

Trauma Response

HOW DO YOU FEEL?

An event just occurred. It is unexpected, certainly senseless and sometimes violent. It affects you, the victim, and your co-workers. This single incident can take away your sense of security and well being; and will, for a short time, impair your ability to function normally.

COMMON REACTIONS:

You may experience one or more of the following reactions...

A. Physical:

- Changes in appetite
- Chest pain
- Dizzy spells
- Headaches
- Heart palpitation
- Insomnia/nightmares
- Lack of energy
- Neck and back pain
- Restlessness
- Shaky feeling

B. Emotional:

- Anger/rage
- Anxiety or helplessness
- Denial
- Easy startled
- Flashbacks
- Heightened level of suspicion
- Inability to concentrate
- Irritability
- Overprotection of children
- Lack of interest in intimacy
- Losing trust in those you've trusted
- Loss of interest in sex

C. Changes at work:

- Daydreaming
- Decrease in quality of work
- Distraction
- Forgetfulness
- Making small errors
- Reluctance to go back to work
- Repetition of work task already done
- Tendency to over-work

D. Things you can do:

One or more of the following tips may help you get through the period following the trauma event:

- Avoid excess caffeine or alcohol.
- Drink lots of water.
- Get a good night's sleep.
- Include fiber and green vegetables in your meals.
- Participate in moderate exercise; take a walk at lunch/break.
- Discuss the group process with your supervisor scheduling a structured daily routine.
- Encourage yourself to go back to work.
- Keep to your normal routine as much as possible.
- Maintain regular activities outside of your home (i.e. work, errands appointments, volunteer work, sports, etc).
- Maintain social activities-do not isolate yourself.
- Return physical surroundings to its original appearance.
- Talk about the specifics of the event with your friends, family and co-workers - tell them it's important for you to talk it out.
- Take a warm (not hot) bath.
- Write down your thoughts.

D. Support the family can give:

- **LISTEN.** Encourage openness and listen to whatever they need to say, however many times it needs to be said. Don't give a lot of advice, just listen. Don't minimize. Remember, the person needs to repeat the story.
- **CONTROL YOUR REACTIONS.** Maintain focus on what actually occurred, and how the person is feeling.
- **ENCOURAGE YOUR FAMILY MEMBER TO GO BACK TO WORK.** Although he or she may feel like quitting, it will not change what has already happened and may prevent full recovery.
- **INCLUDE THE WHOLE FAMILY IN THE HEALING PROCESS.** Include all family members in discussions so that they can gain perspective and cope with their feelings as well as the person affected.
- **WATCH FOR SIGNS OF STRAIN IN YOUR RELATIONSHIP.** Marital problems are common after a traumatic event. Family members can access counselling through your Employee Assistance program.
- **TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF.** Don't take more than you can handle to support and protect the affected family member. Ask your friends and other family members to help.

F. Support a co-worker can give:

- **ACKNOWLEDGE THE EVENT.** Don't pretend it didn't happen. Be an attentive listener. Don't ask a lot of questions; let your co-worker set the pace.
- **OFFER LONG-TERM SUPPORT.** There is no set recovery period for this type of experience.
- **OFFER PRACTICAL SUPPORT.** "Do you want some company at lunch?" or "would you like a ride home?" rather than "let me know if I can help."
- **BE OBSERVANT.** Look for signs of prolonged emotional distress (more than 4 to 6 weeks). Suggest additional support or counselling if this distress remains.

Access your EFAP 24/7 by phone or web.

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