

Safer Together



MANAGING STRESS



www.psa.asn.au
www.cpsunsw.org.au

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INTRODUCTION

PSA/CPSU NSW members work in a range of New South Wales government sector agencies, state-owned corporations, universities, TAFE and non-government organisations.

It is becoming increasingly important that these workers have the skills to help them manage in the changing environment they face.

We understand that in order to best represent our members we need to invest in their professional and personal development.

The Safer Together PSA/CPSU NSW program is designed to provide practical skills to build capacity and resilience among our members.

The program is modelled on the Police Association of NSW's C.A.R.E program and the PSA/CPSU NSW thanks the Police Association for their generosity in sharing their experience and resources with our organisation.

Many of these initiatives are based on work done in Canada, including work by the Ontario Mounties, who we also acknowledge for their research, experience and resources.

The aim of this program is to provide opportunities to develop and enhance skills of delegates, HSRs and members, to not only assist them in supporting others but also assist in their day-to-day roles.

The Safer Together program is designed to align with the PSA/CPSU NSW's Mental Health strategy of prevention, harm minimisation and ongoing support for PSA/CPSU NSW members.

It is designed to assist our members to have long and successful careers and fulfilling personal lives.

- 1 Prevention**
Health and fitness, future planning, personal and professional development.

- 2 Harm Minimisation**
Including injury management, return to work and timely intervention and suicide prevention.

- 3 Ongoing Support**
Including information for families living with an injured worker.

For more information please refer to the PSA website, www.psa.asn.au and CPSU NSW website www.cpsunsw.org.au.

BEFORE WE BEGIN

The information in this booklet will detail key psychological health issues facing our members, along with strategies they can use to manage their psychological fitness throughout the course of their career.

Particularly for those in stressful front line roles where negative stressors are a constant risk factor and for others during those stressful times that occur in any role.

HERE ARE THE FACTS ABOUT STRESS

- » It's not a psychiatric condition
 - » It's not compensable
 - » It is a regular part of day to day living ... and there is good and bad stress
 - » It affects every person
 - » It can be addictive
 - » It can influence how we react, respond and interact with others
 - » Scientific study has found stress can impact our physical health. For example, cardiovascular disease, skin irritations
 - » Our stress levels vary, which can at times make us seem more intense or disengaged than we usually are
 - » Prolonged exposure to stress without intervention and effective relief may have a negative impact on a person's psychological health
-

With these points in mind, it makes good sense to understand what stress is and to actively do something about it over the course of your career.

WHAT IS STRESS?

Stress is sometimes described as feeling overloaded, wound up tight, tense or worried. Stress is normal; it is our body reacting to something in our environment or to a demand, by activating our nervous system and releasing hormones such as adrenalin and cortisol.

These hormones cause physical changes in the body, which help us to react quickly and effectively to get through the stressful situation.

Stressful events and factors that present in our environment are known as 'stressors'.

Stressors can occur in varying degrees and in varying ways and include workloads and deadlines; investigations; attending traumatic incidents such as domestic violence, witnessing a death, attending road accidents; being in conflict with a colleague; tolerating noisy workplaces OR being part of personal events, such as organising a significant family event like a wedding or birthday.

Balancing many demands across work and home life can also build stress.

A level of functional stress keeps people performing well and ready for action, aware of external pressures or

dangers and any risk or threat that presents to themselves and others. However, too much stress can negatively impact a person's health and may lead to burnout or mental health concerns such as depressive and/or anxiety related altered mood states.

That's why recognising the signs, intervening early and regularly with helpful techniques, and seeking professional support are good ways to manage stress effectively and safely.

How we react to certain demands in our lives and in our environment varies. Where a person situates their 'healthy stress level' on the continuum of stress is known as their 'internal threshold'.

This internal balance point for coping will vary from person to person. An event that bothers one person may not have the same impact on another person.

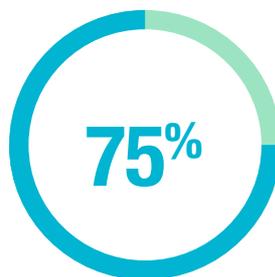
The type and number of demands also has an effect on a person's stress levels. How a person thinks and analyses the situation/s as being stressful will also largely dictate the type and severity of reactions experienced.



have taken time off work due to mental illness in the past 12 months.*



between the ages of 16-85 will experience a mental health disorder in their lifetime.*



believe workplaces should provide support to those experiencing depression or anxiety.*



believe mental health in the workplace is important.*

* Source: Beyond Blue report 2014; State of Workplace Mental Health in Australia

THE GOOD NEWS

The body is designed to adapt to a healthy level of stress. The body can respond very quickly internally and reset itself, which allows a person to show a healthy response to stress and to grow from the experience.

This is when stress is at a level that is helpful. Manageable stress is motivating and allows people to function effectively, achieve goals, complete tasks and respond quickly when necessary.

Some more good news for staying in control! The thoughts we hold and how we mentally assess situations and prepare for tasks are largely responsible for regulating our emotions.

An exception to this can be some medical conditions and drug use interactions that change our personality and how we solve problems.

A good strategy for staying healthy is to commit to being aware of negative and pessimistic thoughts and replacing the 'negativity' with more useful positive thoughts.

This strategy will go a long way to reducing overwhelming emotions.

Physical fitness and mental fitness are equally important. Actively taking care of your inner health and undertaking mind exercises to keep yourself emotionally fit are a very effective ways of managing how bothered you get over situations and by people you encounter in life.

THE 'BE AWARE' NEWS

No matter how capable you are, remember that extreme or prolonged stress and trauma are damaging to a person's wellbeing. They can impact long term on careers and personal relationships and can contribute to unwanted medical conditions.

Too much or uncontrolled stress is disruptive to anyone's life. It can alter a person's personality and cause depression or even suicidal thoughts.

It can make some people feel like they are 'losing it' and get confused over what to do next. Always remember there is hope, help and recovery to reset the imbalance in your life.

To get relief or simply find better ways for coping it is critical that we recognise the need to ask for support, whether it be from work colleagues, friends, family or health professionals.

Keep asking until you get the right type of support. Recovery is attainable and achieving what you want will continue long after any stress has been felt and appropriately dealt with.

LET'S SUMMARISE

For good psychological health:

- » Be aware of pessimistic and negative thoughts and make an effort to replace these with positive thoughts
- » Train for your mental health, just like you would with physical fitness
- » Understand how you personally function and identify helpful techniques that work for you
- » Don't be afraid to seek support from people in your life
- » Recognise that you are human and reactions to stress and trauma are healthy despite them not feeling so great
- » Early intervention is the key when you have lingering unwanted symptoms.



REMEMBER THERE IS HOPE,
HELP AND RECOVERY TO
RESET THE IMBALANCE
IN YOUR LIFE

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WHAT HAPPENS WHEN YOU ARE STRESSED?

When the level of threat or danger exceeds our own coping abilities it floods our emotions and our panic buttons go on.

