

TRIM

The Trauma Risk Management Handbook



FOREWORD

In the aftermath of a traumatic event, you could be faced with a number of differing reactions. It may be that the incident has had no marked effect on you, or conversely, you may be profoundly affected and facing a number of strange and new emotions. The goal of this booklet is to outline the coping strategies and assistance that is available to individuals serving within the Naval Service.

In addition to self-help strategies, the booklet will give details of the Naval Trauma Risk Management (TRIM) Programme. TRIM has evolved out of the Royal Marines Stress Trauma Project and has been functional for six years. It is based on the principles of education, risk assessment and mentoring. The programme is peer group delivered i.e. the Stress Practitioners you may come into contact with are non-medical uniformed members of the Fleet. They are drawn from all branches and ranks of the Naval Service and have undertaken specific trauma training. However, it should be noted that they are not counsellors or therapists, but individuals who are able to listen to your story and offer practical advice and assistance.

As you read this booklet you will see that the recurring theme is that **"YOU ARE NOT ALONE"**. Assistance is readily available and can be used and accessed without critique or stigma. Remember that the feelings that you may be experiencing are perfectly normal, it is the nature of the stressful incident that is abnormal. If you are reading this booklet in the aftermath of a traumatic event and been offered the help of a Stress Practitioner, his or her contact details are included on the final page of this booklet. Also included is a list of more general telephone numbers that you or your family and friends may find useful.

THE TRIM STRESS HANDBOOK

What are traumatic incidents?

A traumatic incident is any event that can be considered to be outside of an individual's usual experience and causes physical, emotional or psychological harm.

We all respond in different ways to any event, but this handout highlights the usual responses of individuals and may offer some help in relieving the anxiety such incidents cause, assist in the healing process and give some assistance in identifying further sources of help.

The determining factor around the emotional responses for anyone involved in, or responding to, an incident can centre on challenges to core beliefs about ourselves or how we see the world. For instance, we may acknowledge that we could die within the next 24 hours (be run over by a bus, involved in a crash or an explosion) but if we really believed that our life might not last beyond tomorrow, we might well be revising what we intended doing - rather than me writing, or you reading this!

It is important to remember that other factors in your life may contribute to your vulnerability to any incident, and its impact upon you.

Reactions to a critical incident are likely to be worse if ...

- There has been a death.
- There is a feeling of wanting to have done more.
- There is little or no perceived support from colleagues, family or friends.
- The incident follows closely on top of stress creating events in your life.



Reactions may include:

Sadness

for deaths, injuries or losses of every kind;

Guilt

for not having done more; for having survived;

Anger

at what has happened, at whoever caused it;
or let it happen;
at the injustice of it all;
at the lack of understanding of others;
at the inefficiencies in the "system";
Why me?

Shame

for not having reacted as one would have wished;
for having been seen as helpless, "emotional" or needing others;

Fear

of "breaking down" or "losing control";
of a similar event happening again;

Memories

of feelings of loss or of concern for other people in your life;
of past, similar events;

Disappointment

which can alternate with Hope.

Physical and mental reactions

You may have some physical reactions, with or without the feelings described above. Sometimes they may develop long after the event.

Physical reactions include tiredness, sleeplessness, palpitations, nausea, headaches, neck and back aches, muscular tension, tightness in the chest and throat, changes in eating habits and sexual interest.



Mental reactions may be loss of concentration and/or motivation, poor memory, nightmares, flashbacks (feeling that it is happening all over again), hypervigilance (always on your guard), or being easily startled.

Irritability, loss of sense of humour and impatience with self and others are extremely common, **and can put relationships with family and friends under strain**. Try to remember that they too may be suffering additional stress, may feel left out, or do not understand how best to support you.

You may find yourself withdrawing from those closest to you, unable to express your feelings, rejecting what is offered.

Stop - and try to ask for what you want.

Remember this

- Our bodies and minds will look after themselves - reactions are a **natural** process.
- Nature will heal if you allow feelings to come out into the open.
- Concealing feelings can prolong the recovery period.

