

## Supporting staff after a serious incident

Employers have a duty of care towards their employees, to ensure that they receive appropriate emotional support following a serious incident at work. Obtaining professional critical incident support for employees at the right time, can be essential in aiding recovery in traumatic situations.

Following a serious incident in November 2019, it was recommended in a commissioned Independent Review that the London Borough of Hillingdon and Central and North West London NHS Foundation Trust share the mobilisation plan that was implemented to support staff in the immediate aftermath of a critical incident. This document is based on the experience in Hillingdon at the time of the event and these actions should be reviewed and adapted to local circumstances when they are employed in other localities and organisations

It is important to understand that everyone deals with trauma differently, and reactions to an incident varies from individual to individual. Following a serious incident, employees need to be allowed time to process and cope with their experience and feelings. Typical reactions to a serious incident include:

- Shock and Numbness
- Loss of Concentration and Memory Disturbance
- Tearfulness
- Mood Fluctuations
- Flashbacks
- Disrupted Sleep and Appetite
- Physical Complaints such as headaches or stomach problems.

### Key Tips to follow

1. If staff are experiencing moderate to serious symptoms of distress, anxiety, etc. then they should be referred to the NHS immediately through the local Increasing Access to Psychological Therapies (IAPT).
2. Advise any staff member who has come into contact with body fluids as part of the incident to attend A&E for necessary screening.
3. Trained Mental Health First Aiders should be available to offer 1-1 support on site or via the phone. In addition, the provision of mental health support from trained colleagues from Mental Health Services should be available to provide clinical guidance and advice. Senior Managers may need to make contact with their relevant trust to arrange this and to prevent delays in its provision.
4. Provide a space for all staff in a different location to the incident where staff can come together and be supported immediately after the serious incident. This will also facilitate the necessary interaction with police who will need to take statements, for example. Be aware of how your employees are feeling, be present and listen. This is one of the most supportive things you can do in this situation. It is helpful to include Senior Management representation but this should not be treated as a rule and delay this step. Whoever the manager is, they need to make sure that the supportive session happens. During this session, it is important to:
  - a. not to delve too deeply in this session, rather to allow staff to tell their story at whatever level they want and for management to show support.

*This document has been prepared in collaboration between Hillingdon Council and Central and North West London NHS Foundation Trust.*

- b. to encourage peer support either in the team or via the mental health first aiders.
  - c. to provide employees with necessities such as water, tissues, food, etc.
  - d. to ensure staff are supported to get home and provided with telephone contact details for an Employee Assistance Programme.
5. Managers should contact all staff who were not present but who may be affected by the incident (co-workers, colleagues and others who worked directly with those involved) to advise them of the incident and provide contact details for the Employee Assistance Programme.
6. Provide staff with the option to come into work the next day or not. A designated room should be set up with the necessary equipment e.g. phones, computers for those wishing to work away from the incident area. Some staff will want to be with their colleagues in the office for support.
7. Resources such as additional administrative support should be identified to support the service to make operational arrangements such as cancelling appointments if a crime scene is preventing the use of rooms. They should also support staff making the numerous reports on the incident expected by the organisation and or for stakeholders
8. Serious incidents often lead to the rapid spread of incorrect information, and it is helpful to contain this. Unverified information can cause unnecessary stress and confusion for all. Therefore, ensure that information provided to employees has been verified and agreed by relevant managers in your organisation. To pass information it may be best to bring together those staff who are in the office. Those at home should be directly contacted by a manager and passed the same information.
9. Continue to provide availability of a Mental Health First Aider for all staff as needed in the days after the serious incident as well as the Employee Assistance Programme.
10. Provision of a Critical Response Counsellor should be secured by HR for 1-1, and group counselling should be explored within a week of the serious incident. 1-1 counselling should be offered to those most affected by the incident and group counselling to all those affected. It is important that managers also receive support and counselling as they are often providing ongoing support to the wider team resulting in vicarious trauma.
11. Staff follow up sessions with the Critical Response Counsellor should be arranged for 3-4 weeks later. Being distressed after incidents is to be expected. In most cases these abate in 3-4 weeks. If staff are experiencing moderate to serious symptoms then they should be referred to the NHS immediately. If the symptoms are only mild, then reassess after 4 weeks and decide, in a collaborative manner with the staff member, whether they should seek NHS treatment.
12. The provision of specialist interventions such as Cognitive Behavioural Therapy and Eye Movement Desensitisation and Reprocessing may be appropriate for some staff, but this will need to be assessed on case by case basis.
13. It is important that all staff are provided with information about Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and, should they exhibit any symptoms, should seek GP advice.
14. Employers need to continue to keep staff regularly updated to ensure accurate and timely information is shared.