

## Self Care Tips for News Media Personnel Exposed to Traumatic Events.

*These tips are offered as suggestions only, to assist healthier newsrooms and better journalism. They are based on research findings on wellbeing and resilience and practical experience of those 'in the field'.*

### **Before a potentially traumatic assignment -**

- Talk through possible emotional risks with your editor or manager. Take them seriously.
- Agree how you will keep in regular touch, particularly if difficulties arise.
- Agree that partners and families are kept informed.
- Maintain strong social supports and peer networks.
- See crises as challenges to learn from. Maintain an optimistic outlook and positive self-view.
- Remember that the journalism of trauma matters. What you do is important and worthwhile
- Camera operators - be familiar with equipment - malfunctions or not being able to file will compound a stressful situation

### **On the job –**

- Understand that distress in the face of tragedy is a normal human response – not weakness. Most people recover soon enough.
- Ensure proper eating, hydration and sleep. All these can effect journalistic judgement.
- Easy on 'self medication'. Overuse of substances is an indicator that all is not well.
- Get some exercise if you can. Even a walk helps break down 'stress chemicals' in the body.
- Take breaks – and encourage others to. This assists integration of material and enables clarity.
- Acknowledge your feelings. Understanding feelings informs your journalism and helps you process trauma.
- Talk to others. Take time to reflect on what you are witnessing and how you are responding and, if possible, talk about it with colleagues. Share your thoughts.
- Call home. Maintain contact with loved ones and peers– especially on long assignments.
- Make decisions in the moment and don't ruminate about 'what if's'. Reassess later if necessary.
- Don't look at grotesque images too long.
- Look out for others in your team.
- Know your limits. Request rotation if needed.
- If you are feeling distressed don't hide it. Such responses are human and it is neither weak, unprofessional nor career-threatening to admit them.
- Camera operators - maintain contact with the desk as well as fellow photographers/camera operators for feedback and ideas. Don't dwell on missed opportunities.

- Camera operators – use the ritual of organising your equipment at the end of each day as a ‘de-stress’ activity.

#### **On the job watch for –**

- Disorientation or ‘spacey’ feelings.
- Difficulty doing simple tasks or problem solving.
- The ‘100 metre stare’.
- Impulsivity, extreme anger, argumentativeness, violence
- Constantly distracted
- Distortion of time
- Expressions of futility, helplessness, terror, fear for ones life, shame
- Physical or mental exhaustion

#### **Not unusual responses immediately after witnessing trauma –**

- Sleeplessness
- Upsetting dreams
- Intrusive images or thoughts of the event
- Avoidance of reminders of the trauma
- Feeling that bad things are about to happen to you
- Being jumpy and easily startled
- Physical reactions such as sweating, rapid heartbeat, dizziness, nausea when reminded of a traumatic event

**\*These reactions may indicate a need for a break or rotation. If they continue for longer than 3-4 weeks, or at any stage feel extremely overwhelming seek the help of a trauma therapist.**

#### **After the job –**

- Diffuse with someone you trust. Choose a good listener. Don’t bottle up feelings.
- Monitor for delayed reactions – they can catch you by surprise at a later date.
- Maintain normal routines and activities, but slow down. Look after yourself.
- If distress continues beyond 3-4 weeks seek professional assistance from a health care practitioner trained in trauma.

For further information contact the Dart Centre Australasia in Melbourne - 0419131947