that all staff are communicated with, that everyone is accounted for and safe, and that all work functions are reviewed for continuity.
- Remind staff that their EAP is available on a 24/7 basis and they can access this via telephone, email, online, or through instant messaging.
- Should you require any assistance or guidance in the implementation of the above actions, please contact your EAP directly and speak to one of our counsellors.

## **2. How will employees react, and what should management's response be?**

- Everyone reacts somewhat differently to traumatic events, so sensitivity to those differences should be maintained. In the early hours after a traumatic event, most individuals will want to access natural supports such as family, friends or close colleagues, rather than structured external counselling.



- Standard clinical guidance on trauma states that: The vast majority of people exposed to traumatic events will tap their inner resilience and coping mechanisms and will recover within 4-6 weeks of the event without the need for clinical intervention.
- Employees will want to know that management is supportive and flexible regarding their immediate needs – and they will want constructive information about what has happened and what the next steps are. Offer the EAP contact details as a resource for 24/7 support in the initial stage.

- You can also notify your EAP of the details of the incident so that our telephone counsellors are aware when employees call in. Depending upon the situation, you may also want to arrange on-site support as a follow-up to the incident (details below).
- If you notice that certain employees are not coping well, you can easily refer them to the EAP for support.

### **3. What additional EAP services are available?**

Your EAP can organise a number of options in addition to the standard 24/7 support with referrals to counselling. These options (which may be subject to additional fees) include the following:

#### **Onsite defusing/psychological first aid**

A specialist trauma counsellor from the EAP can come to the work location within the initial 24 hour period (same day). They can assist with the standing down process for management and offer psychological first aid to employees, as well as provide information on normal responses and reactions to trauma.

Counsellors who come on-site can do the following:

- Meet with management to review the situation and discuss reactions to trauma.
- Offer practical assistance and information to help employees address their immediate needs and concerns and to normalise their reactions to the event.
- Offer ventilation of emotion, support coping efforts and strengths, and encourage individuals to take an active role in their recovery.
- Connect employees as soon as possible to social support networks, including family members, friends, neighbours, and community resources.



### **Drop-in crisis counselling for individuals and small groups**

This includes a trained trauma counsellor coming on-site to provide counselling, as needed, for individuals or small groups in an unstructured manner. The counsellor will assist employees in the normalisation of emotions and how to move towards closure. This support would occur typically 24-48 hours after an event has occurred.

### **Group crisis intervention**

This activity may be appropriate for a group of employees if they have been exposed to a traumatic incident on the same scale and in generally the same circumstances as one another (e.g. an explosion, robbery or death of a team member). This support would be offered after Workplace Options' clinical staff have assessed the situation and deem it to be an appropriate option. The intervention would be in a group format lasting approximately 1.5-2 hours, led by a trained trauma specialist, and would always be voluntary. The session would generally not occur prior to 48-72 hours following an event.

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