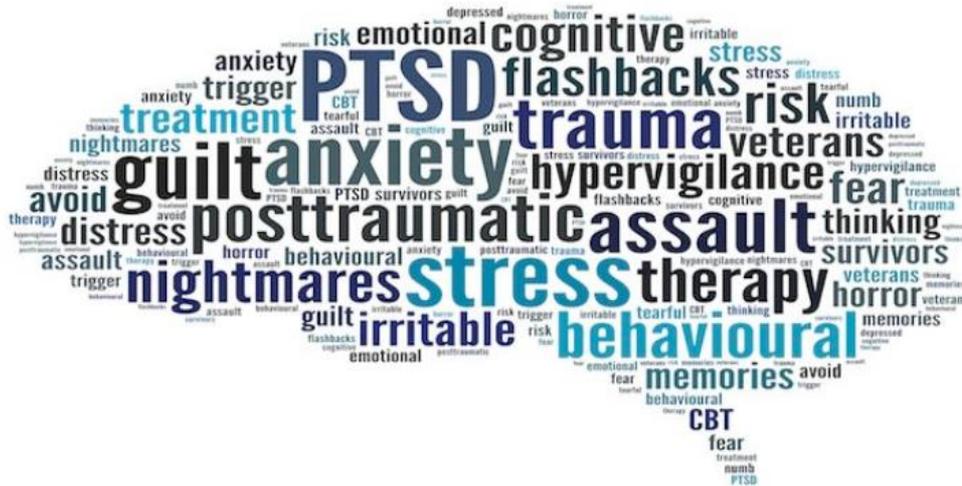


## Tips For Managers & HR In Assisting Employees Post Trauma



Many staff have been affected by the recent tragic events and will no doubt find it difficult to initially return to normal work practices, having to manager their own reactions and deal with needs of customers. Staff may exhibit a number of reactions to the event and any other associated events. Outlined below are some helpful tips and information to help prepare you for likely responses from your team.

### Recovering from Traumatic Events

Immediately following a traumatic event, people are likely to experience strong reactions. They may experience feelings such as fear, sadness, guilt and anger and question their beliefs – about their safety, how much control they have of their lives and how predictable the world really is. For most, these reactions will gradually decrease over time, but for some they could go on to develop Depression, Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), Acute Stress Disorder (ASD) and an exaggeration of pre-existing psychological problems.

Here are some common signs and symptoms of traumatic stress reactions

<b>Physical Reactions</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Fatigue/ Exhaustion</li> <li>➤ Disturbed sleep</li> <li>➤ Nausea/ digestive problems</li> <li>➤ Headaches and/or muscle aches</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Nightmares/ bad dreams</li> <li>➤ Hyperactivity/ restlessness</li> <li>➤ Startle reactions</li> <li>➤ Excessive alertness/ jumpiness</li> </ul>
<b>Cognitive Reactions</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Difficulty with concentration</li> <li>➤ Difficulty solving problems</li> <li>➤ Flashbacks/ intrusive thoughts</li> <li>➤ Preoccupied with the event</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Difficulty making decisions</li> <li>➤ Memory disturbance</li> <li>➤ Disorientation/ Confusion</li> <li>➤ Reduced attention span</li> </ul>
<b>Emotional Reactions</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Fear</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Anxiety/ Panic</li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Guilt</li> <li>➤ Emotional numbing</li> <li>➤ Over-sensitivity</li> <li>➤ Anger/ Blame</li> <li>➤ Avoiding certain places or activities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Depression</li> <li>➤ Feelings of helplessness</li> <li>➤ Blocking out the event</li> <li>➤ Tearful</li> <li>➤ Withdrawn from others</li> </ul>
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These are normal reactions; however individuals differ in terms of the prevalence, intensity and duration of symptoms. Although some of these symptoms can be distressing or painful, they are part of the natural healing process and helpful to readjust and come to terms with what has occurred.

### Recovery Cycle

- Most people will recover with the support of their family, friends, workmates and managers; especially if they are supported in their return to a normal routine and will not need professional help.
- Recovery is not something that happens all at once, nor is it straightforward.
- News coverage of the event or similar events or going through a major life change extend the recovery period.
- If someone appears very distressed or his or her reactions are interfering with work and relationships, it is important to encourage the employee to seek the support of a health professional or to contact the Employee Assistance Program.

### Managers can assist in reducing the impact of the traumatic experience by:

- Promoting an open and positive atmosphere in their team
- 'Accepting' staff where they are in their recovery cycle – not everyone will cope and respond the same way
- Try to focus on other positive aspects of the workplace to promote balance
- Being willing to listen to their staff in a supportive way – you don't have to solve the problem
- Offering time for staff to talk through their concerns
- Try to be flexible with work hours and tasks if possible to allow staff their own space to return to a normal routine.
- Encourage staff to access their supports with family, friends and other work colleagues to help share their burden.

### Managers are often the first to notice 'problems' in their staff members. Some warning signs to look out for in staff are:

- Being constantly on edge or irritable
- Having difficulty performing tasks at work
- Changes in motivation and energy towards tasks
- Significant swings in emotional display
- Being unusually busy in an obvious attempt to avoid issues
- Talk of using alcohol, drugs or gambling to cope

- Sleep disturbance, insomnia, nightmares or other sleep difficulties
- Continued revisiting and discussion of the event
- Appears disengaged, withdrawn or unable to focus
- Exhibits changed behavior compared to before the trauma
- Having thoughts of self-harm

### Who is at greatest risk?

Whilst most of those exposed to traumas adapt and cope successfully, indicators of those at greater risk of longer term problems include:

- Direct exposure to life threat
- Victim of physical violence during the event
- Bereavement – either as a direct result of the event or in the immediate year prior
- Prior/Current mental health concerns
- Poor support networks
- Previous trauma exposure, especially in childhood

### Who cares for the Manager?

Remember you too may have experienced the same event as your staff members and therefore must care for yourself. It's important you practice your own recovery actions and self-care strategies

- Take some time out for yourself
- Balance the time supporting your team and yourself
- Manage your workflow to ensure it meets your current capacity
- Debrief with other colleagues after difficult conversations with your staff

If there are issues that you need assistance with for either yourself or a team member phone the EAP and helpful advice can be given over the phone if necessary.

**If you feel you would like to learn how to manage your own wellbeing, debrief, talk about your situation or seek assistance on how you can provide support to colleagues**

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