



The Disabled Police Association

Wellbeing Resources

Traumatic Incidents

‘How do you cope?’

What is a traumatic incident?

A traumatic incident can be anything out of your ordinary range of daily events that can be distressing. It is an event that is experienced or is perceived to cause threat to your safety or the stability of your surroundings. Many events can have this impact, for example it could be fire, an accident, being a witness to an event such as a death. It can be a large scale major disaster or a personal event involving yourself, colleague's friends or family.



How do people react?

We are all different and will all experience different reactions. In general reactions will fall into three groups:

Re-experiencing the trauma in your mind – such as flashbacks, having upsetting dreams or nightmares. Feeling that the trauma is happening again.

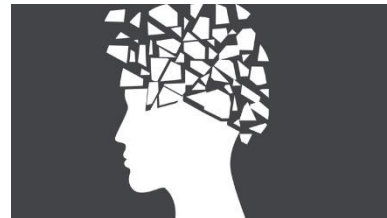
Avoiding things associated with or related to the trauma – such as avoiding thoughts, feelings and conversations about the event. Avoiding activities, places or people that remind you of the trauma. You might feel detached from those around you, not feel yourself and that you have lost or are losing interest in life.

Mood change, feeling more intense, irritable or over alert than usual. Feeling keyed up or on edge, not being able to concentrate, you find also it difficult to sleep. Feeling, low, depressed or vulnerable and becoming emotional or crying – this can be at times when you don't expect it.

Why do we react so strongly to trauma?

There are many reasons why trauma leaves such a strong impact on us emotionally. Firstly, it often shatters the basic beliefs we have about life; that life is safe and secure. It may be that the image of yourself has changed or been shattered, for example you may have behaved differently in the crisis to how you expected or how you wanted to behave. Secondly, trauma occurs suddenly and without warning. We have no time to adjust to this new experience. You may have felt at risk or that you were going to die. In the face of danger, our mind can hold onto the memory of the trauma, probably as a form of self-defense to ensure that it doesn't happen again.

Thirdly, often all your senses are heightened, the brain



receives all these messages from your eyes, ears etc. this can take time, and while it is happening you don't feel yourself.

What can help you deal with it?

It is important to recognise and understand the reactions you are experiencing. The mind can take a few days, weeks to process the experience and move on from it. Experiencing the reactions following such an event is not a sign of weakness or failure, it is natural.

It is important that you look after yourself over the following few weeks. Try to keep to your normal routine and don't withdraw from your usual activities. This is also important with attending work. This can be a challenge but try to persevere; it does help in the long run.

Try to maintain a good sleep routine, this includes keeping to the same pre bedtime routine too. If you feel

able to talk about how you are feel and/or the event do so with friends, family, colleagues, and health care professionals.

Avoid excessive alcohol, caffeine and cigarettes. These are often used as coping mechanisms, but can have a negative effect on how your mind processes the traumatic event and make your reactions appear more intense for a longer period of time.

How long will it last?

85% of people will feel themselves again four weeks after the event. 15% may still be struggling with these reactions after four weeks. If you find yourself in this situation, do not suffer alone. Seek help from your Force Occupational Health Unit, and GP.