



Announcer

It is time for the *IHSA Safety Podcast*.

Ken Rayner

Welcome to the *IHSA Safety Podcast*. I'm your host, Ken Rayner. On this episode of the podcast, we're joined once again by Kathy Martin, IHSA's Mental Health and Wellness Specialist. Welcome back, Kathy.

Kathy Martins

Thank you.

Ken Rayner

And Kathy, this is the eighth podcast that we've recorded together. I will definitely encourage our listeners to go back to the other podcasts and review the guidance and the assistance that Kathy provides in the other seven podcasts that focus on mental health and wellness, because they're terrific. And as Kathy has taught me in the past, it's very appropriate to provide notice to our listeners that we may be discussing some topics today that could prove challenging or difficult to some of our listeners. So be mindful, as we're going to discuss trauma management. And as I understand, one of the characteristics of traumatic events is that they occur suddenly and often without any warning. So Kathy's guidance today, we certainly hope, will provide our listeners an overview of how an employer who is prepared to manage and respond to traumatic incidents can provide support to those effective employees.

And we know that many of our members have already established emergency plans to deal with the physical health and safety of their workers. Our opportunity today is to better understand how to provide emotional and psychological support when an emergency occurs. And I came across a great quote in preparation for this podcast, which was "the only thing tougher than planning for a disaster is explaining why you didn't." And you know what, Kathy? I certainly hope that for our listeners that are listening to this podcast, they're going to get some information out of this that will help them prepare in the event a disaster or something traumatic occurs. So why don't we get into it? Kathy, what exactly is trauma management and why is it an important topic for us to discuss today?

Kathy Martin

Well, first, Ken, I'd just like to thank you. That was a great quote. It's true. We really must get prepared. And yes, as you said, I'm hoping that this podcast will help our listeners. I have a few things to consider. So thanks for the first question. A couple of key things that first you really need to consider, and I think when referring to trauma management, what we're really talking about is often just a slice of what should be included in your emergency response plan.

So you already mentioned that many of us have those emergency response plans for the physical aspects of work. We really just need to embed this into what we already have. It's not an extra plan on the side. This should be embedded, but it's often missed. So we're going to just have a conversation today on what you need to consider.

So really what we're talking about is how to respond to a traumatic event, which by the way is an event that occurs with unusually strong reactions and has the potential to overwhelm someone's normal coping mechanisms. So we're not talking about just everyday events. We're talking about traumatic events, those things that really often overwhelm many of us. And it's pretty easy if you're thinking about a small business, to be intensely focused on the management of the critical event, the event that might've just happened or that emergency situation. And rightly so. There's often a lot of factors at play when you're managing a work crisis. And if you're small business owner, you could be responsible for everything like talking to the media, working alongside the police or the fire contacting, even workers', emergency contacts. Your focus usually is on what I would call business recovery. What we're going to talk about today, I like to think of trauma management really as people recovery.

So you've got your business recovery, but this is about people recovery. Even if no one was injured, we can assume that there was no trauma happening for those exposed to that critical event or that emergency situation. So depending on the severity and the level of exposure, and of course lots of other things like the personal history of the individual and their coping abilities. Trauma can be problematic long-term for some, but really in the short-term, if a traumatic event has happened, it usually is impacting most of us, if not all of us, in the short-term. So it's really good for employers to also know what that looks like. Trauma, as you know, can happen, and typically that event is shocking or scary or might be a dangerous experience. And this can also affect someone emotion, not just emotionally, but physically as well. So even understanding what some of those physical shock reactions might look like is really important. So if you don't mind, Ken, I'd like to share a personal story.

Ken Rayner

I love your personal stories, Kathy.

Kathy Martin

I know you do. So I put this one in just for you, Ken, and hopefully our listeners will get something out of it as well. But I was impacted by a couple traumatic experiences. As many of us, we have trauma that happens in her life, but for the listener, don't worry. I'll keep it to the basics and not really go into the gory details of the events here. But if CPR stories are triggering for you, just be mindful. These will be two CPR stories. So years ago I worked for a really large downtown Toronto hospital, and one morning I was having a one-to-one meeting with my manager in her office, and we both worked, by the way, in the HR department. And she told me she had a minor accident that morning while jogging with her dog and she tripped and she fell over a curb.

Now, she was telling me this because she was a bit sore and she was also distracted and having difficulty focusing on her meeting agenda. But finally just after she told me this, she looked obviously in distress to me and then she told me she thought she was possibly going to faint. So what you do when you think somebody's going to faint? You run to get some help, and that's what I did. I ran quickly to her desk, and fortunately working in a hospital I was able to call a code blue to get some assistance. And then I ran to

the office next to us and I got my co-worker to go sit with my manager while I went to the door to wait for the assistance to arrive, for the crash team to arrive. Now, I just want you to think about this for a minute.

