

The Counseling Team International
1881 Business Center Dr. Suites 11 & 12
San Bernardino, CA 92408
(909) 884-0133
www.thecounselingteam.com

A PROMPT RESPONSE PLAN FOR TRAUMA IN THE WORKPLACE

CRITICAL INCIDENTS ARE UNIQUE WORK STRESSORS FOR FRANCHISES

How prepared are you for this scenario? One of your franchises is held up by armed robbers, threatened people to follow orders or lose their lives. Employees are left shaken, frightened, and unable or unwilling to work. Line managers, who must resume operations while attempting to accommodate traumatized employees, turn to their personnel department for assistance. Will you have the capability to respond?

Serious robberies are rare, but when they do occur, special expertise is needed promptly to guide employers in dealing with the unique stress problems left in the wake of a holdup.

RECOGNIZING THE SIGNS OF CRITICAL INCIDENT TRAUMA

These reactions tell you an employee is experiencing critical incident stress:

- Fear and jumpiness
- Strong memories of the critical incident
- Sleep problems and fatigues
- Physical aches and illness
- Emotional numbness

Stress is also visible in critical incident-caused work problems:

- Avoidance of the counter or franchise
- Problems concentrating or calculating
- Loss of sensitivity to customers

THE IMPACT OF CRITICAL INCIDENT TRAUMA IN YOUR WORKPLACE

When fearful employees are unable to cope with critical incident stress, productivity and morale suffers. Absenteeism and turnover can result. Feelings of helplessness stemming from the robbery continue to undermine self-confidence.

Managers, seeing the distress of employees, but untrained to respond most effectively, may react with heightened anxiety, guilt, or, anger at the company for lacking an organized response. Without guidance, they may deny or underestimate the seriousness of some individual difficulties. By contrast, some supervisors may overprotect employees, and thus interfere with the natural process and return to self-sufficiency.

TCTI and Work Trauma Services: Specialists in Trauma Response

TCTI and Work Trauma Services is a group of professionals consulting to industry. For over 20 years we have specifically provided employer-sponsored trauma reduction programs.

Our consultation and intervention services include:

- **Arrival within 24 hours** at any franchise subjected to a major critical incident. This response period has proven the most effective for minimizing trauma-related problems.
- **Trauma intervention**, consisting of individual or group counseling in person or by telephone, focused to provide support and mobilize employee coping.
- **Consultation** with supervisors and human resources staff to maintain the workflow and help employees to cope.
- **Follow-up** with employees and managers to assure problem resolution.
- **Referral** to local professionals of those employees most seriously affected and requiring assistance beyond our format. Our consultants select licensed psychotherapists for their ability to provide specific treatment for traumatic stress.
- **Training** of human resource managers to promote effective organizational responses to critical incidents, and minimize trauma-related costs.

THE VALUE OF HAVING A TRAUMA MANAGEMENT PROGRAM

SIEGE-STATE

Psychological Response: The natural recovery process is impeded because people continue to experience re-injury. Frustration and anger mount, morale drops and employees experience secondary fatigue and job ambivalence.

Management Defusing Activities: Listen openly to employee concerns, and their suggestions regarding improvements. Be as flexible and creative as possible in responding to individual employee's anxieties. Consult with board members and appropriate authorities to immediately evaluate and, as necessary, upgrade security systems. Keep employees informed of improvement plans, including the date of instillation or implementation of increased security measures. Maintain a high profile in the workplace for the employees, and consider team-building efforts including rewards such as a dinner out with the staff.

The Counseling Team International (TCTI): *Provides defusing activities including an on-site intervention to give support and needed catharsis to employees. Consult with management on the immediate security measures indicated by the psychological status of the staff and make referrals when indicated. Consult with management regarding accommodations such as transfers or rehabilitation in severe situations.*

FACTS ABOUT TRAUMA

- Individual stress reactions vary widely
- Reactions should be considered a normal response to actual or perceived threat to life
- Most employees recover within 24 hours to 2 weeks, are motivated to cope and capable of satisfactory resolution
- Normal needs include: to feel safe, be supported, to balance talking repeatedly about it versus privacy, and allowed own time table for return to normal activities
- Needs may be intensely felt but are temporary if properly addressed by employer, employee and other helpers
- In crisis state, victims recover quicker if allowed choices regarding work assignments, especially temporary pacing of at-risk duties with non-risk duties
- Victims are especially prone to hurt and anger if perceive lack of concern by employer and others (“second injury”)
- Solo victims are especially prone to being ignored and then feeling abandoned
- Group incidents create a spontaneous peer support group, which should be capitalized upon
- Disciplinary action regarding incident behavior or cash loss is risky without proper assessment of degree of trauma: consultation advised
- 3 to 5% of employees exposed to any kind of robbery or traumatizing incident will have serious difficulties and can potentially become disabled

SPECIFIC INTERVENTIONS FOR ROBBERIES AND SIEGE-STATE FACILITIES

Since one-on-one and take-over robberies are some of the most common forms of critical incidents, additional information is presented that provides typical psychological responses in the aftermath of these incidents, defusing activities that can be employed managers/supervisors and interventions that are available through TCTI.