Our sympathetic nervous system becomes dominant over our parasympathetic (relaxation) system, which means that chemicals called adrenaline and noradrenalin are released and trigger the body to respond and prepare for a 'fight' or 'flight' or 'freeze' response.

These responses to threat can be useful in many situations of danger to act swiftly and remove a person from harm – such as fleeing an attacker or retreating from a violent situation.

It's good to use these instinctual feelings when facing dangerous situations.

In other instances, the overwhelming flooding of stress may signal to our brain to invoke a fear based response and a person may freeze, for example, when confronting an attacker.

Common signs of a stress reaction:

PHYSICAL REACTIONS

- » Breathing rate increases
- » Heartbeat becomes faster and stronger creating greater awareness of it
- » Blood pressure increases
- » Muscles tense ready for action
- » Sweating increases to cool the body
- » Blood diverts to body's emergency functions
- » Non-emergency functions close down: digestion, skin perfusion, sexual activity.

AFTER THE THREAT HAS GONE WHAT SHOULD HAPPEN?

- » Breathing and heart rate slows down
- » Blood pressure reduces, muscles relax
- » Thinking broadens and becomes less extreme
- » Feelings are less extreme.



PHYSICAL EFFECTS WHEN SYMPATHETIC NERVOUS SYSTEM IS DOMINANT

- » Insomnia
- » Restlessness
- » Digestive upsets
- » Palpitations
- » Increased blood pressure
- » Muscle aches may be present
- » Immune system breaks down and person may be sick more regularly
- » Headaches
- » Lack of interest in usual activities.

INCREASES THE RISK OF

- » Heart disease
- » Hypertension
- » Stroke
- » Physical and emotional exhaustion.

PSYCHOLOGICAL EFFECTS

- » Distraction/lack of concentration
- » Difficulty setting priorities and making decisions
- » Short-term memory and impaired ability to learn new information
- » Heightened sense of awareness, startle responses
- » Increased irritability
- » Withdrawn socially
- » Diminished attention to dress and personal hygiene.

The majority of general stress related symptoms should resolve within a week or so.

However, if they continue for more than ten days, it is time to intervene.

Find out what's going on and how to manage things differently.

Stress reactions can't be maintained for long periods without exhausting your body.

You will feel low in energy and fatigued, with impaired work performance.

WORKING IN HIGH RISK ROLES

There are a number of high risk occupations undertaken by PSA/CPSU NSW members. Here are some common reactions that tend to be reported more by workers in high risk roles, as a result of the job demands and requirements of their role eg Correctives and Juvenile Justice Officers, frontline Community Service Caseworkers, Sheriffs.

The key point here is to be mindful of these reactions and commit to making a personal effort to modify your responses when they become too intense and harmful.

If you notice these reactions creeping up on you, then plan to do something about it in order to stay emotionally fit.

REDUCED TOLERANCE AND QUICK TO ANGER?

Do little things get on your nerves? Are you short-tempered with others? Are these types of reactions present more often than not in your life?

Workers in these high risk roles often talk about having to tolerate bad behaviour and negative attitudes from the general public.

Trying to stay in control while being regularly exposed to this bad behaviour and verbal abuse can result in the worker's personal unwanted emotions being suppressed and stifled.

Holding on to your own anger and frustrations too much, without using strategies that give you regular and ongoing relief from them, can mean a build-up of unwanted effects for you and those you care about.

Suppressing your emotions too much and too often can mean that the little things in life become bigger than they really are. Anger may surface making it look like you have blown things out of proportion. The target of your frustration may not really be where your anger is coming from.

Not dealing with negative emotions over the course of your career can also lead to poor physical health and disease. Letting the 'pressure valve' go regularly in a safe way through exercise, enjoyable activities, and mixing and talking with those who show respect toward you, will help keep things in perspective.

DO YOUR FAMILY CALL YOU CYNICAL? ARE YOU BEHAVING IN A WAY THAT OTHERS THINK IS OVERLY PROTECTIVE?

Do you think more on the negative side of life than the good? Are you over protective of those you care about? Understandably, high-risk work places emphasise risk management and avoiding danger.

Workers are taught to watch out for the negatives in people as part of risk assessing, surviving and staying safe in the workplace or out in the field.

A little negativity or caution is healthy given your challenging role. However, excessive negativity or over-vigilance can result in developing a negative view of most human behaviour and motivation as selfish.

Overly cautious defensive thinking style can lead workers to over-react to what others do or don't do. Workers may become more cynical about people's true intent.

Conclusions are drawn that people are being deliberately non-compliant. They stop their family trying new things, restrict who family members socialise with and places they may want to go.

What happens if you over value this belief and apply it as a rule in in life? Pessimistic, unhappy, alienating thoughts and actions set in, which others find difficult to live with.

When dealing with family, leave the overload of questioning behind.

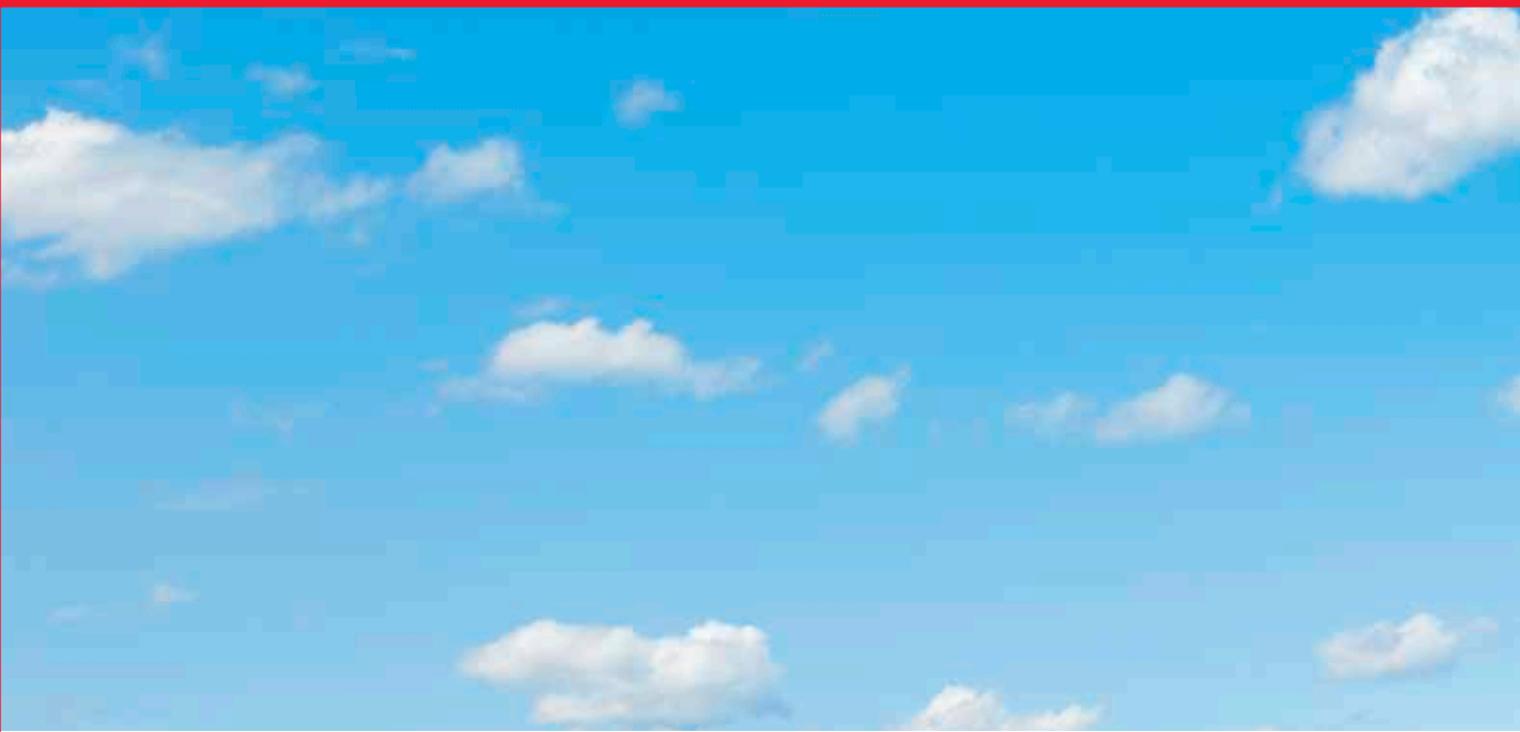
It is nearly impossible for friends and family to have a relaxed, mutual conversation with someone trained in interrogation skills and excessive personal armour. Be aware that people like to ask questions as part of socialising.

