

Seeking professional support

A person should seek support if after a month they: still feel upset or fearful most of the time; act very differently to how they did before the event; find it difficult to work or take care of children; have ongoing difficulties with important relationships; use alcohol or drugs to excess; feel jumpy or are having nightmares; can't stop thinking about the event or appear to no longer enjoy life, feel numb or shut off.



**Ambulance Service
of New South Wales**

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How can I support someone affected by trauma?

Providing comfort to a co-worker or friend who is experiencing distress can be very helpful. Guidelines for helping others include:

- > Be a good listener and provide calming advice
- > Be quietly responsive and reassuring when they are talking about the event
- > Talking about the experience may help some people or make things worse for others
- > Avoid telling the person to 'forget about it' or 'try to put it out of your mind' – this is rarely helpful
- > Structure in a person's life can help them regain confidence. Encourage them to follow normal routines
- > Make sure they have the company of others until the initial feelings of distress subside
- > Family and friends often provide care and comfort. Some people may prefer to talk to a colleague or professional person (especially if away from home)
- > It is helpful to encourage colleagues to consider contacting a peer support officer, Ambulance chaplain or the Employee Assistance Program

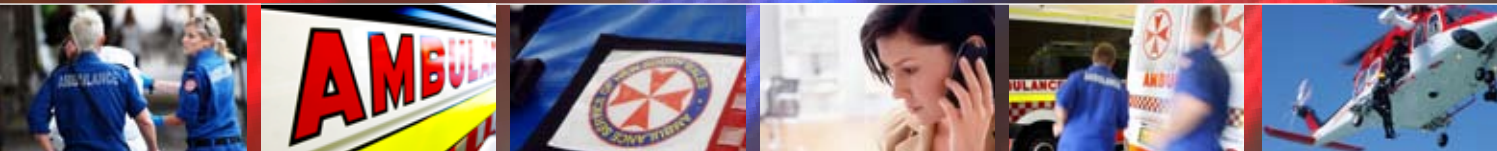
See the previous two pages for support services.

AMBULANCE SUPPORT SERVICES

cop ing with trauma

for Ambulance staff

it's OK to ask for help...



What is a traumatic incident?

Ambulance staff and volunteers face the prospect of dealing with the traumatic effects of injury or death on a daily basis.

While paramedics and operations centre staff are more likely to experience such situations, any employee may also be exposed to a trauma.

Traumatic incidents for Ambulance staff may include:

- > Major incidents or disasters
- > Multiple deaths on-scene
- > Prolonged or failed rescue
- > Massive trauma/multiple trauma incidents
- > Suicide or violent death
- > Assault or threat to an employee's personal safety
- > Serious injury or death of:
 - a child
 - victims or relatives known by staff
 - an emergency services worker
 - an employee while at work

Why am I feeling this way?

If you've been involved in a traumatic incident, you may need help to manage your reactions. This is normal and it's OK to ask for help.

It is important to know that many of the reactions and feelings described may be intense initially but gradually fade.

People will generally be resilient, but at times the reaction is overwhelming, very persistent and may disturb life activities, relationships (personal and work) and day to day functioning. If such impacts occur it is very important to get help.

Everyone reacts differently to a traumatic incident. However, people may be affected in different ways and there may be no outward signs of distress.

Some people manage these situations without the need for assistance. Others may need help to manage their reactions.

reactions to trauma



Common reactions to trauma

Feelings of sadness, grief or anger are normal reactions.

Other common reactions can include:

- > Trouble sleeping or nightmares
- > Unusually strong emotions or mood swings
- > Limited attention span or difficulty concentrating
- > Inability to relax when off duty
- > Preoccupation with what happened eg images, thoughts and feelings most of the time
- > Memory of feelings and need to avoid any reminders or shutting down emotions
- > On high alert or constantly tuned in to threat or trouble
- > Crying
- > Fainting
- > Desire to get away
- > Depression
- > Feelings of overwhelming sadness
- > Guilt
- > Anxiety or fear, panicky feelings
- > Anger
- > Loss of appetite

If you are experiencing any of these reactions the information or support service contacts provided in this brochure may help.

What can I do about it?

Many people who have experienced strong feelings or adverse reactions following a traumatic event have found the following things can help:

- > Keep your life as normal as possible
- > Structure your time and keep busy
- > Alternate periods of physical exercise with relaxation
- > Maintain a healthy and nutritious diet
- > Make as many daily decisions as possible – this will give you a feeling of control over your life
- > Don't make any big life changes – your judgement at this time may be impaired
- > Express your emotions and needs clearly and honestly to family, friends, co-workers and supervisors
- > Allow yourself some time out to rest, sleep and think
- > Help others involved in the event as much as possible by sharing feelings and check how they are feeling
- > Do things that make you feel good
- > Don't expect memories to go away – the feelings may stay with you for a long time
- > Drive carefully and be more careful around the home. Accidents are more common after severe stress
- > Don't self-medicate with alcohol or other substances
- > Ask for help if you need it

staff support services



<p>Employee Assistance Program</p>	<p>The Employee Assistance Program is provided by an external consulting firm Davidson Trahaire Corpsych who offer free short-term professional, confidential counselling either by phone or face-to-face.</p> <p>This service is available for all staff, volunteers and members of their immediate family. The firm also provides on-site support sessions after a traumatic workplace incident.</p> <p>Further information: Ambulance intranet at http://intranet.ambulance.nsw.gov.au/asintranet/corporate/Workforce/Staff+Support+Services/Employee+Assistance+Program or to access these services, telephone 1300 360 364.</p>	<p>Chaplaincy Services</p>	<p>Chaplains represent many different faiths and they are available to provide individual counselling, pastoral and spiritual support to staff members, volunteers and their immediate families.</p> <p>Chaplains can facilitate contacts with ministers of all denominations and faiths as required and they can conduct various services on request.</p> <p>Further information: Ambulance intranet at http://intranet/asintranet/corporate/Workforce/Staff+Support+Services/Chaplains or find contact details in the Softphone Phonebook held in all operations centres.</p>	<p>Peer Support Officers (PSOs)</p>	<p>PSOs are Ambulance staff who are trained to provide practical help and to assist their colleagues manage their reactions following a traumatic event.</p> <p>PSOs can also arrange professional counselling through the Employee Assistance Program if required.</p> <p>Further information: Ambulance intranet at http://intranet/asintranet/corporate/Workforce/Staff+Support+Services/Peer+Support. Each operations centre also has contact details listed in the Softphone Phonebook.</p>	<p>Grievance Contact Officers</p>	<p>Grievance contact officers are Ambulance staff trained in providing advice and support to staff and volunteers about grievances and workplace concerns.</p> <p>Further information: Ambulance intranet at http://intranet/asintranet/corporate/Workforce/HealthyWorkplaceStrategies/GrievanceContactOfficers</p>	<p>Managers</p>	<p>Managers within Ambulance are also available to provide advice and support in relation to all the staff support services.</p>	<p>Other options</p>	<p>Your Local Doctor: can provide support, treatment or referral to other services.</p> <p>Alcohol and Drug Information: confidential information, counselling and referral service. Tel: (02) 9361 8000 or 1800 422 599 (toll free).</p>
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