

## ASSISTING RECOVERY IN STRESSFUL SITUATIONS

When a critical incident or highly stressful situation occurs at work, employees will have reactions which may vary in type, intensity and timing. However, a common factor in recovery is the restoration of a sense of safety. It is therefore very important for employees to feel that their workplace has been supportive and protective during and after a critical incident or very stressful situation.

If an employee feels abandoned or unsupported by the workplace in such circumstances, it will result in a reduction of feelings of trust and safety, which can cause employees to be reluctant or even unable to return to their workplace.

When the workplace offers its employees genuine personal acknowledgement and support after a crisis, it assists them to recover more quickly and fully.

The following support strategies can be helpful:

- Accept that everybody's reactions will differ and that reactions are often unpredictable or differ in timing and intensity. Take care to avoid blame, denial or dismissing a person's feelings.
- Take a worker's concerns seriously but be careful not to be intrusive or rush in and 'rescue'. The aim is to restore the person's own coping mechanisms through respectful facilitation and support.
- Ask the employee what they need. Don't assume you know what would be helpful for them. A range of assistance could be considered, from debriefing and counselling to informal support, the provision of information, access to workplace grievance procedures or temporary changes in work duties or times.
- Restore or enhance links and support networks.
- Restore the normal workplace routines as soon as possible to help recreate feelings of predictability and safety.
- Nominate a suitable person to check the employee's progress from time to time. This may need to occur over several months, remembering that reactions can be delayed or unexpected.
- Take action to improve safety and wellbeing in the workplace. This may include reviewing practices and legal obligations and acting on practical safety issues or problems with interpersonal behaviour.

**For more assistance, please make an appointment with one of our Counsellors**

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