

OEAP Retooling Its Stress Management Services

By Ohio Employee Assistance Program (OEAP) Staff



Newtown grieves after traumatic event, photo from BBC.

In light of the increased incidents of violence and traumatic events, it has become more important than ever to make sure that agencies have access to services and resources needed to assist and support staff in the event of a critical incident in the workplace. The Ohio Employee Assistance Program (OEAP) has been working diligently over the past several months to retool and expand the Critical

Incident Stress Management (CISM) services that are offered to all state agencies and institutions. As part of our strategy, all OEAP professionals were recently retrained and certified in Critical Incident Stress Management Group Interventions. On December 11-12, 2012, the OEAP staff, along with representatives from the Department of Rehabilitation and Corrections (DRC), Department of Youth Services (DYS) and Ohio Attorney General (AG) received this training to ensure that the best services are available to State of Ohio employees and agencies. OEAP has been partnering with DRC for the past several years providing CISM services to their agency. We are excited about the continued opportunity to work with our partnering agencies throughout the State.

Additional information about these services and training opportunities will be forthcoming. While we hope a traumatic event does not occur in the workplace, it is important to have a plan in place to deal with such an event. This month's issue of *Frontline Focus* is dedicated to crisis management and offers helpful information on how to respond to various crisis situations. Stay tuned for more information!

What Is a Traumatic Event?

<http://emergency.cdc.gov>

An event, or series of events, that causes moderate to severe stress reactions, is called a traumatic event. Traumatic events are characterized by a sense of horror, helplessness, serious injury, or the threat of serious injury or death. Traumatic events affect survivors, rescue workers, and friends and relatives of victims who have been directly involved, in addition to potentially affecting those who suffer injuries or loss. They may also affect people who have witnessed the event either first hand or on television. Stress reactions immediately following a traumatic event are very common, however, most of the reactions will resolve within ten days.

Common Responses to a Traumatic Event

| Cognitive | Emotional | Physical | Behavioral |
|-----------------------------|--|----------------------------|--|
| Poor concentration | Shock | Nausea | Suspicion |
| Confusion | Numbness | Lightheadedness | Irritability |
| Disorientation | Feeling overwhelmed | Dizziness | Arguments with friends and loved ones |
| Indecisiveness | Depression | Gastro-intestinal problems | Withdrawal |
| Shortened attention span | Feeling lost | Rapid heart rate | Excessive silence |
| Memory loss | Fear of harm to self and/or loved ones | Tremors | Inappropriate humor |
| Unwanted memories | Feeling nothing | Headaches | Increased/decreased eating |
| Difficulty making decisions | Feeling abandoned | Grinding of teeth | Change in sexual desire or functioning |
| | Uncertainty of feelings | Fatigue | Increased smoking |
| | Volatile emotions | Poor sleep | Increased substance use or abuse |
| | | Pain | |
| | | Hyper-arousal | |
| | | Jumpiness | |

Violence in Your Community:

What You Can Do for Yourself And for Others?

By liveandworkwell.com

Whether you're involved directly, through proximity or as a second-hand witness via the media, friends or family, stress and anxiety are normal reactions to critical events. There are many ways to help yourself and others deal with the feelings that accompany violent events.

What You Can Do for Yourself

Taking care of yourself is key to managing the physical and emotional symptoms that are common side effects of violence. You can start by incorporating the ideas below into your daily life:

- ▼ **Eat well-balanced and regular meals**, even if you don't feel like it. Good nutrition is very important when you are under stress.
- ▼ **Get plenty of rest.**
- ▼ **Exercise regularly.** It can help work off some physical stress symptoms, leaving you feeling calmer and better able to relax. If you're feeling lethargic it can help energize you and clear your mind.
- ▼ **Avoid caffeine**, especially if you are having trouble sleeping.
- ▼ **Spend time with other people.** Coping with stressful events is easier when people support each other.
- ▼ **Avoid the use of drugs or alcohol**, including prescription and over the counter drugs to numb the pain. It will only complicate or delay your recovery.
- ▼ **Structure your time and set priorities.** Maintain your basic normal routine, but give yourself permission to skip the extras for a while.
- ▼ **Don't make any major life changes or decisions.**
- ▼ **Do make as many small daily decisions as possible** to reassert your sense of control.
- ▼ **Don't try to avoid or deny reoccurring thoughts or feelings about the incident.** They are normal and will decrease over time.
- ▼ **Give yourself permission to feel rotten** and to share your feelings with others.
- ▼ **Do things that you enjoy.** Take mini-breaks: go out to dinner, take 10 minutes alone, watch a movie, read a favorite magazine.
- ▼ **Talk about how you're feeling.** Be willing to listen to others who need to talk about how they're feeling.
- ▼ **Don't be afraid to set limits with others** when you don't feel like talking. You don't have to discuss the incident or your feelings when you don't want to.
- ▼ **Don't label yourself as "crazy."** Remind yourself you're having normal reactions.

