



Support for Managers After an incident – what next?

Humans have a remarkable resilience; we often learn quite early in life that adversity is something to be experienced and managed, and this is coupled with an innate survival instinct – we take the physical and psychological steps necessary to improve our survival chances, and it can sometimes be a source of surprise that events which on paper might indicate a protracted recovery programme can appear to be overcome quite rapidly.

Recovery from traumatic incidents can be very swift or it can, in some cases, be quite long term. As a general guide, if you find that you are still severely affected after a month or so you should probably consider seeking some professional help. This may come via the Employee Assistance Programme, or it may be through your GP or another helping agency. The most important thing is not to pretend everything is fine when it isn't.

One of the key factors of this psychological survival process is that it is not necessarily linear – people don't just get a bit better each day until they are fully recovered. It has been demonstrated many times that dealing with trauma is a multi-stage process that may include taking some apparent backward steps along the way. It is also a mistake to believe that you “should be over it by now”.

Read this leaflet, and allow the recovery process to begin.

What happens to people after a disaster or other traumatic event?

Shock and denial are typical responses to trauma, especially shortly after the event.

Shock is a sudden and often intense disturbance of your emotional state that may leave you feeling stunned or dazed. Denial involves you not acknowledging that something very stressful has happened, or not experiencing fully the intensity of the event. You may temporarily feel numb or disconnected from events around you. As the initial shock subsides, reactions vary from one person to another. The following, however, are normal responses to a traumatic event:

- Feelings become intense and sometimes are unpredictable.
- Thoughts and behaviour patterns are affected by the trauma.
- You may find it difficult to concentrate, make decisions or become more easily confused. Sleep and eating patterns may be disrupted.
- Interpersonal relationships often become strained.
- Physical symptoms may accompany the extreme stress. For example, headaches, nausea and chest pain may result and may require medical attention. Pre-existing medical conditions may worsen.

After an incident – what next?

- Helplessness. Faced with a trauma, many of us are forced to face our limitations in a way that puts us in touch with unpleasant realisations about our lack of strength and invulnerability, not to mention our sense of permanence.

“What if...” fantasies can follow. People will take what happened and extend it to what might have happened.

How could I help myself?

There are a number of steps you can take to help restore emotional well-being and a sense of control following a traumatic experience, including the following:

- Give yourself time to heal. Anticipate that this may be a difficult time in your life. Try to be patient with changes in your emotional state.
- Ask for support from people who care about you and who will listen and empathise with your situation. But keep in mind that your normal support system may be weakened if those who are close to you also have experienced or witnessed the trauma - communicate your experience in whatever ways feel comfortable to you – such as by talking with family or close friends, or keeping a diary.
- Find out about local support groups that are available
- Try to find groups led by appropriately trained and experienced professionals. Group discussion can help people realise that other individuals in the same circumstances often have similar reactions and emotions.
- Engage in healthy behaviours to enhance your ability to cope with excessive stress. Eat well-balanced meals and get plenty of rest. If you experience ongoing difficulties with sleep, you may be able to find some relief through relaxation techniques. Avoid alcohol and drugs.

In addition to your EAP, here are some other support services:

The Samaritans: 08457 90 90 90 www.samaritans.org

Assist: Post-trauma Support: 01788 560 800 www.assisttraumacare.org.uk/

Amina Muslim Women’s Resources Centre: 0141 212 8420 www.mwrc.org.uk

SCARD: Road Crash support: 0845 123 5542 www.scard.org.uk

Child Death Helpline: 0800 282 986 www.childdeathhelpline.org.uk

SAMM (Support after Murder & Manslaughter): 0845 872 3440 www.samm.org.uk

Survivors of Bereavement by Suicide: 0300 111 5065 www.uk-sobs.org.uk