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# PTSD Prevention Plan

*This PTSD Prevention Plan has been developed to outline our approach to managing Post Traumatic Stress Disorder at the Township of Red Rock. The goal of this plan is to take a holistic approach across prevention, intervention and recovery and return to work.*

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# Introduction

The Senior Leadership of the Township of Red Rock is committed to addressing Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) in our workplace and specifically as it potentially impacts Red Rock Volunteer Fire Department members. This prevention plan outlines a holistic approach to addressing PTSD and the focus of this plan is to establish foundational elements based on the PTSD Framework below. Specifically this plan highlights our prevention, intervention and recovery and return to work policies and practices.

This is a living document which will be updated as our organization advances on our PTSD prevention journey.

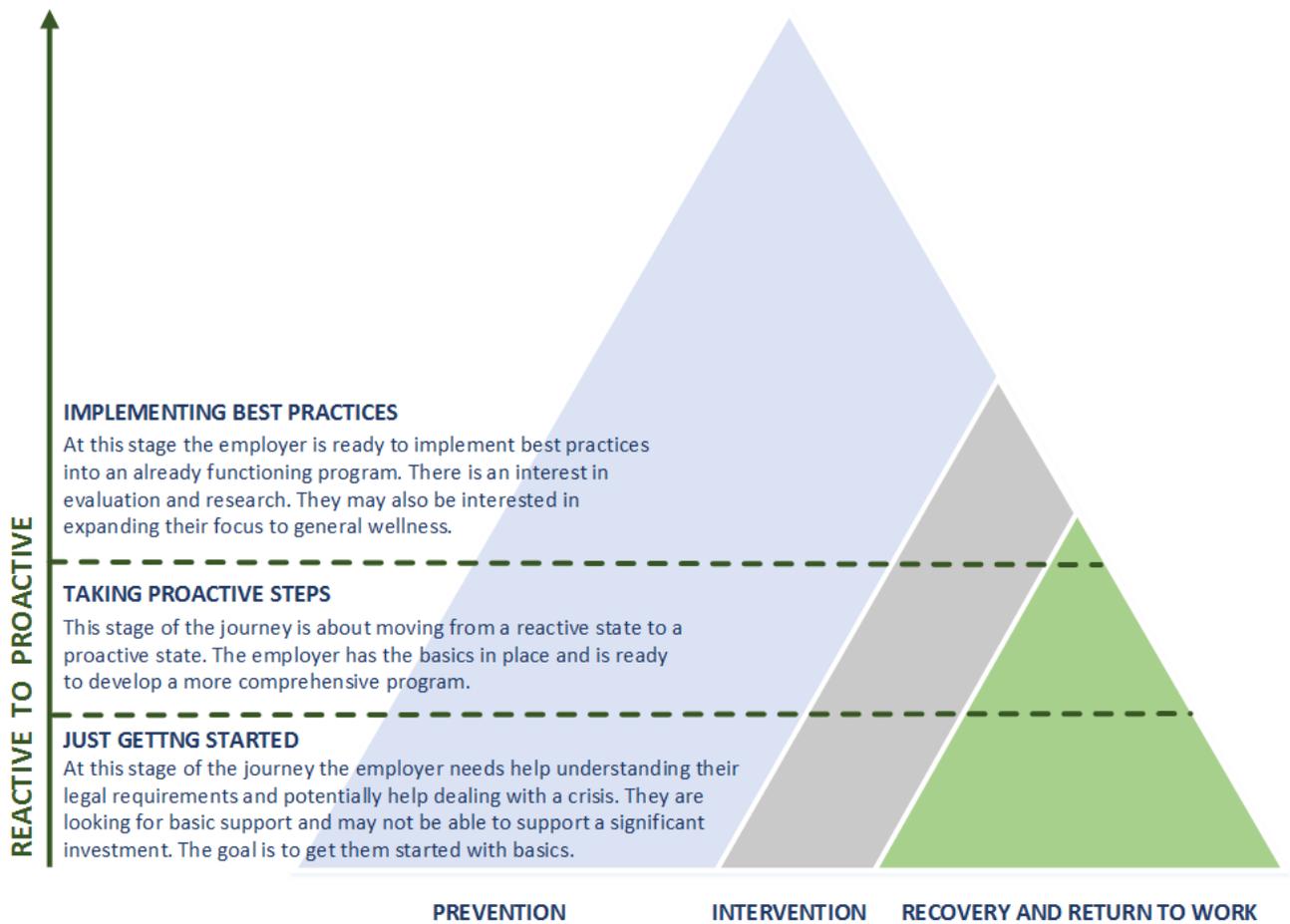


Figure 1: PTSD Framework

## Prevention Focus Area

Prevention focuses on outlining the basic elements of occupational health and safety management such as understanding legal responsibilities, recognizing, assessing and controlling the hazard, developing policies and procedures, outlining roles and responsibilities and incident

reporting procedures in an organization. The goal is to establish or integrate PTSD prevention practices for the promotion of a healthy and safe workplace that actively works to prevent harm to a worker mental health.

## **Intervention Focus Areas**

Intervention focuses on outlining actions that can be taken to improve a situation. This includes ensuring that workers know how to report psychological injuries when they occur and are supported in doing so. It also highlights intervention options that are evidence based and that can be utilized in organizations.

## **Recovery and Return to Work Focus Area**

The Recovery and Return to Work ensures that managers and Fire Department Officers understand how to accommodate a worker who is suffering from PTSD and that there are clearly established roles and responsibilities for supporting workers through this process. Recovery and return to work is an important aspect of preventing future or further injury.

## **Goals and Objectives**

The goal of the plan is to provide all Fire Department Officers, Sr. Fire Leaders, FD Personnel and Municipal Managers clarity on how the Township of Red Rock is addressing PTSD prevention, intervention and recovery and return to work in our organization.

The specific objectives of the plan are to:

- Outline organizational current state.
- Define the legal requirements.
- Explain how to identify and respond to PTSD injures.
- Establish roles and responsibilities within the organization.
