

## **Emotional Trauma and de-briefing**

### **When help is required**

### **Manager's guidance note**

#### **Introduction**

All of us will experience pain and distress at some point in our lives and the reasons behind the causes of such distress are well known i.e. divorce, moving house, bereavement etc.

However, when events happen very quickly, without warning and in circumstances that may be unexpected, people can be left feeling shocked and with a more acute level of emotional distress.

#### **Reaction to events**

Everyone reacts differently to situations-what some of us feel we can handle, others find more difficult. Previous life experiences and personality have a part to play but generally we all will feel some level of distress when we faced with a very emotionally traumatic situation i.e. death or suffering of a child, witnessing or being the victim of severe physical abuse.

#### **Signs and symptoms of emotional distress**

For those who have witnessed/been involved in the traumatic incident they may experience none or any of the following symptoms. (This list is not exhaustive and other symptoms may be prevalent):

##### **Level 1:**

Crying at regular intervals within the first week of the episode occurring

Distressing flashbacks

Fear for own safety

Loss or increase in appetite

Initial reluctance to return to environment where incident had occurred

*These symptoms usually subside within 1-2 weeks and the individual is able to resume their normal activities.*

## **Level 2:**

Crying and distress increase during and following week 1

Inability to sleep and conduct life “normally” - images of event over-shadow all activities.

Feelings of insecurity or being “at risk” of harm

Unable to conduct everyday activities and lead “normal” life

Unable to focus on anything but the event that has taken place.

Loss or increase in appetite

Signs of anxiety/depression.

## **Manager support for individual:**

### Level 1:

- Opportunity to discuss individually or as a group, feelings around the event that has occurred.
- Flexibility in working arrangements if required
- Finishing work slightly earlier than usual if required.
- Counselling not required unless individual has symptoms beyond 2 weeks or has symptoms at Level 2 status.
- Consider sanctioning absence from work for a period of 2 weeks for a complete rest from work-get advice from Occupational Health.

### Level 2:

- Continued one to one or group support
- Flexibility in working arrangements if necessary.
- Automatic referral to Occupational Health if symptoms appear to have escalated to Level 2.
- Occupational Health will provide on-going support and/or de-briefing therapy via our external provider and advise as to ongoing workplace support that may be required.

If you are in any doubt as to the actions that should be taken, after a traumatic event, please contact Occupational Health on 01422 288303 or the HR adviser for your area.