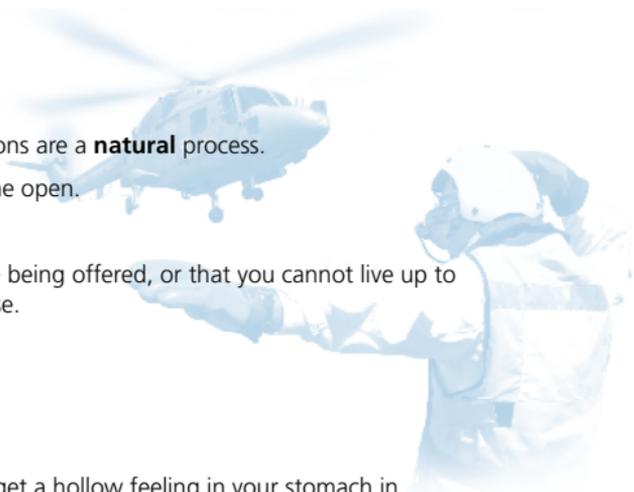
Sometimes there is a sense that too little or the wrong things are being offered, or that you cannot live up to others' expectations of you. Alcohol and drug intake may increase.

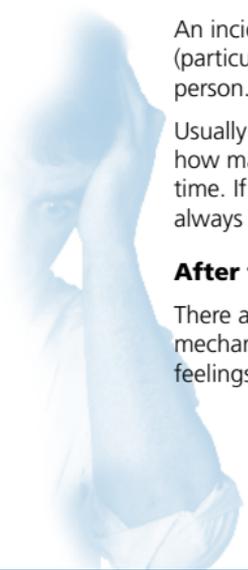
What's this got to do with me?

More than you think, or may want to admit to, even to yourself.

Let's put it into a personal context ...

... how many times have you responded to an incident? Do you get a hollow feeling in your stomach in those few seconds before arrival at the scene of an incident, engaged in combat or after the alarm bells have sounded. Accept it or not, most emergency workers do.





When it's all over, think hard for a moment about how you feel.

The nature of our work can bring us into direct contact with some traumatic situations. We have the advantage of training, skills and techniques that can minimise the danger to ourselves and others, but it is a fact that traumatic incidents do happen. These incidents can happen with very little warning. Colleagues can be hurt, some badly.

Perhaps you know someone who has been exposed to one of these traumatic incidents, perhaps you have been affected yourself. How do you feel about that? When you respond to the incident, you have no idea what you are running into. Fortunately most incidents are dealt with quickly and without traumatic effects but there is always the risk of finding colleagues and shipmates that have been very badly injured or killed.

An incident may not involve physical injury to self or colleagues. The sudden death of an individual (particularly when it is a friend or a child) can have a great impact on those who find and try to revive the person.

Usually the incident is discussed over a coffee or a drink. That's fine, it's one way of easing the stress, but how many of us are totally honest with ourselves, let alone our colleagues about how we really felt at the time. If you were terrified, would you admit it? The truth is that the risk of injury to ourselves and others is always present. Stressful, isn't it?

After the incident

There are some strategies you can use to make things easier to bear post incident. Your mind's defence mechanism may not let you feel the full impact of an incident straight away, often you are in shock. Your feelings will slowly unfold as the days go by.

- You may feel numb if your feelings are blocked and the event may seem unreal, almost dream like, and you may even wonder if it ever happened at all.
- Keeping yourself occupied with other things may help, your hobby, PT, additional work, etc. However, when combined with the numbing effect, this can be over used and delay your recovery.
- Talking to friends or colleagues, who were also involved, about the incident and how you feel.
- Returning to the scene of the event is one way of confronting the reality of it all.
- Dreaming about the event possibly repeatedly, is not uncommon. This is nature's way of helping you to collate and absorb the information.
- Having the support of others can be invaluable. Don't say "no", if it is offered. It may come from others who have had a similar experience. It is important not to isolate yourself. If you are feeling this way, then it is safe to assume that others have done so too under similar circumstances.
- There are times when you may need to be alone with your thoughts and feelings. Again, this is natural. Equally, you may need the company of your shipmates, family and friends.
- Pain, unfortunately may be part of the healing process.