- Establish policies and procedures to support PTSD prevention in the organization.
- State crisis intervention expectations and screening protocols.
- Outline organizations intervention practices and procedures so that all supervisors and managers understand the available intervention options.
- Review the duty to accommodate.
- Provide examples of accommodations that may be utilized in the organization to support efficient and effective recover and return to work.

## **Overview of PTSD, Risk Factors, Signs and Symptoms**

PTSD can develop when someone experiences, sees or learns about an event involving actual or threatened death, serious injury or sexual violence.

## Causes

It is believed that PTSD is caused by a complex mix of:

- Life experiences, including the amount and severity of trauma you have experienced since early childhood.
- The way your brain regulates the chemicals and hormones your body releases in response to stress.
- Inherited mental health risks such as an increased risk of anxiety or depression and inherited aspects of your personality or temperament.

## Risk Factors

- Having a job that increases your risk of being exposed to traumatic events, such as FD first responders.
- Experiencing intense or long-lasting trauma.
- Feeling horror, helplessness or extreme fear.
- Seeing people get killed or hurt.
- Having experienced other trauma earlier in life, including childhood abuse/ or neglect.
- Having other mental health problems such as anxiety or depression.
- Lacking a good support system of family and friends.
- Dealing with extra stress after the event, such as loss of a loved one, pain and injury, or loss of a job or home.
- Having biological (blood) relatives with mental health problems including PTSD or depression.

PTSD can increase the risk of other mental health problems such as:

- Depression and anxiety,
- Issues with drugs or alcohol use,
- Suicidal thoughts and actions.

## Signs and Symptoms

Symptoms may start within 3 months of the event but can sometimes not appear until years after the event. The symptoms can make it hard for the affected person to live their everyday life and can be accompanied by depression, substance abuse, or other anxiety disorders following are three types of symptoms associated with PTSD<sup>1</sup>:

### Intrusive Memories

Also called re-experiencing symptoms, these memories can start from the persons own thoughts, or can be triggered by words, objects or situations that are reminders of the traumatic event. Intrusive memories include:

- Recurring, unwanted distressing memories of the traumatic event,

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<sup>1</sup> Mayo Clinic, 2016, National Institute of Mental Health, 2016

- Reliving the event as if it were happening again,
- Upsetting dreams about the event, and
- Severe emotional distress or physical reactions (heart racing, hands sweating) to something that reminds you of the event.