I worked in a hospital with no 911 call to make. I didn't have that 20-minute window to have to wait, but simply I just called the code blue, which brought to the office one of the leading crash teams from the cardiac unit that literally was just down the hall from the HR department. We were on the same floor, same hallway. So this crash team got to the room and I swear it was probably 90 seconds. It was so fast and overwhelming. But for her situation, it was great because my manager, she ended up collapsing pretty much right when the crash team arrived to her office. So she did faint, and it ended up she went into cardiac arrest, which was really shocking to all of us for me in particular because she just told me she fell and tripped while jogging with her dog. It didn't sound like much. And to then have her collapse and them doing CPR on her was kind of jarring for me. But long story short, it really wasn't a big deal for the crash team. Obviously it's just what they do daily, right? All day long. But for me and those in the HR department, it certainly was a little more traumatic. Now I'm sharing this to let you know that my manager, she got excellent care. She fully recovered, and after a few days of high emotions and lots of chat around the HR department, everyone seemed to be able to shake it off and got back to work and things seemed to be back to normal. Now, on the other hand, I had a great amount of personal stress happening at that time in my life. Then this event happened and I was quite jarred by my role that I played and being a bystander.

And what if I hadn't called the crash team right away? What if? And then I was told take a day or two off cause I was struggling, if I wanted to, by the acting manager. But then that day or two actually ended up turning into a six month leave of absence for mental health reasons. So my co-workers saw me as someone like, oh, all of a sudden off work right after this incident. Now, like I said, lots was happening in my personal life, but this event was really a trigger for me and my coping skills then kind of unraveled at that point. Got back to work eventually as anticipated, but then similar situation years later, I had to deliver CPR on my dad. Although it was stressful in that situation, I was able to bounce back and cope fine with my day to day. Of course, I went through the normal grieving process. My father had just died, I delivered CPR, but it was nowhere near as triggering as the previous event.

So as you can see, these were two very different reactions to two traumas. The one that you would think would trigger a stronger stress reaction would be my father's death. However, this was way less triggering than my manager's. It was really simply more about the state of my wellbeing prior to that, that played a role. But for others, it could be past traumas. Maybe that triggered it, right? Maybe they had witnessed CPR prior. For me, that was not the case. It was just really I was already kind of struggling, and this was sort of the tipping point. The thing is, we don't really know what will trigger that strong stress reaction and what will take people longer to recover and bounce back. And this is why it's important really for managers and supervisors and of course small business owners to really understand the nature of trauma exposure and also have a plan to address it when it happens. So yeah, I think that's just what I'd like to leave with that.

Ken Rayner

Wow, Kathy. So thanks very much for sharing those two personal stories and thanks for illustrating how you can't just draw a straight line between something that dramatic that happens and say, well, this is

the type of reaction that we expect from a worker or an employee or someone else. You just don't know. You don't know, as you said, in terms of the relationship that person has, that doesn't necessarily constitute the reaction. It could be all the other things that are going on in their life that you're not aware of, right? That's going to cause them to not be able to cope as well with that particular traumatic event that happened. So wow, Kathy, those were two really important stories to share, and thank you very much for sharing such personal stories for the benefit of our listeners. And I can better appreciate why an employer or supervisor who has some knowledge and understanding of trauma management will be much better prepared to support the needs of their workers, if such an incident were to occur within the workplace or outside it, because it can happen just like that. And again, it can happen where someone that's been exercising and goes out and is jogging with their dog and has a fall, that doesn't seem to amount to much. All of a sudden now you're dealing with a traumatic, unexpected incident in the workplace. So Kathy, what else? Can we sort of some other knowledge in terms of trauma management that we need to discuss?

Kathy Martin

Well, most companies, big or small, usually have given some thought on how they'll handle emergencies as we talked about, but understanding how to respond to trauma when it strikes is really important. To have that knowledge and to have it in place ahead of time. So as I said, you can appreciate and as you mentioned, it can just sneak up on you. So knowing what to do beforehand is what we're really trying to drive home here today. So we often think of traumatic events like a fire. I worked for bank, so traumatic events, we thought about robberies a lot, or you might think of in the construction industry, like as a fatal accident, somebody fell from heights. But trauma can come from many forms, both from our personal and our working lives. It's not just bomb threats and terrorist attacks. And as my story illustrated, trauma exposure can have a significant impact on some individuals, and we just never know who that person will be.