Stress Risk Assessment

If the incident involves death or serious injury you should access a Naval Trauma Risk Management (TRIM) Practitioner. They will assist you and possibly carry out a stress risk assessment. The aim of the risk assessment is to ascertain how much stress an individual has assimilated as a result of an incident.



1. Focus of the Risk Assessment Meeting

It is an opportunity to allow us to see how you are coping with the event in order that we can help you get any assistance you might need or feel you need. We also hope that you will gain reassurance about natural reactions to traumatic situations and have an opportunity to discuss coping strategies. Finally, the meeting will assist in pooling your experiences and resources.

2. Confidentiality

Everything that is said within this meeting is completely confidential. That said, if we become concerned about issues that affect your personal safety, or the safety of your colleagues, we reserve the right to inform your line manager. However, in this event, we give you an assurance that we will always discuss the issue with you first.

Some DOs and DON'Ts of dealing with your feelings

- **Don't** bottle up your feelings.
- **Don't** avoid talking about what happened.
- **Don't** expect the memories to go away immediately, they may be with you for quite some time.
- **Don't** be too hard on yourself, give yourself a bit of 'slack' whilst you adjust to what has happened.
- **Do** express your emotions - to someone.
- **Do** accept opportunities to share your experience with others - they may have something to offer.

- **Do** make time to review the experience within yourself, but try to avoid isolating yourself.
- **Do** take the time to be with your family and friends.
- **Do** try and tell your family, close friends, shipmates, colleagues and managers how you feel.
- **Do** try to keep to your routines as much as possible.
- **Do** drive with greater care, your concentration may be impaired.
- **Do** be more careful - accidents are more likely to happen at this time.

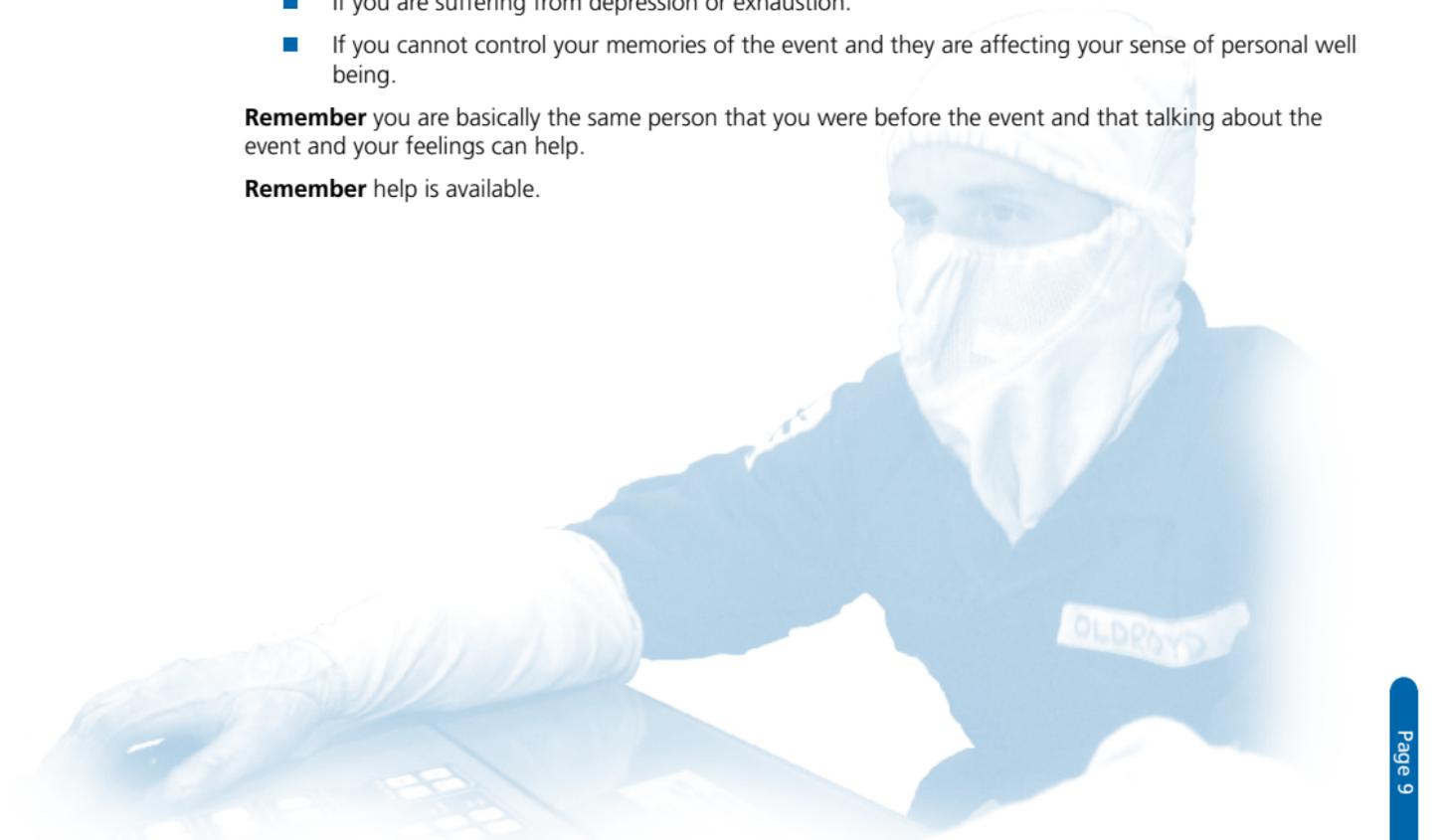
When to look for additional help ...