### **Avoidance**

Avoidance symptoms may cause a person to change their routine such as avoiding things that remind them of the event as well as negative changes in thinking and moods. This include:

- Trying to avoid thinking about the event,
- Avoiding places, objects, activities or people that remind you of the event,
- Increased negative feelings about self or others,
- Feeling emotionally numb or an inability to experience positive or negative emotions,
- Feeling hopeless about the future,
- Losing interest in activities that were enjoyable in the past,
- Feeling strong guilt, depression or worry,
- Memory problems including not remembering important aspects of the traumatic event, and
- Difficulty maintaining close relationships.

### **Hyper-arousal Symptoms**

These symptoms are changes in emotional reactions usually constant and can make a person feel stressed, angry, overwhelmed and “on guard.” The symptoms include:

- Irritability, feeling tense or “on guard,”
- Difficulty sleeping,
- Angry outbursts or aggressive behaviours,
- Being on constant guard for danger,
- Feelings of overwhelming guilt or shame,
- Self-destructive behaviours,
- Trouble concentrating or sleeping, and
- Being easily startled or frightened.

## **Legal Requirements**

At the Township of Red Rock we understand that we have a legal requirement under the Occupational Health and Safety Act to take every reasonable precaution to protect workers from harm. Employers and supervisors are required to inform all workers about psychological hazards on the job and provide training to employees on how to prevent these hazards and protect themselves from harm. Workers are also required to follow policies and procedures set out by the employer.

### **Notification of Injury/Illness**

Following the notification of an injury/ illness, Section 51 and 52 of the Occupational Health and Safety Act (OHSA) requires notification to the Ministry of Labour, Joint Health and Safety

Committee (JHSC) or Health and Safety Representative (HSR) and CUPE (where applicable) if an employee is critically injured, disabled from performing their own work or receives medical attention resulting from an incident. The details required in these reports, and the parties who must be notified are based on the severity of the injury and are outlined in the OHSA, and in Section 5 of the Industrial Establishment Regulation. Of particular importance is the necessity in S 5(2) (j) to include steps to prevent further illness.

Reporting a Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder through required channels is handled in the same manner as other injuries or illnesses. There are not special requirements set out by the WSIB at this time. When an injury or illness occurs, the employer must submit a Form 7 Report of Injury/Illness within three days.

In many cases, an employee with PTSD will require time off from work, but in some instances, it may be possible to accommodate them with alternate work as they are receiving treatment. The same WSIB Form 7 is used regardless of whether the ill/injured employee loses time from work (Lost Time Injury), or only seeks medical attention (No Lost Time Injury). The employee will be sent a Form 6 by the WSIB for completion following the employer's submission of the claim.

## **Organizational PTSD Policies**

The Township of Red Rock has developed the following policies to support PTSD prevention and management in our organization:

- Organizational PTSD Policy
- Anti-Stigma Policies and Procedures
- Hazard Reporting
- Incident Reporting
- Recovery and Return to Work Policies and Procedures

## **Organizational PTSD Prevention Policy**

The Township of Red Rock and Red Rock Volunteer Fire department considers mental health, wellbeing and psychological safety of its employees to be important part of a productive, effective and healthy workplace. Our Organization has established a vision and program for a safe and secure workplace that addresses stigma associated with mental illnesses. This is an organization-wide program involving all FD personnel and employees.

Senior Leadership of the Township of Red Rock and its Fire Department are actively involved in our mental health, wellbeing and psychological safety policy, program and services and is committed to building psychological health and safety into all aspects of Our Organization's operations, processes and procedures, particularly as this relates to incidents of traumatic mental stress and post-traumatic stress disorder.

To achieve our goals we will

- Increase awareness about mental health issues and create an open dialogue between employees, managers and leadership.

- Develop policies, programs and services to help all members of our organization and that are consistent with the principles of mutual respect, confidentiality and cooperation across the organization.
- Support managers to help address the mental health, wellbeing and psychological safety of our employees and provide them resources and tools to address demands, conflict, emotional distress or trauma experienced by our workers.
- Focus on the organizations impact on the health and well-being of all employees, not personal health status.
- Evaluate the success of our program at planned intervals.