ONE-ON-ONE

Psychological Response: Employee is stunned *or* angered by the violation, and prone to intense mental reviewing of the experience and their own responses. Victim often feels isolated and misunderstood since others did not share the experience. Employee may be afraid or embarrassed to discuss their distress and believe they are reacting in an unusual manner.

Defusing Activities by Management: Provide water to drink and later food; accompany employee if they are required to go with law enforcement to identify a suspect; assess whether they need to go home, and if so, whether someone will be there with them. Suggest a call that evening from TCTI.

TCTI: Debriefing and support of employee by telephone counseling, consultation with manager and supervisor regarding trauma-sensitive management techniques, follow-up counseling with employee, and closure with administrator including assistance with referrals when indicated.

TAKE-OVER

Psychological Response: Compliance is forced through fear and intimidation, so feelings of intense helplessness ensue. In many circumstances, critical decisions must be made in mere seconds and this extreme decision-making pressure results in later second-guessing of one's behavior, and fantasizing various "what if" scenarios. After the crime, individuals will be very sensitive to perceived criticism or lack of company support. Many fear returning to work but feel compelled to do so rather than disappoint coworkers and/or supervisors. People feel shame or guilt over having reactions and are concerned about being labeled as weak. Their own self-doubt may increase if they react in a way that is unlike their normal personality or coping style.

Defusing Activities by Management: Demonstrate concern for employees' safety and wellness; provide water to drink and later food and beverages to entire staff. If feasible, have the administrator visit the facility the day of incident to provide support. Determine if facility is to re-open and arrange for rides home if necessary. If possible, offer victims the option of staying or leaving from work, as this will increase their own feelings of control and their sense of being cared for. Call employees that evening to check in on them and remind them of staff debriefing meeting, if scheduled. Assess staffing needs and make arrangements to provide adequate coverage during scheduled intervention.

TCTI: Assess severity of situation with managers regarding the appropriate level of intervention. A typical intervention in this situation includes:

- 1) Telephone calls the evening of the incident to select individuals
- 2) On-site group debriefing the following morning, followed by individual interviews and assessments
- 3) Guidance to the manager in supervising traumatized employees and recommendations regarding trauma-sensitive job accommodations
- 4) Follow-up telephone calls to the most affected employees
- 5) Review and closure with management including the coordination of referrals in the event of employees who do not re-stabilize and need further assistance.

ROBBERIES AND CRITICAL INCIDENTS **PROTOCOL FOR WORKING WITH TCTI**

It is highly recommended that managers and supervisors be involved in advanced training on what to expect and how to prepare for critical incidents.

How to Request Services: Call TCTI, preferably within the first hour after a serious incident to allow time for planning and staffing or intervention:

Available 24-hours a day, 7-days a week
(800) 222-9691

THE PROFESSIONAL ON CALL WILL BE AUTOMATICALLY PAGED TO CONTACT YOU IMMEDIATELY.

What Will Happen:

TCTI Will:

- Review the situation with the administrator for further assessment and planning.
- Recommend appropriate type of intervention.
- Schedule an on-site intervention including a group debriefing and individual employee meeting.
- Obtain the names and phone numbers of the most affected employees.
- Review case with management, providing recommendations and referrals when indicated.
- Provide handouts to employees for their families to help them understand the reactions to trauma and how they can show support.

Immediate Information Needed:

- Description of what occurred
- Number of employees affected (followed later by a list of their names and home phone numbers)
- Management's perception of employees' emotional status
- History of previous incidents
- Impact on manager and supervisors
- Workplace sensitivities

WHAT TRAUMA VICTIMS NEED

- To regain a sense of mastery over their lives
- To feel safe
- To reflect on what they have experienced
- To reflect on their mortality and quality of life
- To ventilate and process their experience (e.g. anger, loss of control, helplessness, why them, what ifs, loss of sense of safety in world)
- To feel supported, not judged and not second guessed

ROLE OF MANAGEMENT, CO-WORKERS, FAMILY AND FRIENDS

- To provide support and understand there is no *right* way to respond to trauma
- To understand a psychological injury has occurred and allow time for recovery
- Avoid projecting your own interpretation of how someone “should” respond... you don’t always know what other factors may be influencing a person’s response
- Provide a supportive environment:
 - Medical Care
 - Food
 - Transportation
 - Stay available and visible
 - Appreciate the need to feel safe
 - Understand the symptoms of trauma
 - Workplace accommodation
 - Appropriate family notifications

SOME DON'TS

- Tell them how you feel
- Tell them it’s over and to stop thinking about it
- Tell them “war” stories about “war” incidents
- Minimize their experience
- Question their response: (e.g. “Why did you give them the money? He didn’t even have a weapon!”)