- ▼ **Write down your thoughts and feelings.** This can be especially helpful if you're having trouble sleeping or when you wake from a troubling dream.
- ▼ **Ask for help if you need it.** If you are having trouble coping on your own, help is available from many sources:
 - Professional assistance from a counselor may sometimes be necessary. This does not imply weakness or craziness. It simply acknowledges that the particular event was just too powerful to handle by yourself.
 - In the workplace you may be able to get assistance from your co-workers, the human resource department or EAP.
 - Church, friends, family, and other community resources can be valuable sources of support.

What You Can Do for Others

When violent events occur - whether personal or national - it's natural to try and help friends and loved ones cope with the difficult time. But we may not always know the best way to do it. Friends may simply need to talk or they may need help taking care of everyday tasks. The following are ideas for reaching out to loved ones during a traumatic time.

Listening

- ▼ Listen carefully.
- ▼ Acknowledge feelings as normal.
- ▼ Be sensitive to individual circumstances and different points of view.
- ▼ Don't respond with "you're lucky it wasn't worse." Instead, say that you are sorry such an event has occurred and you want to understand and help.
- ▼ Don't take emotional responses like anger personally.
- ▼ Respect an individual's need for privacy. If someone doesn't want to talk about the incident or their feelings, don't insist.

Violence in Your Community continued on page 3



Common Symptoms in Child After a Traumatic Event

By liveandworkwell.com

There are some common symptoms to look for in children after they have been exposed to a traumatic event such as an accident, a natural disaster, violence or the death of a loved one. Children are likely to show signs of stress. These signs may resurface around the anniversary of the traumatic event, particularly when there are visible reminders (e.g., on television). Whether a child was involved directly, through proximity, or as a second-hand witness via the media, friends or family, they are likely to exhibit some of the following symptoms. These reactions are normal and there are many ways parents and caregivers can help children cope.

Indicators of Emotional Overload in Children

- ▼ Regression: returning to outgrown behaviors.
- ▼ Nightmares and night terrors.
- ▼ Clinging to parents, fear of strangers.
- ▼ Outbursts and tantrums; irritability.
- ▼ "Fragile" feelings: easily hurt, tendency to cry more quickly than usual.
- ▼ Nervous behavior, worry.
- ▼ Withdrawal and isolation.
- ▼ Suppression of emotion.
- ▼ Physical complaints: headaches, stomach aches.
- ▼ Changes in eating or sleeping behavior.
- ▼ Bedwetting or thumb-sucking.
- ▼ Excessive fear of darkness, separation or being alone.

Helping Your Child with Emotional Trauma

- ▼ Provide reassurance that the child is safe and you will protect him or her.
- ▼ Hold, hug, and touch your child often.
- ▼ Explore your child's perceptions of the event. Correct misinterpretations and answer questions.
- ▼ Be honest and give accurate information but don't give more



information than your child wants. Give information he or she can understand.

- ▼ Be more tolerant of unusual behavior.
- ▼ Spend extra time with your child at bedtime.
- ▼ Help your child to identify, label and express feelings, and let your child know these feelings are normal. Model honesty about feelings by describing your own at a comfortable level for the child.
- ▼ Watch for, and correct self-blame by your child. Children tend to blame themselves for all that happens around them. Make sure your child understands that what happened was not his or her fault.
- ▼ Allow your child to mourn or grieve over their loss, whether it is a toy, their home, etc.
- ▼ If symptoms do not decrease in severity over a few weeks, or if your child was exposed to actual or potential violence, loss, or serious injury, consider consulting a mental health professional who works with children with these types of concerns.

Violence in Your Community continued from page 2

Reaching Out At Work

- ▼ Organize support groups at work to help one another.
- ▼ Offer a "listening ear" to someone who hasn't asked for help but may need it.
- ▼ Give encouragement, support and understanding with on-the-job issues.
- ▼ Identify resources for additional help (EAP, mental health benefit, human resources department).

Helping Family and Friends

- ▼ Offer help with everyday tasks like cleaning, cooking, caring for the family.
- ▼ Respect their need for privacy and time alone.
- ▼ Suggest available help (EAP, community resources, church groups, etc.).
- ▼ Keep communication open —be available and accessible.

Preparing for an Emergency at Work

<http://www.ncpc.org/resources/files/pdf/workplace-safety>



- ▼ Know your company's emergency plans. If your company does not have an emergency plan, volunteer to help develop one.
- ▼ Support each other. Determine how you will help each other in the event that public transportation is down or thoroughfares are impassable. Are there employees who could temporarily house, transport, or feed other employees?
- ▼ Know the exit routes and evacuation plans in your building.
- ▼ Know at least two exit routes from each room, if possible. Be able to escape in the dark by knowing how many desks or cubicles are between your workstation and two of the nearest exits.
- ▼ Know the location of fire extinguishers and medical kits.
- ▼ Make sure there is a designated meeting location and that every employee knows what it is.
- ▼ Make special emergency plans for co-workers who are disabled or may require assistance during an emergency.
- ▼ Never lock fire exits or block doorways, halls, or stairways. However, keep fire doors closed to slow the spread of smoke and fire.
- ▼ Keep your own personal emergency supplies in a desk drawer. Consider a flashlight, walking shoes, a water bottle, and non-perishable food. Contact the Federal Emergency Management Agency for information on workplace emergency kits.
- ▼ Have a printed list of important phone numbers (e.g., your spouse's number at work, your children's school numbers) at your desk. Do not rely on electronic lists, such as direct-dial phone numbers and computer organizers.