## **Organizational Anti-Stigma Policy**

The Township of Red Rock and its Fire Department are committed to fostering a workplace where our employees are protected from stigma associated with mental illness. Our organization will ensure that all employees are treated with respect and dignity; this includes those suffering from mental illness and those who support other workers suffering from mental illness.

Harassment and acts of discrimination will not be tolerated. The Township of Red Rock Anti-Harassment Policy A-14 is distributed to all Departments. Anyone who is found to be stigmatizing another individual may be subject to disciplinary action. Types of behaviour and acts that contribute to stigma include:

- Prejudicial attitudes and discriminating behaviour directed towards individuals.
- Trivializing or belittling people suffering from PTSD, or PTSD itself.
- Insulting people who are suffering from PTSD.
- Patronizing people who are suffering from PTSD by treating them as if they are not as good as other people.
- Ostracizing people who are suffering with PTSD, or their friends and supports.

This policy applies to all current employees and all behaviours that are in some way connected to work including off-site meetings, training and day to day operations.

Senior Leadership of the Township of Red Rock is responsible for providing all employees with a psychologically healthy and safe workplace, free of stigma, discrimination or harassment. The Senior Leadership of the Township of Red Rock will ensure that this policy is applied in a timely, consistent and confidential manner, determining whether or not allegations are substantiated and determining what corrective action is appropriate if required. To support a stigma-free workplace the Township of Red Rock's Fire Department leadership will

- Provide PTSD awareness training and education.
- Regularly monitor organizational practices and systems for barriers to achieving a stigma-free workplace.
- Provide an effective and fair complaints process.
- Lead by example.

Managers and Supervisors are responsible for fostering a stigma-free workplace and setting an example of appropriate behaviour. This includes communicating the policy and procedures for

bringing forward a complaint, addressing situations which they become aware of in a timely fashion, and taking appropriate action in a sensitive and confidential manner for all employees.

Employees are responsible for treating coworkers with respect in the workplace, bringing forward complaints and cooperating with investigations into complaints. Employees are also responsible treating all parties and situations in a sensitive and confidential manner.

## **Recognizing and Responding to Signs and Symptoms of PTSD**

Senior Leadership, Managers and Supervisors are expected to know how to recognize and respond to signs and symptoms of PTSD in a worker or fellow Manager, Supervisor or Senior Leader. If signs and symptoms are found to be presented it is expected that the Senior Leader, Manager or Supervisor will:

- Keep the communication lines open with the worker and ask how they or other team members can provide support to the worker. If the worker is not ready to talk wait for them to open up. If they do start to share, do not interrupt, it is often difficult for people with PTSD to ask for help, particular if there is a concern about stigmatization.
- Deal with signs and symptoms directly and as soon as possible. If signs and symptoms are recognized it is best to open the dialogue and provide support so that the worker knows they are supported in the workplace.
- Provide information about the options the worker has to address PTSD. Help the worker access support and help resources, if they request or need assistance.
- Encourage the worker to talk to someone they trust about what has happened, this could be team members identified in the workplace to provide peer support, family members, friends, or a manager/supervisor.
- Share with the worker that what they are experiencing is a normal reaction. Provide information about signs and symptoms and when they should speak to a professional or seek additional help.

## **Roles and Responsibilities for Prevention, Intervention, Recovery and Return to Work**

This section outlines the Township of Red Rock's specific roles and responsibilities regarding the prevention and management of PTSD.

### **Senior Leadership Roles**

Our Senior Leadership will:

- Understand the impact that PTSD, and other occupational stress injuries have on the organization
- Identify what health and safety programs already exist and how a PTSD Prevention program can be integrated into existing systems. This should consider:
  - Management Training,
  - Employee Engagement,
  - Anti-stigma Awareness,

- Communication Strategies,
- Civility and Respect, Anti-Stigma,
- Critical Incident response and management,
- Employee Assistance Programs (EAP) or other benefits that support a mental health and wellness program,
- Training individuals in strategies for resiliency and health behaviour.
- Identify gaps that need to be addressed using an assessment.
- Determine how the organization should monitor trauma exposures.
- Establish policies, procedures, initiatives and services to support the Prevention Plan and Program and monitor implementation.
- Engage Managers and Supervisors in the development of policies and procedures.
- Set the tone and lead by example, reducing stigma and encouraging conversations and take every reasonable precaution to protect workers.
- Enforce the policies, procedures and program.
- Maintain the Prevention Plan and Program, evaluate it and look for opportunities to improve it.
- Invest in a coordinated Return to Work program that supports recovery and stay-at-work practices.
- Make early and considerate contact with an injured/ill worker.

