

## SOME SIMPLE ADVICE

### Talk with others

Talk with those you are close to or to those who were also involved in the incident. Even if it is difficult to talk about and you think it will only activate difficult emotions, it can be beneficial and sometimes necessary to share your experiences, thoughts and emotions. You can gain a better grasp of what has happened by discussing and going over the events. You can also suffer less from nightmares and involuntary intrusive images.

For some people it may be equally valuable to take the time, over a few days, to write down your memories and thoughts about what happened.

### Visit the place where the incident occurred

After experiencing a serious incident it can seem uncomfortable to go back to the scene of the incident or to go to other related places. If this is the case, it may be helpful to go back as soon as possible to the place you feel most nervous about visiting, ideally accompanied by someone who you feel secure to be with.

### Remember the children

Remember that children and young adults do not understand or make sense of their experiences of a serious incident in the same way that an adult does. To help children deal with their experiences, and to understand that the threat to themselves and to their loved ones has passed, adults can:

- *be available to answer questions and deal with concerns*
- *explain clearly what is happening and what has happened*
- *resume everyday routines and normal activities as soon as it is possible*
- *do fun things together.*

### Physical activity and resuming normal activities

Physical activity can be a good way to reduce inner tension. For most people, getting back to usual work routines as quickly as possible is a real benefit. This is often a good way of resuming everyday life. It can be useful however to initially demand less of yourself and reduce your workload for a time.

### It is normal to react

It is normal for someone who has been involved in a serious incident to react in ways described here. It is usual that over time, reactions will gradually subside as the opportunities to think through, understand and process what has happened occur. The memories will not surface as frequently, and the emotions connected to the memories can become less overwhelming and painful over time.

### Ask others to read this information sheet

Family and loved ones who were not involved in the serious incident may become worried by the intense reactions that may arise afterwards. It may therefore be helpful for them and for you that they are also informed by reading this information sheet.

### Seek help early

For various reasons, reactions may be so strong, painful and prolonged that professional help may be warranted. Do not wait too long to contact someone you think may be able to help you. For example, you can turn to your family doctor, health centre (Vårdcentral) or occupational health service (företagshälsövård) for assistance.

## If you have been involved in a serious incident

Most of us do not really know how to react when we experience a serious incident. If you are familiar with the kinds of reactions that can normally occur, it can be easier to accept and understand your own and other's reactions.

Similarly, it can benefit family members, friends and work colleagues to understand the nature of these reactions as well.

Although some people can react very strongly, this does not apply to everyone.

Many people, immediately after experiencing a serious incident, will experience a sense of unreality. Even though you know it has occurred, it seems unbelievable. Many people describe feeling empty inside and emotionally numb. It can also sometimes be difficult to remember important aspects of what occurred. Over time however, the sequence and the details of what happened will become clearer, and it is usually then when the strongest reactions can occur.

It is common that thoughts keep repeating about what you've experienced, whether you want them to or not. Involuntary visual images of the event can create the feeling of reliving what happened. Such unpleasant and intrusive memory experiences may occur when you are awake, as well as in your dreams.

Feelings of anxiety and sense of vulnerability are common, and may escalate when, in your mind, you relive what has happened over and over again. It can often be extremely difficult to avoid thinking about the unpleasant event.

### Immediate reaction—sense of unreality

### Intrusive mental images

### Anxiety and sense of vulnerability

The feeling of anxiety can lead to experiences of restlessness, difficulty in sitting still and in concentrating on other matters. Some people experience less patience than usual and can become easily irritated. Others can have difficulty undertaking anything at all.

Physical sensations can often be experienced after being involved in a serious incident. These reactions can include trembling, sweating, headaches, palpitations, dizziness and feeling faint, no appetite, extreme tiredness, muscle tension and pain mainly in the chest, shoulders and neck region

For some people involved in a serious incident, their general sense of security can be severely reduced. It is possible to experience feeling increasingly on edge so that even the slightest sound makes them jump. The anxiety reaction and apprehension may bring on fears that something else disastrous or unpleasant may occur, including unexpected death or illness of loved ones. In children, this reaction may appear as clinginess and an increased need for closeness.

It may become difficult to sleep. The intrusive mental images may tend to surface as sleep is just approaching. Sleep may become restless, with frequent and early waking. Some people may relive the events in the form of nightmares. Nightmares can also take the form of other threatening situations other than the one actually experienced.

Many people find they become less troubled by nightmares and intrusive mental images if they take the opportunity to speak with someone about what happened. Sleep also tends to become less problematic once a person has a better grasp of what they have been involved in.

## **Bodily sensations and reactions**

### **Sense of disaster**

### **Sleep problems and nightmares**

Poor sleep for several nights in a row can have serious negative repercussions on physical and mental health. In this case, it can be useful to consult the professional services and support of a medical practitioner, even for a short time.

Some people who survive a serious incident, perhaps uninjured, whilst others are killed or injured, may feel very uncomfortable that they have survived. This may lead to a feeling of guilt which can prevent any feeling of gratitude about having survived or having not been physically injured.

As someone directly affected by, or having been witness to a serious incident, feelings of guilt may also be connected to thoughts around what might have happened if you had intervened or reacted differently.

Anger and irritability are common reactions. These reactions may also be directed towards those people closest to you, which in turn reinforces the feeling of guilt.

Some people feel the need to withdraw and to be alone. For others, solitude may be difficult because of the recurring exposure to thoughts and feelings connected to what has happened.

When one has been involved in a tragic and serious incident, it can be quite common to contemplate life's meaning and purpose. It can be a time taken for granted may surface and take priority when values and priorities which were previously

## **Survival anxiety and feelings of guilt**

### **Impact on relationships with others**

### **Questioning the meaning of life**