- If you feel you are not able to handle intense feelings, or physical reactions continue.
- If you feel numb and your feelings are detached.
- If you have to keep highly active in order to cope.
- If you continue to have nightmares, or are sleeping badly.
- If you have no one, or a group with whom to share your feelings, and you feel the need to do so.
- If your **relationships** seem to be suffering badly, or sexual problems develop.
- If you are having accidents, or your work performance is suffering.
- If you are smoking or drinking to excess since the event.

- If you are suffering from depression or exhaustion.
- If you cannot control your memories of the event and they are affecting your sense of personal well being.

Remember you are basically the same person that you were before the event and that talking about the event and your feelings can help.

Remember help is available.



POST INCIDENT

In the aftermath of an incident or your tour of duty, you should try to re-establish your normal social and work routines as quickly as possible. In the majority of cases individuals will leave (with good reason) the operation or incident taking with them a very positive view of their role on the operation. However, in certain cases people may find that in the weeks and months that follow, they may encounter intrusive thoughts that are both detrimental and unproductive.

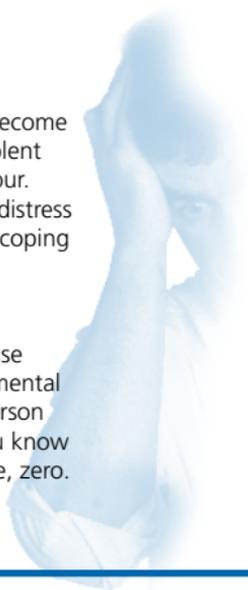
Detailed below are a number of common strategies that an individual may encounter when dealing with heightened stress levels:

Negative Coping Actions

These will increase the chance that you will experience problems. They may appear to reduce distress immediately, but short-circuit more permanent beneficial change. Actions that may immediately seem effective that cause later problems can be addictive, like smoking or alcohol abuse. These habits can become difficult to change. Negative coping methods can include isolation, use of alcohol, "workaholism", violent behaviour, angry intimidation of others, eating disorders and different types of self-destructive behaviour. Before learning more effective and healthy coping some people with symptoms try to cope with their distress and other reactions in ways that will lead to more problems. Consider the following types of negative coping action.

Use of Alcohol or Drugs

This may help wash away memories, increase social confidence or induce sleep. But it will cause more problems than it cures, by creating a dependence on alcohol, harming judgement and mental ability, causing problems in relationships with family and friends, and sometimes, placing a person at risk of suicide or accidents. In your own experience of life, think how many people that you know who use alcohol to deal with life stresses are really content? The answer will be a round figure, zero.



