



Traumatic incidents in the workplace: A guide for employees

Stress reactions are a normal coping response to dealing with an acutely upsetting event. This is especially true if there was a death, injury or direct threat to your safety. These post-traumatic reactions, as they are called, are your mind's attempt to cope with the event. Whether you were directly or indirectly impacted, you may feel emotional or psychological shock much like how your body may go into shock after a physical injury.

Most people will have one or more of the following reactions:

- Constant focus on the traumatic event
- Anger and irritability
- Anxiety
- Depression or grief
- Increased emotionality, feelings seem to be of a greater intensity than usual; or, a numbing of feelings
- Talking too much or not at all
- Sleep disturbance, with or without nightmares
- Survivor guilt
- Recall of past traumatic events or grief
- Difficulty with concentration and/or memory
- Difficulty making decisions and confused thinking

Don't be surprised if you have one reaction that changes to another. Having reactions in this manner may help you avoid overload.

Also, don't be surprised if you find yourself becoming very concerned about safety. It's common for people to focus on their own or others' safety after a traumatic event. It's natural to want to feel some control in stopping further awful events.

It's not unusual to blame yourself or to believe you had more responsibility for the event than you really did. You may even feel guilty about surviving or avoiding injury while others did not. Again, this is common and can be resolved.

What can you do?

You can reduce the impact and disruption these reactions have on your life. In fact, if you don't deal with them, they may last longer. Some coping skills may be more helpful than others. Try some of the following:

1. **Don't go it alone.** After the event, getting some time alone may help reduce the feeling of threat or stress. Later, it's better to talk with others and gather support.
2. **Talk** out what happened and **how you feel** about it. Telling what happened while ducking your feelings leaves you with just telling "war stories." When you name and express your feelings, the bad feelings become easier to bear.



3. **Accept** the concern and care of others.
4. **Reach out** to family, close friends and those you trust.
5. **Enjoy** healthy food and drinks. The stress will only last longer if you turn to alcohol or drugs to get yourself through it.
6. **Do** something nice for yourself.
7. **Acknowledge** support among those you work with. Think about the comfort or help you've received from each other.
8. **Stay in touch** with one another at work. Ask how coworkers are doing. Talk about how this has affected work.
9. **Attend** the funeral or memorial service if, during the incident, someone has died. Go with someone you know or a coworker who was also present during the event.
10. **Avoid** self-criticism. This is a time for healing, not blaming.
11. **Plan** to do something positive in your life.
12. **Exercise** to give yourself energy and clear your mind.
13. **Remember** that your reactions are normal and are likely shared by others. They remind you that you care.