## **Managers and Supervisors**

Our Managers and Supervisors will:

- Be involved in the workplace assessment and participate in identifying controls.
- Participate in training to be aware and ready to address the day to day aspects of PTSD prevention and management.
- Receive training on how to recognize signs and symptoms of PTSD and understand the causes and risk factors and understand how to support workers suffering from PTSD.
- Participate and contribute in establishing policies, procedures, initiatives and services to support the program.
- Enforce the policies, procedures and Prevention Plan and Program.
- Provide advice on how to monitor trauma exposures.
- Identify individuals at risk of PTSD.
- Be prepared through training, coaching or other means to engage workers in discussions about psychological health and safety.
- Encourage active discussion with workers about mental health and psychological safety.
- Implement processes to report concerns and provide support to workers in need.
- Help identify control methods that support PTSD prevention such as workplace rotations for highly exposed individuals.
- Reduce stigma by participating in positive conversations.
- Understand how to accommodate a worker suffering from PTSD.
- Actively participate in a systematic, structured and coordinated Return to Work process and plan.

## Health and Safety Committee

The Township of Red Rock's Health and Safety Committee, or Health and Safety Representative, will be engaged in the development of a PTSD Prevention Plan and Program. To actively participate the committee will:

- Understand the factors of the job that impact psychological health and safety, in particular PTSD. They should develop awareness about what PTSD is, as well as the symptoms causes and risk factors.
- Be involved in the workplace assessment.
- Assist the organization in developing a process for identifying workplace mental health and wellbeing issues, and in particular PTSD.
- Help identify controls that can be put in place to address psychological health and safety.
- Help reduce stigma related to mental illness by participating in identifying the need for education, training, and resources to address PTSD, and participating in delivering these to the organization.
- Participate in training to enable support of the workforce as required.
- Engage in the development of a communication plan and strategies related to address psychological health and safety, particularly PTSD.
- Reduce stigma by participating in positive conversations.

## Employees

Our Fire Department Employee's will

- Comply with policies, procedures and the program.
- Participate in training and education about PTSD, and required training (resiliency, anti-stigma, policies, etc.).
- Report concerns, incidents to that they can be investigated and addressed.
- Listen to coworkers and encourage engagement in the program if needed.
- Reduce stigma by participating in positive conversations.

## Return to Work Coordinator

The Return to Work Coordinator will:

- Assist the injured/ill worker to remain or return to work while they recover, while also ensuring that the workers return to work date is sensible, flexible and safe for the worker.
- Help the worker return to the workplace post-injury/illness.
- Connect and consult with the injured/ill worker, treating health professional, and WSIB representative and make sure that everyone understands what to expect and what is expected of them.
- Monitor the workers progress towards returning to work.
- Take steps to prevent further injury/illness.
- Help resolve issues or disputes related to the return to work.

# Training

## PTSD Awareness and Anti-Stigma Training

The Township of Red Rock is committed to providing PTSD and anti-stigma awareness training to all Sr. Leadership, Managers, Supervisors and FD personnel within our organization. Our organization will develop, implement and maintain the awareness training program so that all staff are familiar with the signs and symptoms of PTSD as well as all of our policies and procedures related to prevention, intervention and return to work. The Sr. Leadership team requires that all employees are involved and participate in this training program.

## Recognizing Signs and Symptoms and Responding to Signs of PTSD

All Sr. Leaders, Managers and Supervisors will receive training on how to recognize the signs and symptoms of PTSD and learn the organizations expectations on how to respond to and address these signs and symptoms.

## Return to Work Coordination and Management

Managers, Supervisors and Return to Work Coordinators will receive training on the practices and principles of managing return to work. This includes the specific mandate that the Township of Red Rock has with regards to supporting successful and safe return to work. The training will review the Return to Work process and how it relates to address the needs of a worker who is suffering from PTSD.