Social Isolation

By reducing contact with the outside world you may avoid many situations that cause you to feel afraid, irritable or angry. However, isolation will also cause major problems. It will result in loss of social support, friendship and intimacy. It may breed further depression and fear. Less participation in positive activities leads to less opportunity for positive emotions and achievements.

Anger

Like isolation, anger gets rid of many upsetting situations by keeping people away. But it also keeps away positive connections and help and gradually drives away the important people in a person's life. It may also lead to job problems, marital or relationship problems and a loss of friendships.

Continuous Avoidance

Avoidance of thinking about the unpleasant event or about the fact that you may need some additional help keeps away distress, but prevents progress in coping with trauma and its consequences. Avoidance can prevent people from seeking help with their problems.

Positive Coping Actions

Individuals who will have experienced unpleasant events need to take active steps to deal with their problems. Often these steps involve making a series of thoughtful changes in lifestyle to reduce symptoms and improve the quality of life. Common lifestyle changes you may wish to consider include:

Increasing Contact

The best way of dealing with this is to seek understanding and camaraderie and support of other people who have been employed on operations or involved in the incident. By making contact with others who have been through similar things, it is often possible to reverse the process of more isolation and distress in others. This in turn will slow down the worsening cycle of symptoms and soften the impact on the individual.

Re-investing in Personal Relationships with Family and Friends

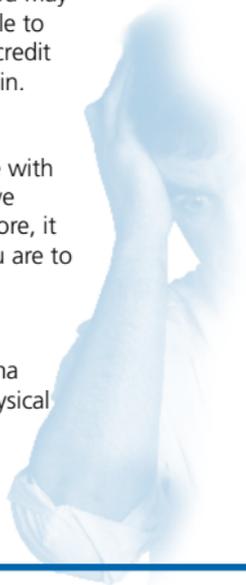
Take action to have more contact with family and friends and working at improving those relationships, reconnect to others and get more good things happening in your lives again. You may feel that you are unable to recount your stressful experiences for fear that the listener is unable to cope. Remember that people generally have more strength and fortitude than we give them credit for. The majority of friends and families would rather be included than excluded from your pain.

Stop Drinking Excessive Amounts of Alcohol

Many people have experienced unpleasant events and use alcohol or even drugs to help cope with their symptoms. However, alcohol and other drugs are possibly having some seemingly positive effects in the short-term, but **always** make things worse in the medium or long-term. Therefore, it is important for you to stop using alcohol to excess. These lifestyle changes are required if you are to benefit from treatment and stay on the path to recovery.

Start an Exercise Programme

Exercise, even in moderation has a number of possible benefits for those suffering from trauma symptoms; walking, jogging, swimming, weight lifting and other forms of exercise reduce physical



tension. It also helps distract the individual from painful memories or worries and thus give them a break from difficult emotions. Perhaps most importantly, they can improve self-esteem and create feelings of personal control.

Volunteer to assist in the Community

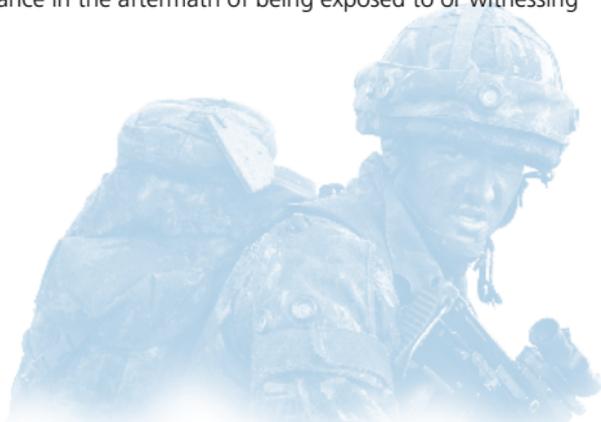
On your return to re-establish yourself, it is important that you feel like you have something to offer others and that you perceive yourself as making a positive contribution. When you are not feeling 100% it can be hard to generate these positive feelings. To regain your feeling of contribution, consider volunteering and helping with activities within the Naval or local community. This in turn will enhance your own feelings of self-esteem.

