

- Getting better comes from allowing feelings to come out. Showing anger and sadness can be helpful. Keeping feelings in will be a drain on your energy.
- Try to share what has happened to you with people who are prepared to listen. It is a mistake to think that “no-one understands”. This may be embarrassing at first, but talking does help. However, don’t get involved with too many people – find one person to talk to over time.
- If you feel able it is better to share your experiences with someone also involved in the incident. Take the opportunity to meet with them. However respect their wishes if they say they do not wish to talk about it.
- Take care not to drink or smoke too much. It may help for a short time and then become a problem itself later. The same may be true of sleeping tablets and tranquillisers.
- Do drive more carefully and take care at home – accidents are more common after stress.
- Attend a Critical Incident Stress Debrief if this is offered to you – seek support from the Staff Support and Counselling Service.

#### **WHEN SHOULD YOU ASK FOR HELP?**

You can ask for help at anytime, but especially:

- If your feelings have not begun to fall into place after a couple of months and you are still feeling tense, confused, exhausted, uncontrollably angry, anxious, or very low.
- If you continue to feel numb, or are keeping active so as to shut out your feelings.
- If you continue to have poor sleep or nightmares.
- If you have no-one to talk to and you feel the need to do so.
- If your relationships at home or work are suffering.
- If you think you are smoking or drinking too much or taking too many tablets.

There is no shame in asking for help. It does not mean you are weak or useless or going mad. The help of an outsider is not an easy answer, but it may help you get things in order in your mind and enable you to use your strengths better. If contacting the Staff Support and Counselling Service feels too uncomfortable for you remember friends, colleagues and your GP can provide support for you.

## **Staff Support & Counselling Service**



# **Coping with a Personal Crisis**

**Information for those involved, witnessing, hearing or supporting someone following a traumatic event**

**For help, information and support contact:**

**Staff Support & Counselling Service  
Longton Cottage Hospital  
Longton  
STOKE-ON-TRENT  
ST3 4QX**

**Telephone: 0300-123-0995 Extension 4428**

At some time or another, everyone goes through a crisis or tragedy. People have accidents at home or work – young and old can die unexpectedly. It may be that you have been involved in an incident at work that you were not prepared for and although you responded professionally at the time you are now left feeling the effects of this. It could be that you have been involved in a violent or threatening situation.

A tragedy is nearly always something we feel could have been avoided. It is something we are unprepared to meet, something that leaves us with all sorts of confusing and unpleasant feelings.

The worst time can be when “all the fuss” has died down but the strong feelings remain. Everyone expects us to be alright – and we are not. The world goes on much the same as before while inside we may feel alone and that no-one understands.

You believe you should be coping better, that you are not dealing with things as well as others. This may mean that you don't tell those around you how bad things really are, because you feel ashamed of asking for help.

This leaflet will help you to understand your reactions, to know what to expect, and to know what to do. It is also useful to share this leaflet with family and friends who may be confused about your behaviour in the coming weeks. This will also allow them to understand what you are experiencing.

## REACTIONS IN THE EARLY WEEKS AND MONTHS

**Shock** Initially, you may feel very little or nothing at you. You may have difficulty understanding what has happened. Everything may seem unreal and you may have a sense of disbelief. Some people describe this as “in a dream”, or feel as if things were happening to someone else.

**Thoughts about what happened** Painful pictures of what happened may push their way into your mind. You may find yourself going over things again and again, or even reliving the feelings you had at the time of the event.

**Anger** Feelings of anger are common. This event may seem so senseless and you may feel picked on “why me?” You may feel badly treated by “The Management” . You may look to blame someone. Your anger may be expressed at everyone and anyone.

**Fear** When things go badly wrong we become aware of how easily such things can happen, and how unsafe we really are. The world around us can now seem much more dangerous. You may feel frightened that the same thing could happen again, and fear for the safety of those you love. You may become over-protective towards your children, or scared to leave your home.

**Shame and Guilt** No matter what actually happened or what we did, it is often the case the people feel guilty. You may wonder if you should have done more for others or why you should be alive when others are not. You may find yourself saying things like “if only”, “why not me”.

**Helplessness** You may feel totally out of control of your feelings and of what happens to you. This may make you feel anxious about the state of your mind. In fact any changes you have are the normal reaction to shock and trauma.

**Loss** For any reason the sense of loss may feel overwhelming. Some describe waves of physical sensations which can come and go at any time. Deep feelings of sadness, anguish, grief and hopelessness may follow.

**How your body can be affected** Some feelings are experienced in your body. This may cause you to worry that you are physically ill when in fact your body is showing signs of emotional distress which is normal.

### The following are common:

- Tiredness
- Racing heart, palpitations and even shakes
- Feeling sick and diarrhoea
- Difficulty in breathing
- Tightness in the throat and/or chest
- Headaches, neck and backache
- Forgetful or lack of concentration

### Sleep problems are common too:

- You may find it hard to get to sleep
- You may wake in the middle of the night
- You may find yourself waking very early

**IN THE LONGER TERM: Loss of Interest** You may discover that you are not as involved as you were in your usual everyday activities.

**Loss of Confidence** You may not even notice this until someone tells you. You may feel numb, and you may be unable to experience the feelings that you used to have.

**Feeling cut off** You may feel cut off or distant from people you love and are normally close to. This, with the irritability and anger you may have can make relationships very difficult.

It is very important to know that these feelings are understandable reactions to abnormal events. Although they are very intense and difficult to put up with, these are the ways in which people can feel.

### WHAT ARE THE MOST USEFUL THINGS TO DO?

- Don't expect the memories and feelings to go away quickly – they will come and go for a while
- Trying to forget, or avoiding things to do with the events may seem like a good idea at the time. Trying to push things to the back of your mind can be helpful for a short while. However it may be impossible to forget – the thoughts may return however hard you try. You won't forget things, but you need to reach a point where remembering is not so painful.