Let people ask you questions without being on guard in what you say. This doesn't mean you need to share trade secrets but a little disclosure about yourself helps to reduce being overly protective and defensive.



DEBRIEF OR CHAT WITH A FRIEND OR TRUSTED OTHER ON A REGULAR BASIS AND NOT JUST WHEN THINGS GET TOO MUCH.

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TOO EDGY OR HYPER-VIGILANT

Have you ever over-reacted and seen negatives in a situation that weren't there? Was it when you were tired, stressed, or had big jobs on that required you to be really cautious? Do you worry about what could happen? Before you go on holidays, do you think about all the possible dangers?

Hyper vigilance means to have a heightened sense of awareness of your situation and surroundings.

It often feels like being super alert about yourself in the context of where you are.

At a healthy level, being aware of your environment can keep a person safe and make them very observant.

However, when a person is overly concerned with safety and what is going on around them, both at work and away from work, then their thinking style changes, leading to facts being distorted or misread and wrong assumptions being made.

It can also lead a person to wrongly attribute reasons for things seen and heard that simply aren't there or it can make the person feel panicky about trying new things.

For example, do you 'scan the room' in new places, making sure you can always see the exit and have a clear view of the entire room? Are you quick to think "Am I in harm's way" or "what do they want from me" or "Could this be a target?"

These safety thoughts and actions definitely help to keep the person safe in the job but staying consistently alert to danger can cause personal harm.

Hyper vigilance is a roller coaster ride, just as you go up you must come down.

It can be exhausting. For example, coming home and feeling like you can't move from the couch, unable to socialise with others or possibly feeling detached and aloof.

Not everyone gets panic related symptoms with hyper vigilance but experiencing some level of hyper vigilance is not uncommon for workers in high-risk roles.

Managing to what extent you experience this symptom of high-risk work is important for self-care.

LIVING THE JOB 24/7

Do you find it hard to talk about anything else but your work?

Do you check your phone too much when you're not required to?

Be careful that work does not take more and more of your time at the cost of your personal relationships. Get involved in activities that do not involve work.

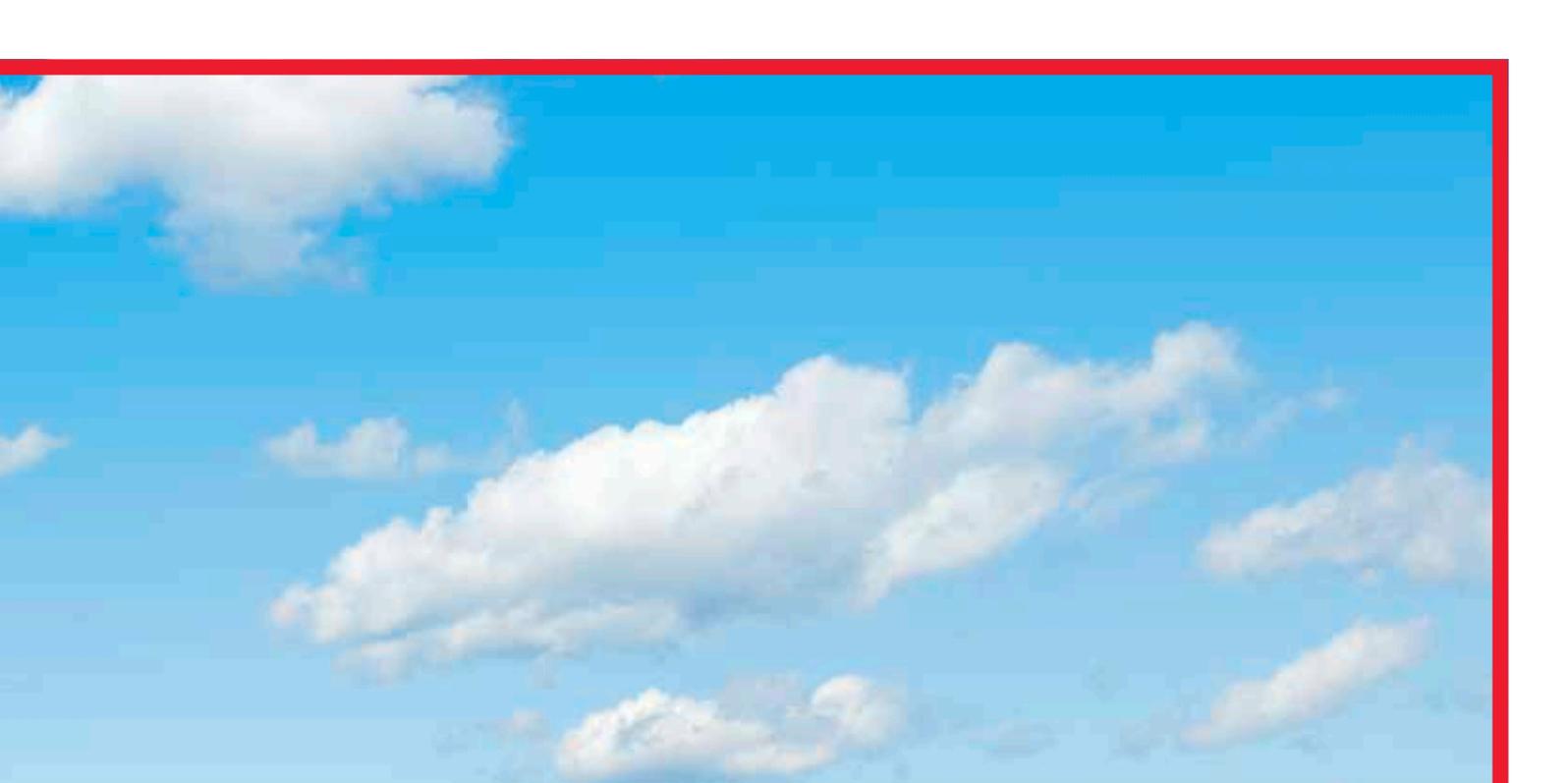
DENYING EMOTIONS

It is not always easy to acknowledge that you are struggling with your emotions. You may avoid subjects that have some sadness attached to them, such as the loss of a colleague, friend or family member.

