

# Trauma Support Guide

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**This guide has been created to provide information and advice in relation to the management of traumatic or critical incidents within Network Rail.**

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## What is a traumatic incident?

An experience that causes physical, emotional or psychological distress, or harm. It is an event that is perceived and experienced as a threat to one's safety.

## What is a critical incident?

The term 'critical incident' is defined as any sudden and unexpected incident or sequence of events which causes trauma.

## What types of incidents could be potentially traumatic?

- Exposure to or witnessing a human or animal fatality
- Exposure to or witnessing a severe injury
- Road traffic accidents
- Exposure to or witnessing verbal or physical abuse
- Workplace accidents
- Actual or threat of physical or sexual violence
- Natural or industrial disasters
- Terrorism
- Being the victim of crime
- Exposure to or witnessing psychological abuse

During such incidents, an individual is confronted with an extreme situation that presents a direct or indirect threat to their life, safety or wellbeing. It is important to remember that different incidents may be traumatic to different people.

**Direct exposure** is being at the scene of the incident, when it happens or shortly following, or being the victim of an incident. For example, a Mobile Operations Manager attending the scene of an incident or station staff who have been the victim of verbal abuse.

**Indirect exposure** could be via receiving a telephone call, hearing of the incident, listening to accounts of the incident from those directly involved, being emotionally affected by knowing about it. For example, staff manning the incident reporting phone lines or signallers.

## What is the significance of a traumatic/critical incident?

The stress, fear, anxiety or shock which is experienced can potentially overwhelm an individual's ability to continue functioning in a manner that is deemed as normal for them. This can lead to physical, emotional or psychological harm in the following, days, weeks, months and even years. At Network Rail we have areas of the business that may present an individual with the risk of being exposed to a potentially traumatic incident. This can have a lasting physical and/or psychological impact on anyone directly or indirectly involved. The nature of certain parts of our organisation may mean that traumatic incidents are often unpredictable and therefore unpreventable.

## How can people be affected by traumatic/critical incidents?

Everyone will react differently to traumatic incidents and therefore a range of responses can be expected. Typical reactions during the first few days include shock, shivering, confusion, disorientation, tearfulness, inability to speak, feeling helpless, fear and anger.

During the first two - four weeks post-incident, reactions can include:

- **Nightmares**
- **Flashbacks, reliving the experience**
- **Recurrent thoughts about the trauma**
- **Avoidance of places and things which represent reminders of the incident**
- **Withdrawal, isolation and mood swings**
- **Difficulties with concentration, memory, thought process**
- **Problems sleeping, eating, tiredness**
- **Headaches, nausea, dizziness**
- **Depression, anxiety, anger, denial, feeling of numbness, irritability, sense of insecurity, feelings of guilt, and a sense of disbelief**

Its important to remember whilst there may be these initial and ongoing responses, trauma is a very different experience for many individual's and responses may vary greatly.

It is important to recognise and acknowledge that these symptoms are a natural response to an distressing incident. During this period, individuals may require time to process the experience in order to work through, manage and make sense of what has happened, which will subsequently enables them to recover. Most people will see a decrease in the immediate post incident symptoms over the first two to four weeks. During this time it's important to:

#### **Line Manager:**

- **Provide emotional support**
- **Encourage the employee to talk about how they feel**
- **If the employee is not able to work ensure contact is maintained e.g. check in calls/texts**
- **Observe a period of 'watchful waiting'**

#### **Employee:**

- **Maintain contact with family, friends and work colleagues**
- **Establish a daily routine**
- **Observe a period of 'watchful waiting'**
- **Seek out emotional support**

## What is watchful waiting?

For 4 weeks following an incident, a period of 'watchful waiting' is recommended. This approach includes self-monitoring symptoms, observation by colleagues or line manager or assessment by a medical professional to help to determine whether there is a need for further clinical treatment or intervention. You could take note or observe things such as:

#### **Line Manager:**

- **Requests for time off**
- **An initial change in work atmosphere and mood of employees**
- **Reduced work performance**
- **Avoiding certain areas or tasks**

#### **Employee:**

- **Feeling tearful, insecure & nervous**
- **Anger and irritability possibly leading to arguments or conflicts**
- **Demonstrating significant difficulties after the 4 week period**

Symptoms for more than four weeks following the traumatic incident could lead to an increased risk of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) or other mental health conditions, and it is at this point clinical intervention or professional support may be required.

