

Experiencing a disruptive event affecting you and your workplace



You have been given this handout following the occurrence of an unexpected and potentially disruptive event that in some way has affected you, your co-workers and your workplace. This event can be a single occurrence or can result from the repetitive nature of similar events that is now creating a strong impact in the workplace.

Disruptive events can be unsettling to varying degrees and can potentially result in affecting your moods, sense of safety, concentration and productivity. We all react in our own unique ways and differently to unexpected, stressful events.

The purpose of this handout is to help you understand possible reactions that can be experienced and provide you with suggestions regarding best ways to manage your reactions, to support your recovery.

What are some possible reactions?

Even though everyone reacts differently, here are some possible and more common reactions people may experience after a disruptive event:

Physical Reactions

Numbness, shock, headaches, loss of appetite, sleep difficulties, fatigue, nausea, digestive problems

Emotional Reactions

Fear, anxiety, distress, anger, irritability, sadness, guilt, frustration

Behavioral Reactions

Tearfulness, restlessness, feeling disconnected, increased vigilance, blaming self or others

Cognitive Reactions

Loss of concentration, forgetfulness, indecisiveness, confusion, recurring intrusive thoughts and images

Need more information or assistance? All calls are completely confidential.

1-800-663-1142 | TTY: 1.888-384-1152 | International (Call Collect): 604-689-1717

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Supporting Employees Impacted by Disruptive Events

Are these reactions “normal”?

Absolutely. These are normal reactions that we can all experience when we are impacted by unsettling events. Research has shown that when you acknowledge these stress reactions and take steps to take care of them, they typically diminish within a short period of time. Most of us recover and return to our previous level of functioning, either on our own, with the assistance of others, or with the assistance of a mental health professional.

Do these reactions always occur right after the event?

Not always. Some of us may not experience these reactions until later, but this is not the case for most people. Whether these reactions occur right away or later, they are generally experienced by almost everyone to varying degrees.

Is there any way to avoid these types of reactions?

For most people, it is difficult to avoid these reactions altogether. Even people with extensive training and recurring exposure to traumatic incidents can still experience strong reactions.

What can you do?

- Pay more attention to your feelings and reactions than to the event itself.
- Avoid judging or blaming yourself for experiencing reactions.
- Be patient. Think about how you would support a friend in this situation and treat yourself similarly.
- Try to reduce other sources of stress in your life.
- Take the time to talk about your thoughts and feelings with someone you trust.
- Connecting with family, friends and coworkers has been shown to be a key factor in supporting resiliency.
- Let those that support you know how they can help during your time of healing and recovery. If they are doing something unhelpful, feel free to let them know.

- Get some physical exercise within the first twenty-four hours following the event, no matter how light it is. Exercise stimulates the release of stress-relieving chemicals (such as dopamine, endorphins) into our system.
- Find something that will help distract you from thoughts about the disruptive event. Some people find it helpful to be engaged in leisure and social activities. Returning to daily routines can also be helpful.
- Make an effort to maintain good sleeping habits. Avoid using electronics (ie: cellphone, tablet, laptop) at least one hour prior to bed. Having healthy sleep patterns will support your recovery.
- If you find yourself re-experiencing distressing thoughts or images, certain stress-reduction techniques may be helpful. We recommend viewing credible web sites that provide strategies on topics such as: relaxation exercises, diaphragmatic breathing, mindfulness and healthy sleep routines.
- Avoid comparing your recovery to that of your coworkers. We all recover differently based on our connection to the event, our interpretation of the incident and our life experiences.
- If you are questioned for details about the event, it is perfectly fine to explain that you do not feel up to discussing the event in depth at certain times. Use this opportunity to let those around you know what they could do to help you.

What should you do if your stress reactions do not diminish from week to week?

It is better not to keep the problem to yourself. Reach out to those people closest to you for additional and ongoing support.

If these reactions do not diminish within a few weeks, consider seeking counselling from a mental health professional through Homewood Health’s Employee and Family Assistance Program. You can access support in person, by phone or via internet to ensure that you obtain the assistance you might need.

Need more assistance or support? For more information, to book a counselling session or to access Homewood Health for any additional assistance or support, contact our Client Services Centre available to you 24/7 in English and French. All calls are completely confidential.

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