Denial serves as a way to keep psychological distance from the issues and relief from dealing with human sadness and hardship which may feature in your work.

A little of this can be helpful indeed but a lot is harmful. Be careful not to let things build up on you.

Debrief or chat with a friend or trusted other on a regular basis and not just when things get too much.



WHAT YOU CAN DO

You have taken the first step by reading this material. Other things you can do are:

- 01 Don't accept the 'habits' of a worker in your role
- 02 Take action when these reactions are more noticeable
- 03 Use exercise to work out your frustrations
- 04 Get plenty of sleep
- 05 Seeking some alone time may help
- 06 Reality test. Check your own behaviour outside of work
- 07 Take feedback from people you trust
- 08 Adopt the 'Rule of Three'
- 09 Use 'I' statements to locate anger. "I feel angry because.."
- 10 Use internal self-talk for managing anger
- 11 Remind yourself that anger only makes things harder
- 12 Remind yourself that people make mistakes
- 13 Remember not everything and everyone is controllable
- 14 Don't control what others can and can't do in their life
- 15 Apologise to those you've been angry with
- 16 Get it off your chest in other ways. Write it down
- 17 Don't address anger issues when you've been drinking
- 18 Crack a joke and have a laugh
- 19 Organise social outings at work

*If three things make you feel angry and frustrated in a day then it's most likely that it is you that is upset, rather than other things/people.

WORK STRESS: BURNOUT

Burnout OR 'uncorrected job stress'.

This type of work stress builds up from the daily hassles encountered, is very common to experience and is easily corrected.

It's more than just 'whining' about the daily grind. It's about an ongoing negative attitude toward the job and a feeling of worthlessness built up in the worker.

Burnout is an erosive stress. This means that this kind of stress response develops over a longer period of time than the type of general stress mentioned earlier. It gradually wears the worker's personal resources down.

This type of stress reaction is usually built up over time and across a number of stressors that impact on the worker until their internal resources are worn down and negativity sets in to their thoughts.

Stressors might include a missed promotion, lack of sleep on night duty, doing too much overtime, conflict with the boss or too much exposure to violence.

If you let it go on for too long, erosive stress can develop into more serious psychological conditions.

The good news; when dealt with early, burnout allows for a healthy recovery and a return to usual functioning.

Simple steps can be taken to fix this imbalance.

COMMON SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF BURNOUT

CORE SYMPTOMS INCLUDE

- » Withdrawing from work in response to excessive stress
- » Loss of enthusiasm or sense of purpose in your work
- » A change in attitude from empathy to one of apathy
- » Emotional and physical reactions including irritability, social isolation, insomnia and headaches
- » Low self-esteem and increasing cynicism
- » Negative and 'can't do' language is more prominent in your discussions
- » Presenting at work more physically exhausted than usual

PHYSICAL EXHAUSTION

- » More susceptible to minor ailments like colds and flu
- » Gastro intestinal problems become more frequent when people are burning out
- » Feeling tired and run down more than usual but passing it off as sleep problems or shiftwork.
- » The worker continues to present as low in energy and motivation
- » Performance starts to decline for no apparent reason
- » Feeling physically weak

EMOTIONAL EXHAUSTION

- » Moodiness and tendency to withdraw from others
- » Complaining of emotional fatigue
- » Over reacting to situations and having emotional outbursts in public
- » Frustration, which leads to anger and then can escalate to fear, depression, anxiety and despair
- » If the person is experiencing more frustration than job satisfaction, they could be experiencing burnout.
- » If the emotional exhaustion continues it can develop into depression.

MENTAL EXHAUSTION

- » Work is seen as meaningless and the worker is negative and disengaged from the team. Some of the things you may hear people say are, “why bother?”, “why should I try?”, “No one takes my opinion into account”. It’s ongoing and pervasive. These people don’t recover and continue to speak of the loss of hope at work
- » More cynical than usual
- » Loss of interest in work and others
- » Noticeable increase in negative thoughts and attitudes towards self and others
- » Harsh on the self a lot – “I’m useless”, “I never get it right”
- » Fail to respond to the feelings of others. They are often seen as the person giving up on tasks at work

IF A WORKER HAS FIVE OR MORE OF THESE SYMPTOMS, IT IS TIME TO INTERVENE. OFFER THEM YOUR SUPPORT AND SUGGEST THEY SEEK PROFESSIONAL HELP AS SOON AS POSSIBLE.

Some suggestions include;

- » Seek professional help early to reduce the symptoms and find out ways to correct any imbalance
- » Modify your work environment and the job demands to reduce the symptoms for a good recovery
- » Find ways of increasing your interest in other areas of your life
- » Actively look out for and remember your successes and wins not just the personal negatives
- » Redirect your satisfaction levels to cope and recover. Have another goal on the horizon if your work is not providing satisfaction for you at the moment
- » Make the conscious effort to add relaxation in to your routine to correct the imbalance you feel right now
- » Seek out extra support and connections from someone you consider to be a good role model in your life and/or a good leader at work. Let them know how you are feeling and thinking about work. Helpful suggestions from someone you trust at work will go a long way.

**SEEK PROFESSIONAL HELP
EARLY TO REDUCE THE
SYMPTOMS AND FIND OUT
WAYS TO CORRECT ANY
IMBALANCE.**



CRITICAL INCIDENT EXPOSURE

In certain roles you will attend traumatic incidents and call outs to witness scenes most of the community will not see in their lifetime. Here are some key facts to help you understand trauma and when to intervene and when to seek professional help.

Put in some extra self-care around this time and it will go a long way in managing symptoms.

DID YOU KNOW?

- » Having a reaction to a traumatic incident does not immediately = Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.
- » Typically trauma symptoms occur within seven (7) to 10 days
- » The most vulnerable time period for the affected worker is the first four (4) weeks after a traumatic event and symptoms should be lessening in intensity during this time
- » Ongoing trauma reactions from four (4) weeks onwards can be a predictor that something is wrong and professional treatment is required. There is evidence to show that those who develop strong stress reactions lasting typically up to four (4) weeks after a critical incident/trauma are at a higher risk of developing PTSD. It is now imperative to refer the person to the relevant professionals for assessment
- » Not all workers exposed to traumatic events will go on to develop PTSD
- » Receiving treatment early is a top priority and important to good recovery.