The symptoms of PTSD can start after a delay of weeks, months, or years but usually within six months of the traumatic event.

## What is available to support employees?

- 1. Network Rail – Traumatic Incident Management Business Process**  
Outlines the process for supporting employees following exposure to potentially traumatic incidents
- 2. Employee Assistance Programme – Validium**  
Provides confidential support and guidance for employees, managers and family members who may have been directly / indirectly involved in potentially traumatic incidents. Line managers may use this service for guidance on how to best support an employee. Employees may contact Validium for support and to arrange face to face or telephone talking therapy.
- 3. Validium can also provide ‘critical incident response’ to support staff onsite following an incident (in line with the Network Rail Business Process referenced above). The term ‘critical incident’ is defined as any sudden and unexpected incident or sequence of events which causes trauma.**

## Steps to take following a traumatic/critical incident

- Contact Validium's Critical Incident Support Line - 0800 358 67 58
- The core CI Team will:
  - Assess your wellbeing and provide immediate Psychological First Aid Support if required.
  - Gather information (type of Incident: Public, Organisational, fatalities, media intervention, No. of people involved, mixed or homogenous groups, Dates and Time for Onsite or Remote Support).
  - Discuss most appropriate Support (Onsite or Video Conferencing) and most appropriate intervention (CMB, Defuse, CISD and PFA)



The different types of intervention will depend on the type of incident and the support required. Delivery can be onsite or via video conferencing.

- Primarily PFA (Psychological First Aid) and/or CISD (Critical Incident Stress Debrief) is provided for Groups and/or Individuals.
- Where immediate CI Support is required, Validium will provide CMB (Crisis Management Briefing and/or Defusing).

### Post Incident Support

Any employee requiring further support post incident can be referred for the appropriate therapy via our current critical incident service provider – Validium. Post incident support is paid locally by each route/region. This includes:

- Structured counselling sessions
- Special psychological support including EMDR, and CBT Therapy.

Validium are available 24 hours a day seven days a week. Use the login details below to access online:

<https://vclub.validium.com/Account/Login?ReturnUrl=%2F>

- Username: NetworkRail
- Password: onlinesupport

Alternatively, call Validium on the telephone number: 0800 358 4858  
Select option 5 for dedicated line manager support

### **3. Occupational Health**

Can support employees and line managers establish a back to work or at work plan for anyone who may become unwell or are affected following exposure to a potentially traumatic incident. Referrals can be made via the online portal - [www.myohportal.co.uk](http://www.myohportal.co.uk).

### **4. Samaritans**

Provide a confidential listening service for anyone affected by a potentially traumatic incident

### **5. Peer Support (TrIM practitioner, Mental Health First Aider / Champion)**

Some Regions/Functions of Network Rail have trained staff in peer to peer mental health support who can provide guidance and sign posting to support for employees

### **6. Regional Occupational Health and Wellbeing Manager**

Can provide guidance around what process is in place to support employees in your Region.

### **7. Mental Wellbeing Hub**

Educational material and resources for employees. Videos, briefing packs, posters, leaflets and more.

### **8. Central Occupational Health Team**

The central occupational health team in Technical Authority are able to provide guidance and can be contacted via: [healthandwellness@networkrail.co.uk](mailto:healthandwellness@networkrail.co.uk)

Where to find out more information?

[Mental Wellbeing Hub](#)

[RSSB Responding to potentially traumatic incidents guidance](#)