So we typically think it'll be those closest. In my case, my manager would be having this stress reaction, or perhaps the crash team. But really it was myself as that bystander that was likely, in this case, the most impacted. So I think we need to really also look at the level of exposure. Who's been exposed, not just limited to those immediately impacted, right? Like the one that did the CPR or the one who was injured or had the incident happen to them. We need to look at those value standards in particular. Now, regardless if you're a small or large employer, trauma management really can be kept simple. I'm not asking people to create this elaborate plan here, but what's most important, and I hope the key message is that it's not forgotten. So when you're doing your emergency plan review, because typically they're review it every so many years, consider your trauma management or that people recovery piece, make sure that it's not been forgotten.

Ken Rayner

Alright, Kathy, you mentioned having an emergency plan. And we know the Ontario construction regulations require the instructor to establish written procedures to be followed in the event of an emergency for every project, and that means that planning for emergencies must begin before any work starts. So on IHSA's website, we do provide direction on developing an emergency plan and recommend addressing the topic of debriefing and post-traumatic stress procedure. Now, that sounds a lot like your people recovery plan to me, so maybe we can get into a little bit more about that people recovery plan,

because I'm just envisioning for the majority maybe of our membership who have got an emergency plan in place, maybe not all the puzzle pieces are now in that puzzle. Maybe there's a few gaps and holes there, and that gap and hole might be the people recovery plan because I'm going to anticipate that although we've really prepared well for physical health and safety, mental, emotional, psychological, still lots of opportunity to improve upon that.

Kathy Martin

Yeah, well, thanks Ken. Yeah, really, when you're developing an emergency plan or a crisis plan, whatever you want to call it, typically there's different models out there, but there are four basic phases in developing a crisis management plan. And what I want the listeners to do is sort of think about how you might approach people recovery or trauma management within these four phases. This is really what needs to get done when you're developing a plan. So the four phases of crisis management simply are prevention. Number two is preparedness. Number three is developing your response or your incident management, how you're going to manage that incident. And of course recovery, how you might think about trauma from a prevention standpoint. Some people say, well, how can I prevent trauma from happening? IHSA would say, well, it's really all about health and safety, right? It's all about safety and accident prevention in the workplace, and I don't really want to go into too much here.

I trust IHSA's other podcasts and resources are supporting you in that effort. There's lots we can do to prevent having trauma in the workplace, but when trauma does occur, we want to be prepared. And so we're really looking at those other three areas, preparedness, response, and recovery. So now I'll give you a few activities businesses can consider in order to be more prepared. The first is education and training, both for yourself if you're a small business owner who manages people or for your frontline supervisors and managers, of course, on what to expect after a traumatic event and how to support someone. The second you should consider is what resources you might want to have on hand. When you're talking about people recovery or trauma management you might want to have on hand some resources about what a normal trauma response might look like. This can be in simple form of a handout and you can give it to those who've been exposed, to bystanders and certainly to those who are directly involved.

And this will help them know what to expect and when to consider seeking help, because we know in very traumatic experiences, we're all going to have some sort of response. Now, the third is your procedures and policies that help outline who does what and when your emergency plans likely have that. Do you have an emergency response team? When you're looking at emergency response team, you want to think about what the recovery plan or the people recovery plan, who's going to do what and you want to build that in. Lastly, it's simple to get prepared by just writing it down. We need to review this, so this needs to be more than, I think Ken you just mentioned, one or two words in your emergency plan. You want to spell that out. What does that actually look like? So make sure that you're doing that in your emergency plan.

And if you want to hold it separately, say refer to the people recovery plan, that's fine too, depending on the size of your organization. So this is a really good learning opportunity for business owners to take some time to develop out a plan. In a small business, this might be you yourself as the owner, or senior managers, or maybe you have a health and safety rep. This is a great exercise for them to take on regardless of the size, it forces businesses, like I said, to think more concretely about the steps they want

to take. And you're not just winging it when a traumatic incident occurs, and trust me, you don't really want to be winging it. We wing enough when an event happens, right? Yet luckily trauma response is one area we can plan for with some level of confidence. We know there's some tools and resources out there.

Ken Rayner

Thanks very much, Kathy. Look, you provided some great ideas how you can prepare as an employer to support a traumatic experience in the workplace. Can we go back to your story? Because when that incident occurred, obviously you were dealing with trauma. So if I was part of that management team at that large hospital and I came to provide support, and I saw you as someone who had witnessed the entire thing and been a part of it, and I've got some understanding and awareness about trauma management, I want to provide some level of support to you. So what does that look like?