BEING INVOLVED IN TRAUMATIC EVENTS

It is completely normal to experience a reaction to a traumatic event. Reactions typically occur in days or weeks following the traumatic incident. Individuals vary on how they respond to witnessing trauma.

Some experience little or no reaction. Others can feel wiped out by what they saw and heard.

Workers in high risk roles are by no means immune to experiencing undesirable emotions and thoughts associated with traumatic events, such as serious assault, child protection issues, road crashes and investigation processes associated with these incidents.

There is a lot of processing work being done in your brain in the week to 10 days following a trauma.

The mind is working hard to understand and make sense of the traumatic event witnessed and lived through.

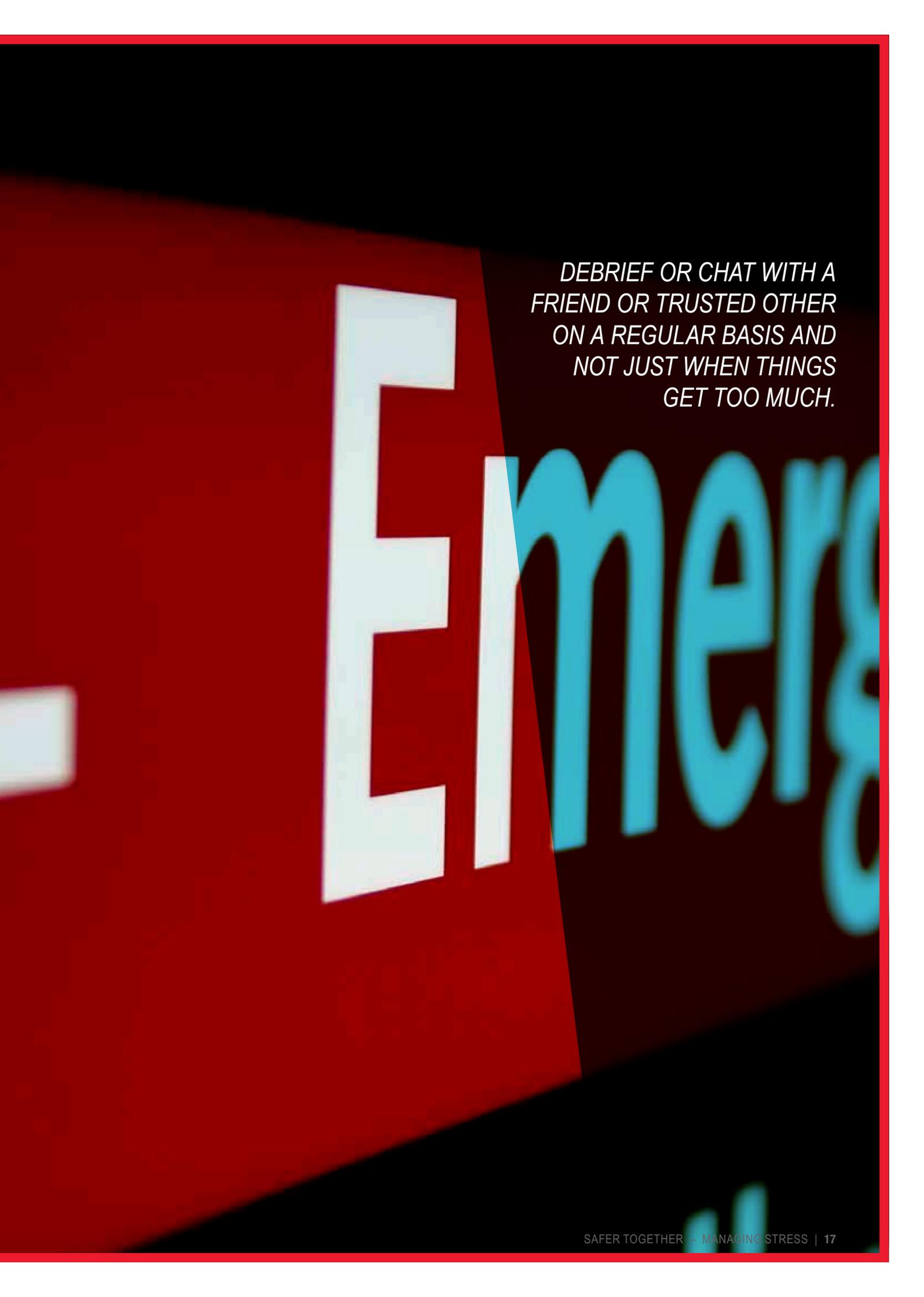
Allow yourself time to adjust. Most people will recover with time and support and go on to resume some sense of normalcy in their lives.

Time is important to how you should treat your symptoms. The following are some of the reactions to trauma that some people may experience.

These reactions should lessen in intensity with most resolving within a three-week period.

Not all of these reactions will be felt by all people.

If you continue to experience any of these unwanted reactions for more than 30 days please take steps to consult with a qualified health professional for assessment and advice.



*DEBRIEF OR CHAT WITH A
FRIEND OR TRUSTED OTHER
ON A REGULAR BASIS AND
NOT JUST WHEN THINGS
GET TOO MUCH.*

CRITICAL INCIDENT EXPOSURE (CONTINUED)

EMOTIONAL

- » Over reacting to relatively minor events, reduced tolerance toward others and 'the small stuff'
- » Under reaction to provocative events
- » Preoccupation with the horror of the event and your role in it
- » Irritability/Aggression: "Someone needs to pay for this"
- » Guilt: "I shouldn't have any enjoyment". "Maybe I should have done more to help"
- » Sadness: "It's so senseless. Things will never be the same. I feel lost"
- » Fear: "It's not safe here. I don't want to go out in case it happens again"
- » Anxiety and excessive worry
- » Loss of faith/spirituality

THOUGHT BASED

- » Poor concentration and difficulty making decisions
- » Short term memory loss
- » Difficulty understanding details and completing small tasks
- » On the lookout for more danger (hyper vigilant)
- » Wanting to spend more time with family and people you cherish and thinking about what is important to you
- » Some people think about suicide.

PHYSICAL

- » Stomach problems (indigestion/diarrhoea/constipation)
- » Headaches
- » Heart palpitations/difficulty breathing/aches and pains
- » High blood pressure
- » Jumpy and easily startled by noise
- » Dizzy spells
- » Excessive trembling
- » Sweating more than usual
- » Dry mouth
- » Restless and edgy
- » Tired and feeling run down
- » Changes in sex drive
- » Having medical problems with no diagnosable cause.

BEHAVIOURAL/ACTION

- » Impulsiveness/excessive risk taking/recklessness
- » Silent/withdrawn/avoidant
- » Problems sleeping/nightmares
- » Changes in personal or work habits
- » Changes in appetite – weight gain/loss
- » Increase in caffeine and smoking
- » Increase or misuse of alcohol and drugs
- » Lashing out at others

**ALERT: IF THE ABOVE SYMPTOMS DO NOT
LESSEN OR DISAPPEAR WITHIN 30 DAYS, SEEK
PROFESSIONAL HELP.**



COMMON SIGNS SEEN AFTER INVOLVEMENT IN A TRAUMA

POSITIVE

When a person is coping post a critical incident they will be able to:

- » Sustain work performance
- » Show a reduction in their distress
- » Connect with others
- » Maintain their self-esteem
- » Be able to show regular mood states
- » Like challenges and thrive in them
- » Use existing skills in new ways
- » Think laterally and be able to solve problems effectively.

