




**University  
Hospitals Sussex**  
NHS Foundation Trust

# Psychological Support for Staff following a Traumatic Incident



You may have been involved in a traumatic incident at work which was highly stressful. There is no clear definition of what a traumatic incident is and all of us are affected differently by different situations.

It is normal to have a whole host of feelings following a traumatic incident.

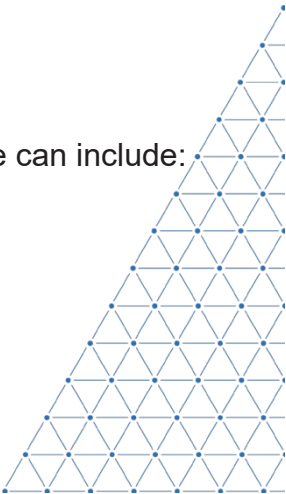
Your reaction may be worse if:


- you doubt your contribution
- feel unsupported in your role
- you have other stresses in your life
- you have experienced previous trauma

In the days following this, it is likely that you may experience some physical and emotional symptoms. These may include:

- difficulty sleeping
- palpitations
- feeling very tired
- increased irritability
- lack of interest and enjoyment

It is common that negative feelings may develop, these can include:

- grief - for the loss
  - guilt - feeling you were responsible
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- shame - for not doing 'enough'
  - fear that you may experience this again
  - memories of previous incidents

Initially many people can feel quite numb to their own feelings in the immediate aftermath of an incident.

Later they often experience a 'ruminating phase'

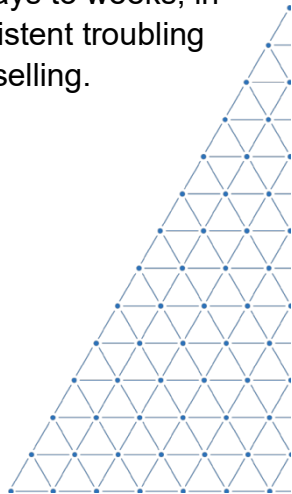
- intrusive thoughts about the incident
- going over and over what happened
- nightmares and flashbacks
- a sense of hyperarousal waiting for something to happen again.

After days-weeks you enter the 'Recovery Phase'.

You will realise that you haven't thought about this case for some time. Be mindful that the avoidance of people and places can potentially delay the recovery phase.

It is vital to remember that these symptoms are a normal part of your brain processing a stressful situation, and that within days to weeks, in the majority of individuals they will settle. Rarely if persistent troubling symptoms continue, you may benefit from formal counselling.

Most important is to look after yourself;

- talk to friends
  - eat healthily
  - take regular exercise
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- try to get good quality sleep
- avoid excessive alcohol
- avoid substance use

All of this can be mentally and emotionally very tiring and can impact upon your work and home life. People often feel more distracted and less able to concentrate.

## Talking about the incident


It is important that you allow yourself to reflect upon what happened and specially to talk about your experience with someone you trust. Ideally this would be a colleague who was involved, a neutral third party with support training (Counselling) or a close friend or family member.

Be cautious that well-meaning colleagues who were not involved may be curious and they may inadvertently make comments which you could find unhelpful or damaging.

## Writing it down

Consider writing down what happened, soon after the incident. This can be helpful in processing the incident, as well as allowing you to reflect on your role in the incident.

Sometimes statements may be required as part of investigations so having written it near to the time is beneficial as this process often takes many months and you may be able to use your notes to help you with this.



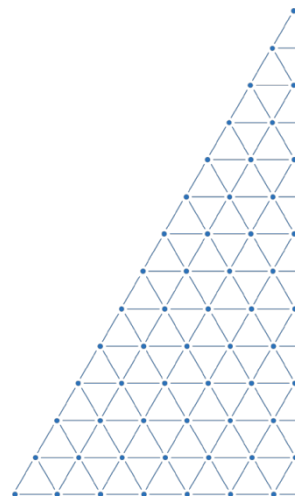
If you are worried about anything following the incident or continue to experience any of these symptoms, please do speak to your line manager, a member of your team or seek support from any of the teams listed on the back of this leaflet.

Please do not suffer in silence.

## **A note to your friends and family**

As you can see from this information leaflet, your family/friend has been involved with a very challenging situation at work. As a result of this, it is expected that they may appear more distracted than normal; they may be more irritable and need additional support both at work and at home.

Remember that these symptoms are likely to be exacerbated by difficulty sleeping, but that with time, they will pass.



# You are not alone. There are many sources of support you can access:

## Within your department:

Line Manager

Educational/clinical Supervisor

Matron/Senior Nursing Staff

## Within the Trust

Staff Psychological Support Service

**St Richard's Hospital: 01243 831624, x31624**  
[uhsussex.staffpsychologicalsupport@nhs.net](mailto:uhsussex.staffpsychologicalsupport@nhs.net)

**Worthing Hospital: 01903 205111, x85356**  
[uhsussex.staffpsychologicalsupport@nhs.net](mailto:uhsussex.staffpsychologicalsupport@nhs.net)

## Chaplaincy service:

**St Richard's Hospital x35380 or Worthing x84004**

## Other useful numbers

- **Citizen's advice bureau: 01243 784231**
- **Samaritans: 116 123**
- **NHS: 111**