How to Respond Appropriately if Something Happens

By OEAP

Unfortunately, anyone can experience a traumatic situation or a critical incident in the workplace, in public or at home.

Critical incidents may include:

- ▼ Hostage or riot incident
- ▼ Serious injury or death of co-worker
- ▼ Resident suicide or death
- ▼ Catastrophic accidents
- ▼ Incidents involving use of force

Rapid response is most effective in minimizing the long-term problems such incidents cause; therefore, employees, managers and Human Resources should

immediately contact the Ohio Employee Assistance Program (OEAP) when a traumatic event occurs in the workplace.

OEAP is here to listen and to help with any critical situation or issues in the workplace. OEAP also knows how to professionally evaluate potentially threatening situations, so please don't hesitate to call us. Your prompt response can save a life!



The Basics: Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) Toolkit

By OptumHealth Behavioral Solutions by United Behavioral Health

What can I do?

Following a traumatic event it is important to take care of yourself.

Talk about your feelings with those close to you. Having support can help you to cope with your experiences. If you are having trouble there are things you can do to help yourself.

Seek help:

It is important to be open about the experience. There are professionals trained to guide you through the healing process. Sometimes medication may be needed. It can help to start managing the symptoms. Tell your health care professional what you are feeling. They can refer you to someone specializing in the treatment of PTSD.

Seeing a counselor to help with your recovery can be one of the first steps to healing.

Reconnect with others:

If you are feeling numb it may be a struggle to regain close relationships. Making an effort to reconnect can help with the healing process. Reaffirm existing relationships. Work to develop new ones. Spend time with people. Being involved in volunteer work can help you form new relationships. Helping others is a great way to stay busy. After a horrible event it may be hard to believe that people are good. Involving yourself in volunteer work can remind you that there are a lot of good people out there.

Join a support group:

Sharing with other survivors of trauma can help you. You can begin to build a network of support. There are many support groups for those who have survived a trauma. Find one that is comfortable for you. It is important to feel safe talking about your experiences.

Practice relaxation techniques:

When our bodies are always on alert it is hard to relax. Find time

to practice breathing exercises. These are useful when you start to feel stressed out or feel a flashback coming on. Daily meditation is a good way to relax. You can start with just a couple minutes a day. Increase your meditation time as you become more comfortable. Nature soundtracks, such as ocean or wind sounds, can help you to relax.

Exercise:

Physical activity can help relieve tension. Starting an exercise routine can allow time daily to be free of the event. Exercise will keep your mind and body healthy.



Keep yourself safe:

Be aware of your surroundings. If possible, avoid places with high crime. Making sure that you are in a safe environment will help you to re-establish the feeling of security you may have lost.

Educate yourself:

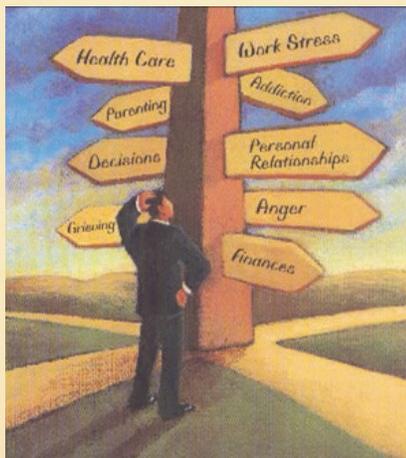
You are the biggest part of your recovery. It is important to understand what you are living with. Learning more about the symptoms of PTSD can help you to create a plan for coping. The more you learn the more tools you have for recovery.

Enjoy life:

Find a hobby or activity that you enjoy. If nothing sounds like fun, try something you used to enjoy. Start gardening again or playing board games. Do anything that can keep you busy and teach you to have fun again. Healing is different for everyone. Find what works for you. Taking action to help yourself is one of the best decisions you can make. Make sure that you are getting the support you need.



Your employee assistance program offers confidential help for personal problems and concerns. Concerned about a troubled family member who won't get help? Feel tired and exhausted, but don't know if it's burnout, loss of motivation, depression, or all three? Late for work too often? Has use of alcohol or drugs created a crisis you are facing right now? The bottom line: Never wonder if your concern is suitable for the OEAP. So, if you've been putting off taking action to solve a serious issue that is weighing on you, give the OEAP a call today.



Are you at your breaking point?
Contact the OEAP today
for confidential assistance.
800-221-6327

246 N. High St. 1st Floor
Columbus, Ohio 43215
Ph 1 (800) 221.6327
(614) 644-8545
Fax: (614) 564-2510
www.ohio.gov/eap