Lifestyle Balance

Besides being more aware of coping strategies, there are many complimentary ways to restore lifestyle balance. These will assist you in keeping track and allow you to make progress. By adopting the lifestyle changes you will discover a path to regain your balance in the aftermath of being exposed to or witnessing traumatic experiences.

Physical Self Care

- Eat regularly eg, breakfast, lunch, dinner
- Eat healthily
- Exercise
- Get enough sleep
- Take leave



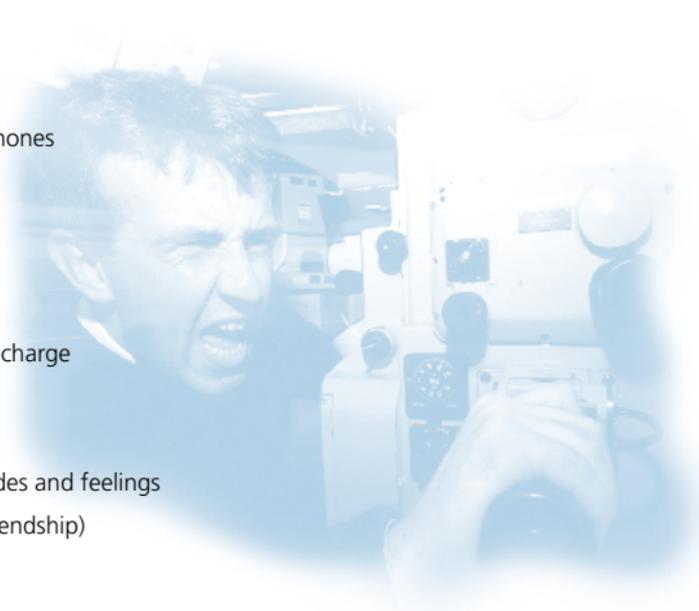
- If possible, try to make time to be away from telephones
- Seek help if feeling unwell

Psychological Self Care

- Make time for self reflection
- Read literature that is unrelated to work
- Do something at which you are not an expert or in charge
- Attempt to decrease stress in your life
- Notice your inner experiences
- Listen to your thoughts, judgements, beliefs, attitudes and feelings
- Practice receiving help from others (help, advice, friendship)

Emotional Self Care

- Spend time with others whose company you enjoy
- Stay in contact with important people in your life
- Find a way to increase your sense of self esteem
- Re-read favourite books
- Identify comforting activities, objects, people, relationships, places and seek them out
- Find things to make you laugh
- Relax



Spiritual Self Care

- Make time for reflection
- Be open to inspiration
- Cherish optimism and hope

For Family Members, Friends and Colleagues

In the aftermath of an incident or upon returning from stressful tour of duty, you may become aware that the character or personality of a person close to you has changed. This is likely to be a temporary change and, with your help and support they will quickly resume their normal persona. To assist a person who has been exposed to traumatic events it may be useful to employ the following steps:

- Listen carefully
- Spend time with a traumatised person
- Offer your assistance and a listening ear even if they have not asked for help, reassure them
- Help them with everyday routine tasks
- Allow them some private time
- Do not take their anger or other feelings personally
- Do not tell them that **they are lucky it was not worse** or **you will get over it** or **to pull yourself together**; these statements do not console traumatised people. Instead tell them that you recognise such an event has occurred and that you want to understand and assist them.

Journal Your Thoughts

It may be useful to write down or jot down your thoughts regarding the traumatic event. The next two pages have been included to allow you to journal your reactions and emotions, and in time, read and reflect on your feelings following the traumatic incident.

Finally

You should not give yourself a hard time over events that have already happened. Instead, try to re-orientate yourself and think about the event in a positive way. Review the whole event in its real place within your life (like a small pebble on a big beach). When recounting or mulling over stressful incidents, it is unhelpful to review or self critique your actions in a negative light. Instead, think about the event in a beneficial way and concentrate on the positive aspects of the incident. To do this effectively takes some effort (you may not be used to doing this, but like physical exercise it gets easier with practise). Remember, fortitude brings its own very positive rewards.



Contact Details

Operational Stress Management and Trauma Risk Management (TRiM) Cell

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Your TRIM Stress Practitioner is

Telephone Number.....

E-mail Address

Dates of future meetings



NOTES