Kathy Martin

That's a great question. I guess my best advice is not to ignore those who've been exposed to the trauma, as in my case, I felt kind of left to the wayside and kind of dangling in the wind. And certainly don't ignore those who may be having a stress reaction. And we can tell when people are having a stress reaction. It can be physical, right? You can see people cry, you can see them overwhelmed. So if you see that, definitely check in with the individual that might be having a stress reaction. But the first thing you need to consider really is who's been exposed and to what degree, and this will help guide your actions. If it's a large event, you might not be able to handle this all on your own. You might need to call in some reinforcements. That could be an employee assistance team that comes in and can help you through your EAP [employee assistance plan], if you have one, which is an employee assistance program, or maybe it's calling the police department and having victim services come in. It really depends on the trauma and the event. But there are tools and resources that I'm going to share that'll help you sort of determining the level exposure, and I would think the level of intervention as well. But we're going to skip over that for now. One of the key things, like I said to remember, is to respond to those who are having that crisis reaction. But you need to keep things brief and simple. After a crisis or traumatic event, it's common and quite normal for people to experience these emotional aftershocks or stress reactions. And sometimes these occur immediately, and sometimes it can occur hours or days or weeks or even months after the event. And these reactions can last, like I said, days, weeks, and in some cases even longer. depending on the impact and the severity of the crisis or the trauma. So while it's impossible to know exactly how an individual reacts, it's important to understand that trauma affects people in many different ways.

Like myself and the story that I showed, even myself, I reacted differently to similar types of traumas. These reactions are part of the stress response, and they're really not a sign of weakness or inability to do your job. It's just human nature. It is how we're built. So although I've been trained in crisis response, I'm no expert, no expert really in it. So I would strongly encourage those listening to the podcast who want to learn more information on how to do a formal intervention, or if there's a large crisis response needed, to go to the International Critical Incident Stress Foundation or I-C-I-S-F for more information, and I'll make sure that the link is provided in the resources for this episode, but the website for those listeners is icisf.org. Lots of great resources and tools for employers on actually managing the response when the event is occurring and shortly after.

And what I-C-I-S-F states is that people in a traumatic event, they respond to simple, not complex, issues during a crisis. So interventions really need to be kept simple, not just simple, but keep interactions short. So those short contacts can be a few minutes and up to a maximum of an hour. You don't want to sit down with somebody and go over and over and over how they're feeling, but give them some space to talk. And these interactions, typically you might have three to five contacts to complete sort of that intervention. So in my case, just to kind of give a concrete example, what three to five contacts might look like for me is, oh, checking in with me that day. How are you doing? Are you coping okay? You look like you're stressed. Do you need something from me? Do you need time off? Keep it short. And I might say, yeah, I need to get the heck out of here and go home and just be with my kids and decompress.

So that might be one. And then two might be "Kathy's called in sick the last couple of days; let's call and check in on her. So "yeah, it was pretty stressful event. How are you doing? Sounds like you, you're still struggling". And then maybe it's maybe a 20-minute conversation about how I'm reacting, those aftershocks what I'm experiencing. And maybe it's a discussion. "Well, it sounds like you need a little more time off." And then as you can see, it progresses until the person seems to be back and on their feet. So it's not just a one and done. This isn't just about here, here's a sheet at the time, and this is what you can expect and no follow up. You need to have some sort of follow up. But a crisis reaction demands rapid intervention, because people can go into shock depending on the crisis.

So you don't want to ignore it. You want to get in there and have a conversation, make sure the person's doing okay because delays can cause more pain and more complications, in my case, being left with lots of questions and things going on. Also, they state when possible the crisis intervener, which would be yourself or maybe a manager, supervisor, they really are working to set up expectations of a reasonable outcome. So when you are talking and you're kind of engaging in those conversations, you want to instill some hope, right? That this is going to get better, that we're going to have some positive outcomes here. This is going to subside, and it's normal to be overwhelmed and you're going to get through this. And so that means you need to also employ people who have those skills and who've maybe been trained on how to do this so that they can instill that hope and calm, because not everyone has that ability at the time of the crisis to instill that. So us where training is really important. And also, like I said, when you're asked to manage emotionally charged situations, it's also critical to be looking out for those who are doing the responding on your behalf of your company. So let's not forget our interveners our managers or supervisors who are there trying to support their team. It's good to check in with them too. Boy, that was stressful. You dealt with a lot today. How are you doing? And I think that's a really important key piece.