## Orientation

The PTSD awareness and anti-stigma training as well as the policies and procedures related to PTSD hazard recognition, reporting and interventions will be incorporated into the new FD employee orientation program.

## Post Exposure Education and Awareness

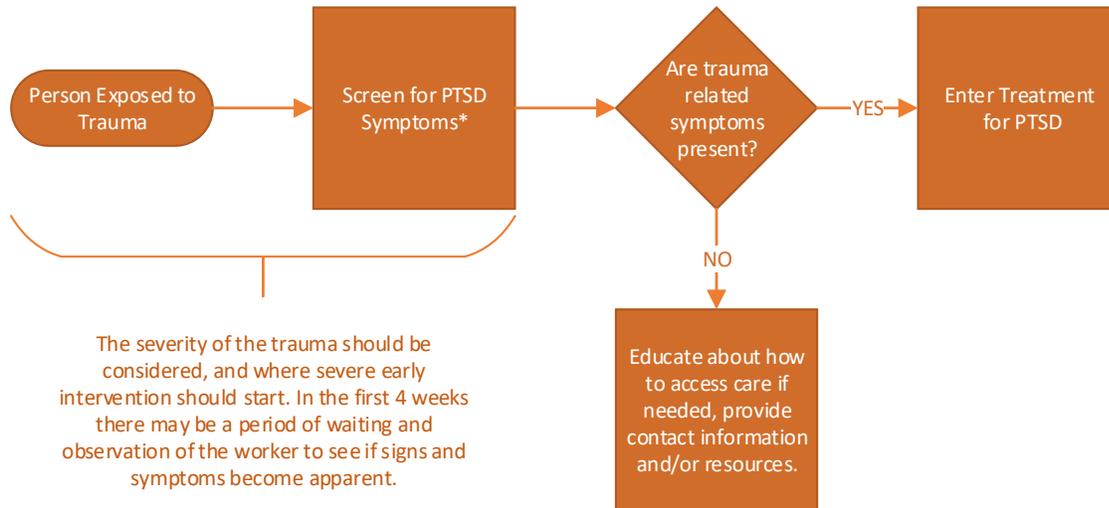
Education and awareness will be offered to those who have experienced a traumatic event. This education will focus on providing information about signs and symptoms, how to access care if needed and provision of contact information if they require assistance and/or resources.

## Screening Protocols and Early Intervention

### Screening Protocols

The Township of Red Rock recognizes that early intervention is important for the effective treatment and prevention of PTSD. The severity of the initial traumatic event will be considered when determining the need for early intervention.

Screening protocols have been developed and implemented to help identify workers who are potentially at risk for developing PTSD. For workers who have been exposed to a traumatic event the Township of Red Rock will implement screening 1 month following the event, utilizing the process outlines below.



\*this includes observation of work related or intrusive memories, avoidance, or hyper-arousal signs and symptoms and/or self screening methodology

Figure 2: Sample Screening Process

## Early Intervention Strategies

When workers are exposed to a traumatic event, the Township of Red Rock will provide those workers with the following early interventions to minimize stress and promote prevention of PTSD. The specific early interventions that will be utilized include:

- Allowing time off for the workers who have been involved in a traumatic event.
- Providing workers with stigma-free counselling services to address the emotional aspects of what they have experienced.
- Using of debriefing sessions that focus on helping the worker put their experiences in perspective and validate what they have seen, done, thought and felt.
- Providing ongoing education that gives information on PTSD, stress management and actions that workers can take for themselves.
- Offering peer support programs.

# Responding to a Crisis and Accessing Treatment

## Return to Work

The Township of Red Rock Return to Work program is built on the 7 Principles of Return to Work which supports positive outcomes for our workers. The return to work process is highlighted below:

- The employer will make early and considerate contact with the injured/ill worker.
- The employer will make an offer of modified work to the injured/ill worker so they can return to work safely.
- The return to work plan will be developed so that it supports the returning worker, their coworkers and their supervisor.
- The supervisor will receive training in work disability prevention and be included in the development of the workers return to work plan.
- The worker will be provided an individualized Return to Work plan that focuses on the workers initial and ongoing needs.
- The employer will maintain ongoing communications with healthcare providers and the WSIB to ensure that they understand the workers job and the workplaces ability to accommodate.

