



Traumatic Exposure

Tip Sheet

Experiences of trauma

trauma, *noun*; an experience that produces psychological injury or pain.

Anyone can experience trauma- not just operational staff at Ambulance Victoria. Trauma exposure could be the result of the work people do (e.g. difficult or distressing jobs people attend or hear about), circumstances in individuals personal lives (e.g. interpersonal or relationship difficulties, abuse, violence or suicide) or in communities (e.g. natural disasters).

As an employee of Ambulance Victoria, you may be exposed to various events that have the potential to cause you distress. Even if you do not work on the road, you might be exposed to confronting material that might cause similar traumatic stress responses to those who experience it firsthand. These responses are commonly known as vicarious trauma and may have a lasting effect on the individuals work and/or personal lives. **Early intervention is key to managing these responses.**

Recovering from traumatic exposures does not mean forgetting the experience or having no emotional response. Recovery means feeling less distressed when reminded of it and having more confidence in your ability to cope with time. Most people will work through the experience of trauma with support from close friends or family.

Tips on managing trauma

If you have experienced a traumatic event first-hand, or through exposure to confronting materials it is important to:

- Recognise that you have been through a distressing experience and give yourself permission to experience some reaction to it. Take extra care of yourself. Focus on the basics such as good nutrition, exercise and getting ample sleep/ rest when you can.
- Maintain your normal routine as much as possible. It is important not to take on too much at the present time.
- Avoid use of alcohol or other drugs to cope as this can create long term issues.

Ambulance Victoria Wellbeing & Support Services is AV's internal mental health support service available 24/7 to all employees and their immediate family members, RANs, ACO's and CERTs.

Common reactions

Listed here are some common reactions to traumatic events.

- **Emotional impacts:** shock, disbelief, anger, shame, fear, anxiety, or guilt.
- **Thinking changes:** difficulty concentrating, self-doubt, confusion, and distressing memories of the event. Some people may actively try to stop thinking about the event.
- **Behavioural changes:** increases in the use of alcohol or cigarettes, sleep difficulties, agitation, and avoidance of reminders.
- **Physical:** tiredness, dizziness, tightness in the chest, muscle tension, diarrhoea nausea.

Cumulative effects

On-road and corporate staff can be repeatedly exposed to difficult jobs or materials. It is important to process these events as you go, and practice self-care strategies to mitigate the cumulative effects. If you feel that you do not have a range of strategies to support, you then contact the AV staff support line on 1800 626 377.



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- Cut back on tea, coffee, chocolate, soft drink, and cigarettes. Your body is already 'hyped up' and these substances will only add to this.
- Avoid making any major decisions or big life changes.
- Talk about your feelings to someone who will understand if you feel able to do so. Talking things through is part of the natural healing process and will help you to accept what has happened.
- Write about your feelings if you feel unable to talk about them. Avoid throwing yourself into activities or work to distract yourself. Try not to bottle up your feelings or block them out. Recurring thoughts, dreams and flashbacks are unpleasant, but they are normal responses to trauma, and will typically decrease with time. Make sure you do not unnecessarily avoid certain activities or places.
- Let your friends and family know of your needs. Help them to help you by letting them know when you are tired, need time out, or need a chance to talk.
- Make time to practise relaxation. You can use a formal technique such as progressive muscle relaxation. You may also find it helpful to absorb yourself in a relaxing activity such as gardening or listening to music, or any other activity that you enjoy. Keep informed (about the event you experienced) through managers, but don't overdo it.
- Support is available through Wellbeing and Support Services, VACU, and managers.
- Book in for a free and confidential [SMART 2.0 Program](#) which is aimed at helping staff to manage their psychological wellbeing and resilience in a proactive way. The SMART 2.0 Program is available to all staff, both on-road and corporate.

When and where to seek support

It is important to seek professional support if you:

- Continue to have disturbed sleep or nightmares (in excess of two weeks post event).
- Are unable to handle the intense feelings or physical sensations (such as being tense, agitated, or on edge).
- Have increased your use of alcohol or drugs.
- Feel that your reactions are not improving with time or are getting worse.
- Find your ability to function is severely impaired and/or your relationships are affected.
- Have no-one who can support you.

There are lots of supports and services available, such as:

- 1800 MANERS; Press 2 for Counselling
- AV psychologists, or the [VACU Network](#)
- [Wellbeing and Support Services Intranet page](#)
- [Beyond Blue](#)
- [Phoenix Australia](#)



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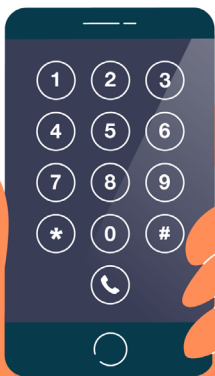
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AmbulanceVictoria

1800 MANERS

1800 626 377



Option

1

Peer Support

Talk to a caring, trained colleague who understands your experiences.
peer.support@ambulance.vic.gov.au

2

VACU Counselling Line

Confidential telephone support from a qualified counsellor (24/7).
Find your nearest VACU Network Clinician.
vacu@ambulance.vic.gov.au

3

AV Chaplain

AV's Chaplains provide compassionate support for your emotional, spiritual and pastoral care needs. This is a non-denominational service for everyone.
chaplain@ambulance.vic.gov.au

4

Bullying and Harassment

Confidential support and advice about bullying or harassment.
ProfessionalConductUnit@ambulance.vic.gov.au

5

Police Statements & Court Attendance

Get help with police statements or an upcoming court appearance.

6

Alcohol and Other Drugs Advice and Support

Talk with AV's AOD advisor about your options for support (8am-5pm).
AOD@ambulance.vic.gov.au

Want to Know More?

You can find more resources and helpful information on the Wellbeing and Support Services **Links and Resources** Intranet page and also in our **Videos and Podcasts**.