

A Managers Guide...

...To PTSD

WHAT IS PTSD?

Post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is a mental health condition caused by experiencing or witnessing very stressful, frightening, or distressing event(s).

WHAT CAUSES PTSD?

ANY situation that a person finds traumatic can cause PTSD. This can include but is not limited to violent personal assaults (e.g. sexual assault, mugging, or robbery), serious road accidents, serious health problems, injuries, childbirth experiences, death of a loved one, childhood abuse, miscarriages, and bullying.

REMEMBER: PTSD can be developed from incidents both inside and outside the workplace. PTSD does not have to be caused by a work-related incident, to impact someone at work.

WHAT DOES PTSD LOOK AND FEEL LIKE?

- Someone with PTSD often relives (or re-experiences) the traumatic event through nightmares and flashbacks and may experience feelings of isolation, irritability, and guilt.
- A flashback is an intense, vivid, involuntary memory of a past real event which recurs and often leads to feelings of distress.
- If the person experiences nightmares they may also have problems going to sleep as they may fear having the nightmare again. This may lead to insomnia and progress on to problems with concentration.
- These symptoms are often severe and persistent enough to have a significant impact on the persons day-to-day life.
- PTSD can also manifest itself through physical symptoms, some of these could include stomach aches, increased heart rate, chest pains, shortness of breath which may be experienced as feelings of panic.
- You may notice behavioural changes in someone who is experiencing PTSD, for example they may begin to avoid triggers associated with the event, such as places, people, or objects.
- They may experience rapid changes in mood too.
- People who suffer from PTSD may also isolate themselves from others.

REMEMBER: You shouldn't expect everyone with PTSD to have the same symptoms. PTSD can look different from person to person, and everyone may not present with the same symptoms.

WHERE CAN EMPLOYEES GET HELP WITH OR WITHOUT A DIAGNOSIS?

- Please ensure you have discussed with the individual whether they want support, and if they do ensure you gain consent before making a referral.
- You can signpost staff to other resources including Vivup, Spiritual and pastoral care, and their GP.

Vivup: employee assistance programme provides 24/7, 365 days a year confidential helpline offering a non-judgemental listening ear and provides free staff counselling. Contact 0330 380 0658 or visit VIVUP.co.uk

The spiritual and pastoral care team offer a 24/7 confidential, sympathetic non-judgemental listening ear for those of any faith and those who do not have any religious belief. Call 01623 622515 ext. 2754 between 8.30am and 4.30pm / 3047 or call Switchboard for the on-call Chaplain 24/7.

Remind the staff member that their GP can be contacted about any health concern, whether that be physical or mental, and reaching out to their GP could mean access to different kinds of support.

TRiM: TRiM is a trauma-focused peer support intervention based on 'active monitoring' following a traumatic event. If you or your team experience a traumatic event a list of everyone affected can be shared with the TRiM managers (with each person's consent) via sfh-tr.stafftrimreferrals@nhs.net. The Trim team will work with managers to support colleagues. **Please note that TRiM is most effective when initiated as close in time to the event as possible. It is unlikely that a TRiM referral will be accepted if the referral is made more than 2 weeks after the incident.**

WHAT CAN YOU DO TO HELP SOMEONE WITH PTSD?

You can do a few things to help someone who is experiencing PTSD. These include being prepared to listen to what they want to share, do not judge, do not be offended if they choose not to tell you information, learn what triggers them. (A trigger is something which brings on or worsens the PTSD symptoms.) Ask them what support they would like from you.

REMEMBER: it is important to set boundaries when it comes to supporting people, you don't want to risk taking on too much becoming overwhelmed and be unable to support the individual at all.

ADJUSTMENTS WHICH MIGHT HELP AT WORK

If you have any questions or concerns about making reasonable adjustments in the workplace, please get in contact with occupational health: sfh-tr.occupational.health@nhs.net.

- Create a safe space for employees to speak out.
- Work with the person on what they want/need.
- Allow them to choose their seating location if this is relevant to their difficulties. This may minimise their triggers, e.g., sitting facing the door so they can see an escape route.
- Offer designated workspaces to provide consistency.
- Provide a safe space for a moment alone, or for respite after a panicked moment.
- Depending on an individual's needs and triggers, consider adjusting their noise exposure, e.g., providing a private office if able, allowing the use of earphones for music or to block sound, pre-warn them of fire alarm testing, etc.
- Allow for flexibility in policies, e.g., agreeing with a member of staff that they are allowed to call in sick via text message, rather than calling in.
- Allowing flexible working hours and locations where possible, including being flexible about when breaks can be taken, and about whether the employee works from home, or in-person.
- Allow time off for appointments, e.g., psychology appointments and time after the appointments (as they may feel drained, both emotionally and physically).
- Avoid making changes to their routine/working day without discussing this with them.
- Provide clear and direct instructions for tasks and break this down into manageable chunks.
- Offer extra time to get tasks completed if needed and feasible.
- Work with the employee to create a plan for managing their triggers, e.g., how to avoid them, what should be done if they become triggered, etc.

You may also want to look at the Trust stress risk assessment with a staff member who maybe struggling. This can be found on the intranet.

WHAT CAN YOU DO AS A MANAGER IF THIS IMPACTS ON YOU?

Sometimes managers can find that by supporting someone with a mental health difficulty such as PTSD, it may bring up issues for themselves, i.e., they might find it difficult because of their own history, or stressors in their life. If you are finding it difficult because of your own issues, or wish to access additional support, you can also access:

- **Vivup, contact 0330 380 0658 or visit VIVUP.co.uk.**