Ken Rayner

Yeah, some great advice, Kathy. So that's dealing with, let's say, an incident that occurs in the workplace. Now, as again, the question I asked you, it was based on me being somewhat involved. If I was that manager or another member of management in the large hospital, and I'm arriving, I may not have seen it occur, but now I've got some context and I'm sort of being able to witness what's going on. And I think I've got some perspective in being able to maybe provide some assistance and hopefully I've got some training and awareness on how to do that. But what happens when the traumatic event happens outside of the workplace where there's no context, all is somebody's coming in and maybe you're hearing a story about something that's occurred, or maybe you're just noticing that person is just not acting in the normal behavior that you're usually accustomed to and you can see something's really

wrong. How do you as an employer provide support to that employee when the traumatic event has happened outside of the workplace and now they're returning to the workplace?

Kathy Martin

Yeah, no, it's a really important area. We know trauma is happening all around us, and often it is in our personal lives. So good news, we can actually adopt some of the principles from, ICISF, International Critical Incident Stress Foundation. They have some things we can consider when planning those post-incident needs of workers, which can be applied to those who've been traumatized in their personal lives as well. It's either or, right? You just know a trauma has occurred. And a couple of things they mentioned is to ensure that the worker knows where to access supports if needed, right? This could be your local crisis lines, counseling services that might be available in your community, or if you have one, it could be the employee family assistance program. These are formal supports, but it's really important not to forget to make sure that they know where to find emotional support from their peers in the workplace or HR or even yourself. Social support is really important. And also ensure that they understand that they have also access to accommodation, return to work process, especially if they're finding it hard to remain able to function in their main duties at work. Yet you need to underscore that this would need sort of that medical support as well. You would need to get off to your doctor, but that's available to them. And remember, regardless of the size of the company, you are required to offer reasonable accommodation, to undue hardship, to workers who are experiencing a disabling mental health condition. And this could happen during those stress reactions after a trauma. So it's really important to make sure that they are aware that that is available to them. And I guess a couple other things is do you have someone who is going to go check in on the individual or do those follow-ups? Often at the day of everybody's great to support each other, and then it sort of drops.

So if this was a workplace incident, anyone who was exposed to the trauma, are they being followed up on? And more importantly, do they know what to look for in themselves? Remember we talked about getting prepared by doing some training on what to look for and what to notice after a traumatic experience, or how to recognize when someone's struggling with their mental wellbeing. Well, we can also teach that to our workers beforehand as well. So when they have a trauma happening in their personal life, they're a little step ahead. So that's often why we talk about workplace mental health and doing mental health training on what to do when someone's struggling. And we can talk about trauma when we're doing that as well. So Ken, another important thing in my experience is really to understand that sort of insidious nature of trauma. Help the worker to understand or remind them about that concept of the emotional aftershock. You might think you're doing fine, and we all hear different stories of someone who was in a pretty serious traumatic event, they're doing fine, and then three months later they seem to have that emotional aftershock and they're really struggling. So helping workers when you're doing that training to understand that concept, I think is really important as well.

Ken Rayner

Okay, so Kathy, when the crisis is over, you've got someone, let's say that a physical crisis has occurred, an instance occurred, someone breaks their arm and you're going to see them recover. You're going to see them as the recovery goes on, the cast is going to come off or the brace they're wearing, and you're going to see them being able to use their arm in the same way as they're using their other arm and they're returning to full health. When somebody has suffered a traumatic issue from a mental,

psychological, emotional standpoint, maybe it's not that easy to understand when they're back from a full health perspective. So how as an employer can we continue to aid in that worker's recovery from that traumatic event?

Kathy Martin

Well, I think simply we can offer some social support by being present and ensuring that the worker knows that you're open to talking if they wish to discuss anything. But one thing we really haven't spoken about today that I think is really critical for all of us to have success, especially in offering social support, is to ensure that the workplace culture is one of support and understanding. And this can't be done on the fly. It has to be there before the crisis or trauma strikes. Perhaps we can talk about that the next podcast, Ken, on how to build that supportive workplace culture. What do you think?

Ken Rayner

I think these podcasts on mental health are really needed. Again, talking about that puzzle that we've got in regards to just all the puzzle pieces to address physical health and safety, I think there's still work that needs to be done from a mental health perspective in the workplaces in Ontario. And this is a great avenue to be able to discuss this on these podcasts with you, Kathy. So I am always open to discussing a mental health topic with you, and I look forward to our next discussion. So Kathy, thanks very much for being here again and sharing this information. Really appreciate it.

Kathy Martin

Well, thank you. And thank you for having me.

Ken Rayner

Alright, and thank you to the listeners for listening to the *IHSA Safety Podcast*. Be sure to subscribe and "like" us on your podcast channel and visit us at ihsa.ca for a wealth of health and safety resources and information,

Announcer

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