NEGATIVE

When a person is not coping they will:

- » Have difficulty maintaining focus on tasks
- » Have difficulty learning and adapting to new tasks
- » Struggle keeping up with workplace norms and maintaining it for long periods
- » Exist in survival mode rather than thriving and keeping up with the team
- » Have marked fluctuation of moods and uncontrollable emotions over an extended period
- » Have anger outbursts, lashing out and attacking others
- » Show an inability to manage their personal relationships
- » Express strong feelings of self-blame and worthlessness
- » Worry excessively
- » Present with a feeling that they are living under constant threat despite reassurances from authority
- » Excessively misuse drinking or other illicit substances.

CRITICAL INCIDENT EXPOSURE (CONTINUED)

QUICK TIPS

- » Exercise is a good way to burn off any excess energy in your body
 - » Follow it up with some helpful relaxation activities
 - » A massage may be a good way to relieve any muscular tension you may be experiencing.
-

HOW PEOPLE REACT AFTER A TRAUMATIC EVENT CAN VARY DEPENDING ON MANY FACTORS, INCLUDING

- » How sudden the event was and how long it lasted
- » How dangerous the individual perceived the event to be
- » How awful the event was and whether there were grotesque images witnessed
- » Whether the individual felt that they could relate to the victim or if they knew the injured person
- » The individual's stress levels prior to the event
- » Past traumas in their life, either personal or work
- » Personal care beforehand, which could hamper recovery – being tired, ill, run down, poor eating habits, etc.

KEEP UP ROUTINES LIKE
WORK, SPORT, FAMILY AND
FRIENDS.



WHAT YOU CAN DO FOR YOURSELF IN THE DAYS AND WEEKS FOLLOWING

- » Aim to understand psychological reactions. Information is key!
- » Spend time with those you care about
- » Allow yourself time to think things through. Identify coping techniques that work for you
- » Put in extra positive and relaxing activities at this time
- » Keep up routines like work, sport, family and friends
- » Talk about what happened with someone you trust to support you when you are ready
- » Exercise to release tension and relieve thoughts that may be bothering you
- » When you are ready, prepare to adjust. Think about how you could grow from this situation and set a goal to achieve it
- » Get professional help for additional support.

AVOID

- » Using drugs and alcohol
- » Too much activity and over working
- » Falling into the belief that talking about it will make it worse
- » Withdrawing from people in general. Complete withdrawal is unhelpful.

COMMON SIGNS REQUIRING REFERRAL

POST TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER (PTSD)

Remember, if you are struggling emotionally for any longer than 30 days and your trauma reactions have not reduced in intensity then seek out professional help.

Is there day to day impairment?

Do you feel like you are going crazy or even suicidal?

Post traumatic stress disorder could be one hypothesis for explaining the continued presentation of trauma symptoms and needs to be further investigated by a qualified professional.

Don't second-guess what's going on. Seek some clarification from the experts.

Recovery isn't about forgetting your experiences. It will mean fewer and less intense reactions to the memories and it will create more confidence in how you cope and control the reactions.

PROBLEMATIC POST TRAUMATIC REACTIONS IN NEED OF IMMEDIATE PROFESSIONAL INTERVENTION INCLUDE:

MEMORY DIFFICULTIES

Ongoing gaps in memory about the traumatic experience.

RE-EXPERIENCING REACTIONS

Immediately after a critical incident most people suffer from intrusive thoughts about what happened.

This is your mind trying to make sense of what happened and this response is a healthy one if the thoughts, dreams and nightmares subside.

However, for someone who is experiencing PTSD these symptoms persist and are replayed over and over again. These individuals have difficulty accepting the trauma is in the past.

Some people display profuse sweating and rapid heart rate toward other events or situations that may make them think about the trauma.

NUMBING AND AVOIDANCE REACTIONS

- » People can feel numb or empty inside and detached from others
- » Some feel like things are a dream or things have slowed down or feel far away
- » Others engage in avoidance routines. People suffering may try to self manage by avoiding doing anything that reminds them of the traumatic situation, such as parts of their usual work
- » Others may overwork or take on risk taking behaviours to avoid dealing with their emotions
- » Most people don't want to open up the 'Pandora's box' and so they avoid conversations that make them anxious
- » Some people worry excessively about the future and overly predict danger in their life. This may result in the person over-planning for 'what if' events to avoid being shocked.

EXISTING IN A CONSTANT 'SUPER AROUSED' STATE

This means the person looks 'on guard' more than usual. The person may overuse the tendency to scan the environment for danger and display an over exaggerated/catastrophic thinking style for their safety.

However, you may see this in a person as them:

- » Being easily startled by noises
- » Being jumpy and edgy
- » Having difficulty sleeping, insomnia
- » Being angry and irritable
- » Being paranoid
- » Having an intense need to control situations and this can present as them being overly demanding at work. Their anger is ongoing.

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

All of the earlier techniques in this booklet will help.

Most of all, please work with a trained trauma specialist and practitioner to understand what is happening and what you can do for yourself.

Contact either your GP or the Australian Psychological Society (APS) to help locate a qualified health professional specialising in the specific area you need help with.

APS Referral Line



1800 333 497



www.psychology.org.au



PSYCHOLOGICAL FITNESS TRAINING

PRINCIPLES OF PSYCHOLOGICAL FITNESS

These general wellbeing principles will help with planning your career and fully enjoying the successes you have along the way. They can also be used in more challenging times.

PRINCIPLE

01 HEALTHY MINDS, HEALTHY BODIES

Many people find it easier to accept and invest in the idea that we need to train our body to stay physically fit and strong in order to function optimally. But how many people have planned to look after their emotional health? Often, far fewer than those wanting to stay physically fit.

Principle one encourages you to plan and apply beneficial strategies in your life that make you feel emotionally and psychologically strong. Everyone has different interests. Tailor a plan to suit your needs. A balanced life is key to long-term emotional and physical health.

PRINCIPLE

02 KNOW YOUR PERSONAL LIMITS

Find out how stress impacts on you, how you react to certain triggers in your life and use this information to become aware of how you cope. We hear you saying “Yeah, yeah, I’ve heard this before” but don’t assume you do this automatically.

People don’t realise what they are doing isn’t managing their emotional health, until they experience a set of negative emotional symptoms and need professional help.

Why wait for the awful, intense feelings? Plan now to do something about the small, niggling feelings you have and by doing so, symptom reduction is easier to achieve and balance can be more easily restored.

Identify which situations seem to cause you more distress and plan to manage them. Review your actions and try to change how you think with more growth talk – “If I get it over and done with then I can pursue something I really want to do” or “I’ve faced worse situations and survived.”

