

Trauma Response Protocol

Employee Assistance and Respectful Workplace Program
Public Service Commission

Preamble

The Employee Assistance and Respectful Workplace Program (EARWP) has a provincial mandate to provide a range of support services to employees and departments in promoting psychological health and safety in the workplace. These services include responding to individuals and workplaces that experience a traumatic event. Upon the request of the Deputy Minister or designate, EARWP will work collaboratively with the appropriate stakeholders to assist, support and promote the psychological safety and recovery of those impacted by trauma.

Definition of Traumatic Event

A traumatic workplace event includes an employee or group of employees who have experienced, witnessed, or have been confronted with an incident that involved actual or threatened death or serious injury, or a threat to the physical integrity of self or others, and that the individual's response involved intense fear or helplessness. Examples include but are not limited to the following: witnessing a death, exposure to or witness of a physical assault, physical threats, or search and rescue activities.

Purpose of the Protocol

The goal of the Trauma Response Protocol is to provide an organized intervention to a distressed employee or group of employees following a recent traumatic work event. The Protocol is designed to reduce the initial distress caused by the traumatic events, and to assist the longer term coping, adjustment, and emotional well-being of the individual(s) impacted by the event.

The World Health Organization identifies the following three factors as being the most helpful to supporting the individual, and in mitigating longer term psychological impact of exposure to a traumatic event:

- feeling safe, connected to others, calm and hopeful;
- having access to social, physical and emotional support; and,
- feeling able to help themselves, as individuals and communities.

Responding to Traumatic Events

It is recommended that, on notification of a traumatic event, the following process be followed:

1. While first priority is given to managing the trauma, the EARWP Division should be contacted as quickly as possible following a traumatic event. An EARWP Coordinator will determine, in consultation with leadership, whether or not a response is required.
2. The EARWP Coordinator will assess the nature of the incident to determine the most appropriate response to support the needs for immediate and ongoing safety of the parties involved.
3. The EARWP Coordinator may contract an external responder to assist in the response, depending on the needs of the situation and location in which the incident occurred.
4. The EARWP Coordinator will maintain a close liaison with senior management in the effected department regarding response efforts.
5. The EARWP Coordinator will offer guidance to departmental representatives on supporting employees and the work group in their adjustment and well-being.
6. Employees will be provided education on the signs and symptoms of trauma, recognizing trauma-related issues, and recovery after trauma. The EARWP Coordinator will also provide information to employees on available resources and trainings, EARWP supports, and community-based services.
7. Individual employees who may require follow up counselling will be identified by the EARWP Coordinator and/or departmental representatives. Where individual counselling is required, the process of referral to EARWP will be covered by policies outlined in the program, and the confidential nature of the program should be emphasized by the person facilitating the referral.

Recommendations:

Planning and preparation are important when responding to a traumatic workplace event. It is essential to establish communication and coordination with authorized personnel that are managing the work site including the manager and human resources representative.

It is recommended that departments develop their own internal operating plan to respond to traumatic workplace events. This plan should include, but not be limited to the following:

- steps to follow on notification of the incident; and,

- who to contact and the responsibilities of departmental representatives with ongoing coordination efforts (i.e., Police, Fire & Emergency Services, departmental representatives, human resource representatives, EARWP, etc.).

The EARWP Division is available to provide guidance to leaders on strategies for responding sensitively to trauma related issues and fostering a supportive culture. This shall include providing advice and direction on ways of implementing trauma-informed practices to mitigate psychological harm and exposure of employees who were not present or witness to the incident/event.