

# **Trauma Response Protocol**

## **Employee Assistance Program – Public Service Commission**

### **Preamble**

The Employee Assistance Program (EAP) has a provincial wide mandate to provide a range of highly sensitive and confidential counselling and support services to employees and departments in promoting psychological health in the work environment. The Employee Assistance and Respectful Workplace Division works closely with all levels of the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador including Deputy Ministers and equivalents, Human Resource Secretariat, public sector unions and public sector employees eligible to receive EAP services. Services provided under EAP include responding to individuals and workplaces that experience a critical or traumatic incident during the course of work.

### **Definition of Traumatic Incident**

A traumatic workplace incident includes an employee or group of employees who have experienced, witnessed or have been confronted with an event that involved actual or threatened death or serious injury or a threat to the physical integrity of self or others and that the individuals response involved intense fear or helplessness. Examples include but are not limited to the following: witnessing a death, exposure to or witness of a physical assault, physical threats or search and rescue activities.

### **Purpose of the Protocol**

The goal of this protocol is to provide an organized intervention to help a distressed employee or group of employees following a recent traumatic work event. The trauma response is designed to reduce the initial distress caused by the traumatic event and to assist the longer term coping, adjustment and emotional well-being of the individual(s) impacted by the event.

The World Health Organization identifies the following three factors as being the most helpful to supporting the individual and in mitigating longer term psychological impact of exposure to a traumatic event:

- feeling safe, connected to others, calm and hopeful;
- having access to social, physical and emotional support; and
- feeling able to help themselves, as individuals and communities.

### **The Employee Assistance Program (EAP)**

EAP will provide counselling and coordination of support services to employees and departments following a traumatic event in the workplace. Upon the request of the Deputy Minister or designate, EAP will work collaboratively with the appropriate stakeholders to assist, support and promote the psychological needs and recovery of those impacted. The response from EAP shall include:

- establishing a connection with the departmental representative;
- assessing the nature of the incident and the employees present and/or exposed either directly or through some other means to the incident;
- supporting the need for immediate and ongoing safety;
- providing a calm presence to employees who may be overwhelmed or distraught;
- assisting departmental representatives by providing information and advice that would assist employees and the work group in their adjustment and well-being;
- identifying individual employees who may require follow up counselling supports that will address any acute stress reactions, cumulative stress, anxiety and/or depression;
- providing education and/or resource materials to employees on the signs, symptoms, and impacts of a traumatic incident so that they are equipped with information should they experience difficulty in the days to follow; and
- providing information on the full range of counselling services available under EAP, community mental health services and services available to the public.

### **Dealing with Traumatic Events**

It is recommended that, on notification of a traumatic event, the following process be followed:

1. While first priority is given to managing the trauma, EAP should be contacted as quickly as possible following a traumatic event. An EAP Coordinator will determine, in consultation with on-site personnel and/or the Director of Human Resources (or designate) whether or not a response is required. The EAP Coordinator may provide the response or arrange to bring in an external responder depending on the needs of the situation and location in which the incident occurred. (EAP maintains a list of external professionals/consultants trained in trauma response and mental health counselling who work with EAP when required);
2. The EAP Coordinator will maintain a close liaison with the Director of Human Resources (or designate) and/or the senior management in the effected department regarding response efforts;
3. The EAP Coordinator will do an immediate assessment to determine the most appropriate response to meet the departments and employees' needs;
4. Provision of information to employees on services related to traumatic events and any training which may be available, will be the responsibility of the EAP Coordinator; and
5. Where individual counselling is required, the process of referral to EAP will be covered by policies outlined in the program and the confidential nature of the program should be emphasized by the person facilitating the referral.

**Recommendations:**

Planning and preparation are important when responding to a traumatic workplace event. It is essential to establish communication and coordination with authorized personnel that are managing the work site including the manager and the Human Resources representative. Effective response delivery also includes the sharing of information about the nature of the event, current circumstances and the type of support services available.

It is recommended that departments develop their own internal operating plan in managing traumatic workplace events. This plan should include but not be limited to the following: steps to follow on notification of the incident; who to contact and the responsibilities of the various departmental representatives involved with on-going coordination efforts. (i.e. Police, Fire & Emergency Services, departmental representatives, Human Resource Secretariat, EAP, etc.)

EAP is available to provide guidance on strategies and procedures in managing a workplace traumatic event that is suited to the departments operations and culture. This shall include providing advice and direction on ways to mitigate psychological harm and exposure of employees who were not present or witness to the incident/event.