PRINCIPLE

03 REASSESS THE STRATEGIES USED TO MANAGE YOUR EMOTIONAL HEALTH

It’s great if you have found ways to cope with unwanted stress and you can see the benefit from managing yourself this way.

However, the ‘one size fits all’ strategy does not always work effectively for managing your emotional health. From time to time re-assess and adjust the type of strategies you use to manage emotional health, particularly in high stress times.

Keep in mind our reactions will vary with different experiences and the number of stressful situations we face.

PRINCIPLE

04 GET STUBBORN AND DON’T EVER GIVE UP

Many workers, particularly those in high risk roles are known for their tenacity to pursue matters and to see matters through to conclusion.

Use your personal strength and tenacity to your own advantage to see this through too.

During highly emotional times remember to hold on to HOPE. Keep repeating to yourself, “Things can always change” while you recover.

Remind yourself when you feel this way that what is happening is exactly that: a stressful situation. It can pass with the support in your life.



PRINCIPLE

05 STAY CONNECTED TO RESOURCES

Stay connected to friends and family, especially in high pressure times. In some agencies, particularly those high risk areas, the nature of the job and the privacy and confidentiality requirements can seem like a curse. Secrecy, mistrust of others and paranoia can be by-products of the job and lead to some people withholding or locking down how they are feeling.

You may not want to worry your friends and family with how you are thinking and feeling. Remember you won't hurt them by disclosing and they will help you heal. Withdrawing is harmful during these times. Stay connected, especially when you feel isolated. Keep reaching out bit by bit to keep your main social connections, even when you don't feel like it.

Use your networks to your advantage. Have you ever thought of seeking help before your symptoms were overwhelming you? Psychologists, counsellors and treating medical practitioners are part of the everyday community and are there to offer assistance.

EAP and any external mental health links available to you can also be accessed to ease your emotional distress.

In the modern day of technology and for those who are feeling that it is hard to face a professional just yet, there are also some very useful online resources to access as a first line of awareness that something is wrong. We encourage you to speak to health professionals more directly to advance your treatment intervention as part of a positive recovery process.

PRINCIPLE

06 INSTILL THE 'MATE' PRINCIPLE AT WORK

Many occupations involve a helping role and many workers are directly involved in assisting members of the public.

Take that strong personal commitment to serve, protect and assist the community and use it to stay aware of how your colleagues are coping with the demands of their work.

Look after your work colleagues and it will be remembered when they recall their career stories in years to come.

Don't underestimate your impact on your colleagues.

Some individuals in distress can show excessive paranoia, anger, irritability and therefore can be quite difficult to deal with at work and may not be very likeable.

Be brave and push through their anger gently and don't take it personally or see them in a negative light. They may be grumpy or a difficult personality or, alternatively, they may be suffering.

If you notice change in a person's attitude and their behaviours, or you are watching someone experience these reactions, please don't ignore your role in helping.

Make an attempt to offer your support to that colleague. Alternatively, ask a senior supervisor to address the matter.

Showing your support to someone when they are down will go a long way in helping them gain control over their situation.

WELLNESS STRATEGIES

Use this information to check your strategies for coping and what you need to look at changing.

RESOURCES

The more you have, the better you will cope.

TRAINING AND EDUCATION

Build personal resilience and increase professionalism. Training to deal with adverse events and keeping up to date with the latest information on maintaining your psychological health are important for reducing the risk of vulnerability to psychological injury.

PHYSICAL FITNESS

Being physically fit makes it easier to handle yourself and encourages psychological strength.

EMOTIONAL FITNESS

Be conscious of setting a plan to look after your emotional health. Don't take for granted that it will take care of itself. What other stressors do you need to address and realign in your life outside of work, to reduce pressure and stress?

PERSONAL STRENGTHS

Identify your personal strengths and play to them rather than focus on what you are not.

WORK LIFE BALANCE

Take time for yourself, friends and family, outside work.

STAY CONNECTED WITH OTHERS WHO HELP AND SUPPORT YOU

Make a conscious effort to stay emotionally connected to others and those who you enjoy socialising with. Evidence shows that it is important to your overall wellbeing to avoid withdrawing from regular supports.

SOME THINGS TO ASK YOURSELF

ADDRESS YOUR PHYSICALITY

- » How fit are you?
- » What is your diet like?
- » Do you have a regular eating pattern?
- » What are your sleep patterns like? Are they regular?
- » Do you limit your alcohol intake?
- » Why are you drinking? For coping (high risk)? Stress (med-high risk)? Or fun (medium to low risk)?

REVIEW YOUR THINKING STYLE

- » Are you too negative?
- » Are you too cynical?
- » Do you always think of risk first before enjoyment or the positives in life?
- » Can you introduce more positive thinking patterns into your life?

WHAT EMOTIONS DO YOU MAINLY HAVE?

- » Sadness, irritability, anger, intolerance?
- » Do you feel more happiness than frustration overall?
- » Can you be optimistic about your life and current situation?

ADDRESS YOUR SOCIAL CONNECTIONS

- » Do you have friends and significant others to support you?
- » Do you feel connected to others?
- » Are these relationships personally satisfying?
- » What could you do to improve your life with others?

BALANCE WORK WITH OTHER DOMAINS IN YOUR LIFE

- » What other social interests and relaxation activities do you keep outside of work?
- » What activities provide meaning to you outside of your work?



*BEING PHYSICALLY FIT MAKES
IT EASIER TO HANDLE
YOURSELF AND ENCOURAGES
PSYCHOLOGICAL STRENGTH.*

”

WELLNESS STRATEGIES (CONTINUED)

PSYCHOLOGICAL STRATEGIES

BUILD UP YOUR OPTIMISM AND TOUGH MINDEDNESS

Did you know even a pessimist can become more optimistic with training?

FACT: Research shows that optimists take action, believe their actions matter and have healthier lifestyles.

Pessimists give up and suffer more stress. Optimists try and cope better with stress.

When you put yourself into psychological fitness training you become aware that emotions are mainly driven by thoughts.

If you work on becoming more mindful of your negative thoughts and move into problem solving then you will have more control of the thoughts driving your negative emotional response.

Tackle the negative thinking. Replace it with hopeful thinking, which will assist in bringing your stress levels down and improve your physical health.

Sounds simple doesn't it? It involves learning new ways to promote better habits in the way you think.

Practise regularly and pretty soon it will become more automatic. You will have to remind yourself to do it when you feel negative and doubt is creeping up on you.

Stay in the moment and think about what you want to respond to.

Change the worrying thought to bring down the emotion. For example, change: "I'm never going to get a promotion" to "Next year is another chance and I will do things differently".

FLIP YOUR THINKING

Reduce the amount of time worrying about negative events. Sure it is important to analyse situations to ascertain what should be avoided in the future. This is an important aspect of the workplace requirements for risk assessments.

However, it is not helpful to spend more time thinking about events that are bad than you do about what goes right. Did you know that focusing on negative events too much may set a person up for anxiety and depression?

