



## How to Assist After a Traumatic Event

### INFORMATION FOR CO-WORKERS, FAMILY MEMBERS AND FRIENDS

If your family member or friend has just been involved directly or indirectly in a traumatic event, you may find it helpful to read this.

It is normal that individuals will likely experience a range of reactions following a traumatic event. These kinds of reactions can include:

- Emotional (anger, sadness, anxiety, etc.)
- Physical (head or back aches, muscle tension, stomach upset, etc.)
- Behavioural (changes in appetite, sleeping patterns, irritability, withdrawal, etc.)
- Thinking process (forgetfulness, decreased concentration, etc.)

These reactions can begin immediately or be delayed. They can also fluctuate in intensity. Often this is a time when feelings of helplessness and vulnerability can be experienced. It is important to remember that these are normal reactions to a very unusual or unexpected event. Sometimes it can be difficult for family and friends to understand the reactions they may observe. The care and support you give at this time can be very helpful and appreciated.

### HOW YOU CAN HELP

- Listen sympathetically even if you don't understand their reactions.
- Do not talk them out of their feelings. You can tell them you are sorry such an event has occurred and that you want to understand and assist them.
- Do not minimize their experience. Do not make false promises to suggest, "Everything will be O.K."
- Ask what you can do to help the person feel safe. Often, people who have experienced a traumatic event can feel vulnerable and uncertain about their safety.

- Ask what else you can do that he/she would consider helpful. As much as possible, help with everyday tasks.
- Respect their possible need for personal space and private time.
- Try not to take their anger, irritation or other feelings personally.
- Do not encourage the person who has been affected to leave their job or make any snap decisions. Major life changes should be held off until the intense impact of the trauma subsides.
- If the signs of stress you see do not begin to subside within a couple of weeks, or if they intensify, encourage the affected person to seek further assistance.

## **HOW YOU CAN SUPPORT YOUR CHILDREN**

- As soon as possible after the event, speak with children in an open and honest manner, keeping in mind their age level. **Keep it simple.**
- Remain calm and provide reassurance that the affected parent is safe. It is normal for children to express their concern for their parent's or other family member's safety.
- Explain that the affected parent went through an upsetting experience and it is normal for them to have some reactions. Tell children, things usually get better with time.
- Encourage your children to express their concerns and to ask any questions. It is important not to dismiss their feelings.
- Be alert to any major changes that you observe with your children during this time. Make yourself available. Seek professional assistance, should your children exhibit prolonged signs of distress.

## **SELF-CARE FOR YOU**

You and others around you may also develop some reactions after hearing about the traumatic event. It is common to feel concerned, angry or upset that someone you care about has been affected in this way. Sometimes the stress of this situation can add to other stresses that may already exist. If you are concerned that this may be happening to you, your family, or is affecting your relationships, please remember that professional assistance is always available.

Remember that wherever you are, the confidential Employee Assistance Program (EAP) services are accessible to you. Emotional support services are available and accessible 24 hours a day, seven days a week.