Telephone: 020 3228 2671 | Internal: 82671 | Email: ciss@slam.nhs.uk



# Critical Incident Staff Support (CISS) Psychoeducation Leaflet Normal Reactions to Distressing Events

Staff working in mental health are inevitably exposed to significantly distressing events from time to time. Overall people are resilient when traumatic events occur and most people will recover without long-term problems. However it is normal to have strong reactions to traumatic events. Reactions are likely to be strongest in those who were closest to the incident, in those who directly witnessed or were involved in the distressing event. People who have experienced other traumatic events in the past, especially of a similar nature, may also be particularly affected by strong reactions.

## What reactions might I experience?

Common reactions after a significantly distressing event include feeling frightened, horrified, helpless, sad, angry, confused, and overwhelmed. People may also have nightmares or upsetting thoughts and images of the events. These are normal and not a sign of 'going mad' or weakness. Further common reactions include, physical tension, insomnia, and irritability. It is also normal to be more alert or 'jumpy' and initially to avoid reminders, such as where the event occurred.

#### What can I do in the first few weeks?

You should use your usual social support such as, talking with family, friends and colleagues, with whom you are comfortable and at your own pace. You should follow your own natural inclination with regard to how much and to whom you talk. In addition, it is beneficial to get back to everyday routines and to continue to take part in activities that you enjoy or are important to you. It is also important to look after yourself generally, eating healthy food, taking exercise and not using alcohol or other drugs to excess.

## Should I seek help straight away?

It is normal to feel a bit more anxious than usual following a distressing event. Most people will recover naturally, without professional help, within the first few weeks. In these cases NICE recommends a period of 'Active Monitoring' for the first month. The CISS Team can provide you with a self-screen questionnaire to support the active monitoring process. Some people experience high levels of traumatic stress symptoms within the first month of an incident. These difficulties are highly treatable with short term psychological therapies, therefore, please contact CISS or your local IAPT service to discuss.

## When should I seek help?

A referral to IAPT for an assessment is recommended if **a month after the event** you continue to:

- feel upset or fearful most of the time
- feel jumpy most of the time
- have nightmares
- frequent memories of the event are intruding on your day-to-day life
- have difficulties managing day-to-day responsibilities, such as going to work or caring for family

Other psychological difficulties may persist after a traumatic incident, for example, depression and grief reactions in the event of bereavement. It is important for you to monitor your symptoms and if they are not improving over time then you need to seek help.

In addition to the above, if you experience any of the following then a referral to IAPT is recommended:

- experience high levels of anger/aggressive impulses
- have thoughts about harming self or others
- increase in alcohol consumption/recreational drug use

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Do not wait to seek help if the difficulties you are experiencing are troublesome. These difficulties are highly treatable with short term psychological therapies, therefore, please contact CISS or your local IAPT service to discuss at your earliest convenience.

## Where can I go for further support?

If you are experiencing any of the symptoms described above then a referral to IAPT is recommended. You can also contact the CISS Team to discuss further (details at the top of this page)

#### **IAPT Services**

You can self-refer for evidence-based talking therapies at your local (the borough where you live) IAPT service:

• Online: <a href="https://slam-iapt.nhs.uk/self-referral/">https://slam-iapt.nhs.uk/self-referral/</a>

• Telephone: **Croydon** - 0203 228 4040 Southwark - 0203 228 2194 Lambeth - 0203 228 6747 Lewisham - 020 3228 1350

If you live outside of these boroughs please contact your GP who can advise you on how to refer to your local IAPT service, or search online via this link: https://www.nhs.uk/service-search/Psychological-therapies-(IAPT)/LocationSearch/10008

## What treatments are recommended for psychological difficulties after trauma?

The following interventions are recommended for those experiencing severe symptoms or whose symptoms do not improve after a period of one month:

Presenting condition	Recommendations based on NICE guidelines
Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)	Trauma Focused Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT)
	2. Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR),or CBT
Depression	1. Self-help or computerised CBT, Behavioural activation, or CBT
	2. Interpersonal Therapy (IPT), or CBT
Generalised Anxiety Disorder (GAD)	1. Self help
	2. CBT
Alcohol dependence	CBT, or Behavioural therapies, or Social network and environment-based therapy,
	or Behavioural Couples Therapy
Substance misuse	Contingency management, or Behavioural Couples Therapy, or
	Motivational Enhancement Therapy, or CBT

1= Mild, 2 = Moderate-Severe

## Occupational Health & Wellbeing

If you think that your health problem/s (physical or psychological) are affecting your ability to work, your manager can refer you for advice and support. You can also self-refer to the OHS by emailing slohs@gstt.hs.uk or calling 0207 188 4152.

- The Employee Assistance Programme (Care First) offers free, confidential advice for emotional and practical issues. Contact a Counsellor or Information Specialist by
  - o Telephone: **0800 174 319**
  - o Online: <a href="https://www.carefirst-lifestyle.co.uk">www.carefirst-lifestyle.co.uk</a> (username: slam123 password: employee)
- OHS may refer you to SLaM Counselling Service for face-to-face counselling or SLaM Wellbeing service for other support.

## SLaM Staff Counselling & Wellbeing Service

A confidential in-house service providing support for a range of difficulties. Staff can refer themselves to the Counselling Service by contacting staffcounselling@slam.nhs.uk. These sessions are confidential supportive spaces but not intended to treat mental health problems (such as depression, anxiety or trauma). For such problems, IAPT is recommended.

## Spiritual & Pastoral Care Service

Facilitate multidisciplinary staff support groups and work with individual staff: Bethlem Royal Hospital chaplains: 020 3228 4361; Ladywell Hospital chaplains: 020 3228 6210; Lambeth Hospital chaplains: 020 3228 6210; Maudsley Hospital chaplains: 020 3228 2815

You may prefer to access support from an external service. The following agencies should be able to help or signpost you to an appropriate service:

- Your GP
- Unions (e.g. UNISON welfare)
- Professional Associations for example:
- Royal College of Nursing Counselling: 0345 772 6100 or self refer online <a href="https://www.rcn.org.uk/get-help/member-">https://www.rcn.org.uk/get-help/member-</a> support-services

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• British Medical Association Counselling/Doctor Advisor Service: **0330 123 1245**