Form a new habit and build resilience. Switch your thinking to consider what went right. Emphasise the difficulty in what you're doing here yet push on to change negative habits.

Set aside ten minutes at the end of the day and think of three things that went well and why they went well. They don't have to be big events but they should be important to you. For example, "I played a game with the kids and gave them time to talk with me about their day" or "I was reliable at work and backed up a colleague on an issue".

You will continue to experience negative thoughts and reactions to negative situations but recovery will be more robust.

Some work groups may not offer you positive reinforcement. In this instance give it to yourself and start offering it to others.

It's contagious and if you stand back you will see the effect it has on others.

AVOID FORMING HABITS OF PLEASURE

- » Repeated indulgence in the same pleasure does not work
- » Pleasure based neurons are wired to respond to novel events and will not fire if the events do not provide new information
- » Seek out a variety of experiences at work and home and spread out pleasurable events over time
- » This will keep you stimulated and challenged

LEARN TO FORGIVE

- » Let go of anger and resentment
- » Get it out and write it down
- » An inability to forgive is associated with persistent pondering over what happened

SLEEP AND DIET

- » Avoid caffeine and chocolate, particularly in the six-hour period before bed. Caffeine tells the brain to hold back on the release of melatonin, needed for sleep
- » Eat regularly and try to stay in the healthy weight range
- » Drink plenty of water throughout the day to stay hydrated.

EXERCISE FOR MOOD MANAGEMENT

- » The mood benefits of exercise are terrific, instant and importantly, supported by scientific evidence
- » Your mood before exercise may be low and lethargic but after exercise you will notice an upbeat mood
- » Exercise is linked to less anger and cynical distrust
- » Did you know that panic attacks and anxiety based disorders are two to three times higher among physically inactive individuals?

DEVELOP A PLAN FOR SURVIVING HIGH STRESS TIMES

Develop a 'Survival Plan' to cope with high stress times. Write into your plan something fun and enjoyable to do outside of work each day to relieve the high stress you are experiencing.

Set a goal to achieve and shift your focus away from work. For example: make a fitness plan for each day, research a holiday, learn a new hobby and step out what you will do each week.

Setting an achievable goal will help you shift the focus off the primary stress point and allow you to strive for something you want to personally achieve as well as stimulate satisfaction levels.

For example, if there is a lot of staff conflict going on in your team and you are waiting to transfer to a new location to get out of this situation then it could be useful to develop a survival plan that will distract you from the work stress.

Write into each day of your survival plan what you did well. This will help you keep positive during this time.

REMEMBER YOU ARE YOUR OWN COACH

- » Practice makes habit
- » How you practice will become habit
- » Sloppy practice becomes a bad habit
- » Practise with focus and precision and then that will become your habit
- » Strength is a skill – both physical and mental strength. It takes practice
- » If you think you can, you are right
- » If you think you can't, you are also right.

STAY SAFE IN YOUR CAREER

COPING STRATEGIES

- » Simple changes to our everyday lives can have significant positive impact on our resilience and ability to recover from psychological injury. Here are some simple tips:
- » Enjoy a life outside work – have other aspects to your life like family, friends, hobbies, sport etc that you invest time in
- » Do 30-40 minutes of exercise 4-5 times a week. It relieves stress, and acts as a transition between work and relaxation
- » Stay close to people – support networks are crucial to prevention and recovery
- » Eat well – our diet can have an impact on our wellbeing, even in relation to stress and depression
- » Go to the doctor – your GP can identify things that are affecting you, and act as a gateway to resources and support services
- » Watch your alcohol intake – alcohol can increase the risk of mental health problems. Unfortunately it is often used as a strategy for coping, but it is only a short term response, and may exacerbate the problem. For more detailed information on alcohol intake, consult your GP
- » Have some self-awareness – knowing what your triggers are, or realising that your behaviour is the result of your mood or mental health, can arm you to take steps to get back to your usual self
- » Stay in the present
- » Try not to think in Black & White or Good & Bad
- » Get 7-8 hours of sleep – inadequate sleep can cause biological reactions that affect mood and mental health.





PROFESSIONAL CONTACTS

If you are experiencing any symptoms outlined in this booklet then you are strongly encouraged to contact your GP for a referral to a qualified mental health practitioner.

USEFUL REFERENCES

PSYCHOLOGICAL AND COUNSELLING ASSISTANCE

You and your family member can access professional counselling through your treating GP.

Your GP can do a mental health plan and refer you for counselling. Some psychologists are registered with Medicare under the Australian Government's Better Access to Mental Health Care Initiative.

To be eligible for a rebate certain conditions need to be met. If eligible, you may qualify for up to 10 individual sessions in a calendar year with a review taken after six (6) sessions.

Fees vary – some psychologists may bulk bill or you may have to pay a small difference between the rebate and the psychologists' fees.

Your GP will be able to assist you with this information. Information is also available on the Australian Psychological Society website.

You can contact the APS referral line on 1800 333 497 or via their website to find a psychologist in your area.

EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (EAP)

The NSW Government sector offers free counselling sessions through their Employee Assistance Program. Employees are generally entitled to six (6) sessions over a two (2) year period.

Check with your employer for your EAP provider.

IMPORTANTLY, FOR ANY EMERGENCIES OR THREATS OF SELF HARM PHONE EMERGENCY 000 IMMEDIATELY.

CONTACT LIST

Beyond Blue



1300 224 636



www.beyondblue.org.au



infoline@beyondblue.org.au

Beyond Blue is a national government initiative established to increase the capacity to deal with anxiety and depression and how these conditions can be treated. This has a number of online e-learning programs to look at symptoms for diagnosis. It also contains a register of clinical psychologists matched to an area of your interest.

Mensline



1300 789 978 (24 hours/7days a week)

MensLine Australia is the national telephone and online support, information and referral service for men with family and relationship concerns.

The service is available from anywhere in Australia and is staffed by professional counsellors, experienced in men's issues.

Black Dog Institute



(02) 9382 2991



www.blackdoginstitute.org.au

The Black Dog Institute offers educational and research information as well as a number of online computer based assessment and treatment tools for use.

This institute also has a Medicare rebated treatment clinic for depression.

Relationships Australia

 1300 364 277

 www.relationshipsnsw.org.au

Relationships Australia is a not for profit organisation that offers counselling and education services for couples and individuals.

Telephone and online counselling is available. This is a fee paying service.

SANE Australia

 1800 18 SANE (7263)

 www.sane.org

This website offers facts sheets and podcasts on mental health conditions.

Workers Health Centre

 9749 7666

 www.workershealth.com.au

The Workers Health Centre offers injury management and occupational rehabilitation services.

If you have been injured at work, the Workers Health Centre can help you through the injury management and return to work process.

They also have a number of useful fact sheets on a range of health and safety topics, available on their website.

SafeWork NSW

 13 10 50

 www.safework.nsw.gov.au

SafeWork has a number of brochures to assist injured workers understand the workers compensation process. These brochures can be accessed by visiting the SafeWork website.





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