

# Psychosocial Safety tip sheet

## Traumatic Events or Materials (Psychosocial Hazard #11)



This hazard relates to investigating, witnessing, or being exposed to traumatic events.

- Exposure to a traumatic event may include researching, reading, hearing, or seeing accounts of traumatic events.
- An event is more likely to be experienced as traumatic when it is unexpected, perceived as uncontrollable, where there is a threat to life and safety, and/or where there is intentional cruelty.

Exposure to traumatic events can:



### Are we OK?

#### Watch out for:

Employees who may investigate, research or interview survivors of abuse, neglect, human rights violations, violence, or other traumatic events.

- Employees who may witness, investigate, or otherwise be exposed to events involving fatalities or serious injuries.
- Employees who may perceive themselves as being exposed to extreme risks (e.g., being in a car accident).
- Employees who may be exposed to the effects of natural disasters (e.g., bushfires, floods, cyclones, etc).
- Employees who may be required to provide support to survivors of traumatic events (e.g., leaders, counsellors, support officers).
- Situations or events that may bring up memories of exposure to trauma for employees.

#### It looks & sounds like:

Employees may seem to become more pessimistic or cynical in their worldview. Employees may say that 'there is no point' to their work or that they have lost a sense of meaning in their work.

- Employees may display physical signs such as inability to sleep, aches and pains, frequent illness, or accidents.
- Employees may display or describe psychological signs such as fear, distrust, numbness, feeling vulnerable, intrusive distressing thoughts, oversensitivity to strong emotion.
- Employees may withdraw from their relationships in the workplace and at home.
- Employees may have difficulty separating work from home, they may seem more impulsive, there may be a drop in their performance, or you might notice an increase in behaviour such as smoking, drinking, or eating.

#### For more info:

- Visit the [Safe Work Australia Website](#).
- Contact the Health & Wellbeing Team via: [heathandwellbeing@griffith.edu.au](mailto:heathandwellbeing@griffith.edu.au).

### Tips for building psychosocial safety:

- Minimise the likelihood that employees will be exposed to traumatic events wherever possible (eg, consider who really needs to attend the site of an incident or natural disaster, consider who really needs to be involved in gathering or reviewing accounts of traumatic events, follow WH&S procedures to eliminate or mitigate the risk of accidents and injuries, consult with employees around their own safety and where they may perceive risks).
- Ensure that files, research materials and other documentation containing distressing content is appropriately secured.
- Where an employee's role must include exposure to distressing content, rotate workers through tasks to provide breaks and time for recovery.
- Provide support, including trauma debriefing support, for employees who are exposed to traumatic events or materials.
- Where relevant, tell job applicants that they may be exposed to distressing material and the nature of the material.