## Supervisor and Return to Work Coordinator Considerations

When considering how to accommodate a worker the Supervisor and Return to Work Coordinator will review the following:

- What is the worker experiencing (signs and symptoms) and what are the limitations?
- How will these limitations impact the work that the worker needs to do?
- Are there specific job tasks that will be problematic as a result of these limitations?
- What accommodations can help address or remove these limitations?
- Has the worker been asked about possible accommodations, can they help identify specifically how the organization can assist?
- Does the workers Sr. Leadership team, Supervisor or Coworkers need training on PTSD to help facilitate a successful return?
- Is the worker currently receiving care or treatment and if so will they continuing to follow a treatment plan (if this is known)?

## Providing Accommodation

The chart below can be utilized by the Manager, Supervisor and Return to Work Coordinator to identify types of accommodations that can be used to support a worker suffering from PTSD. This chart is aligned to specific signs and symptoms and how they can manifest themselves at work.

### Potential Accommodations

Signs and Symptoms	What this could look like at work	Impact on job tasks	Potential Accommodations
<b>Intrusive Memories</b>	<p>Reduced concentration</p> <p>Difficulty managing time and tasks</p> <p>Increased errors in work</p> <p>Difficulty completing complex tasks</p> <p>Reduced organizational skills</p>	<p>Difficulty completing tasks with deadlines, time pressures or high expectations</p> <p>Inability to complete tasks in which error rate is impacted by reduced concentration</p> <p>Inability to complete complex tasks or multi-task</p>	<p>Reduce distractions in the workplace</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Sound proofed areas</li> <li>- Use of white noise</li> <li>- Soothing music</li> <li>- Uninterrupted work time</li> </ul> <p>Manage completion of work</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Flexible scheduling</li> <li>- Breaking large projects into smaller chunks, with easily achievable goals</li> <li>- Provide memory aids such as schedulers, organizers, use of auditory or written cues</li> <li>- Weekly meetings with supervisor or mentor to assist with determining goals, reminding of important deadlines, create daily to do lists</li> </ul> <p>Restrict tasks with immediate risk for injury if concentration lapses</p>
<b>Avoidance</b>	<p>Social Withdrawal, irritability</p> <p>Relationship problems</p> <p>Difficulty maintaining close relationships</p> <p>Feelings of guilt, depression or</p>	<p>Reduced motivation and productivity</p> <p>Increased stress, emotional outbursts</p> <p>Interpersonal difficulties with customers, supervisors and co-workers</p>	<p>Encourage use of stress management techniques</p> <p>Allow support animals</p> <p>Allow telephone calls to doctors or others for needed support</p> <p>Use a mentor or supervisor to alert employee if behaviour is becoming unprofessional or inappropriate</p> <p>Encourage the worker to walk away from frustrating situations and confrontations</p>

Signs and Symptoms	What this could look like at work	Impact on job tasks	Potential Accommodations
	worry	<p>Decreased ability to deal with conflict or other emotionally charged events</p> <p>Reduced capacity to cope with stressful situations</p>	<p>Provide awareness training to supervisors and co-workers</p> <p>Provide partitions or closed doors to allow for privacy</p> <p>Assign supervisor or mentor to be available to answer employees questions</p> <p>Allow for a flexible work environment – scheduling, breaks, leaves for counseling, work from home</p> <p>may not be able to complete tasks with frequent customer contact</p>
	<p>Excessive fatigue</p> <p>Exaggerated startle response</p> <p>Hypervigilance</p> <p>Increase in self-medication practices</p>	<p>Reduced concentration, activity and productivity</p>	<p>Allow for flexible start time</p> <p>Provide a place for the employee to sleep during breaks if needed</p> <p>Allow the worker to work one consistent schedule</p> <p>Allow for a flexible work environment</p> <p>Provide goal-oriented workload</p> <p>Identify and remove environmental triggers such as particular smells, or noises</p> <p>Allow a support animal</p> <p>Allow for breaks and provide a place where the worker feels comfortable to use relaxation techniques or contact a support person</p>

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