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TRAUMA RISK SUPPORT HANDBOOK

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FOREWORD

After a traumatic event you may experience a number of different emotions. It may be that the incident had no marked effect on you, or you may be profoundly affected and facing a number of new emotions. The aim of this booklet is to outline coping strategies and highlight assistance that is available to you. In addition to self-help strategies, the booklet gives details of the club's trauma risk management approach. It is based on principles of education, risk awareness and mentoring. The programme can be facilitated by the club chaplain possibly together with the club welfare officer(s), who are non-medical professionals. They have experience of counselling sports people and are able to offer practical advice, emotional and spiritual support. As you read this booklet you will see the recurring theme is ‘YOU ARE NOT ALONE’. Support is readily available with the assurance that it can be accessed with a sympathetic person to guide you through. Remember, the feelings you’re experiencing are normal, it’s the nature of the stressful incident that is unusual.

Try to remember that we are all unique and will react differently to trauma and take different amounts of time to recover. This handbook has been designed so we can work through such challenges together.

If you are reading this booklet after a traumatic event and have been offered a chaplain’s help, his/her contact details are on the final page of this booklet. Also included is a list of more general numbers that you or your family may find useful.

THE TRAUMA RISK SUPPORT HANDBOOK

A traumatic incident is any event that is considered to be outside a person’s usual life experience which causes physical, emotional, spiritual or psychological distress. We all respond differently to such events. This handbook highlights the usual responses of people and offers help in relieving the anxiety such incidents cause. It aims to support in the healing process and give assistance in identifying further sources of help.

It may be that, for some time after, the incident dominates your thoughts and emotions. The process of healing is about replacing these dominant thoughts and emotions with the more balanced ones that informed your life before. It is important to be aware that there are many factors in life that may contribute to your vulnerability to an incident, and its impact upon you. A difficult relationship or problems at work etc. can become even harder to cope with after going through a traumatic event. Try to remember to talk about these issues as well as the incident, because they are all factors to be considered in the recovery process. Understanding that there is a life to live after such an incident is important. To deal with your feelings with the purpose of moving on from them is the aim.

REACTIONS TO A TRAUMATIC EVENT CAN BE WORSE IF;

It resulted in a death;

You feel you could have done more;

There is little or no perceived support from anyone;

The incident follows closely after other stressful events in your life.

REACTIONS MAY INCLUDE;

Sadness for death, injury or loss of any kind;

Guilt for not having done more;

Guilt for having survived;

Anger: at what happened; at whoever caused it or let it happen; at the injustice of it, at lack of understanding from others; at the inefficiencies in the system.

Shame: for not reacting as you might have wished; for having felt helpless; for currently being emotional or feeling needy.

Fear: of ‘breaking down’; of a similar event happening again;

Intrusive Memories: of feeling past loss; of similar past events;

Disappointment which alternates with hope. (Confused feelings)

Questioning why.

PHYSICAL AND MENTAL REACTIONS.

You may have some *physical reaction*, with or without the feelings described above. They may develop long after the event. Physical reactions can include tiredness; sleeplessness; palpitations; nausea; headaches; neck and back aches; muscular tension; tightness in the chest and throat area; changes in eating habits; changes in sexual interest.

*Mental reactions* may include: loss of concentration; loss of motivation; poor memory; nightmares; flashbacks to the event; hypervigilance (over guardedness over multiple issues); being easily startled; irritability; loss of sense of humour; impatience with self and others are also common.

Try to remember that those close to you may also be suffering additional stress as they try to come to terms with understanding the best way to support you. You may even find yourself withdrawing from those closest to you, feeling unable to express your feelings and rejecting help offered.

*This is the time to stop and make great efforts to ask for the help you need!*

Try to remember that concealing emotions can prolong the recovery period. Negative reaction to traumatic events is natural and so is the healing process. Being purposeful in taking the right course of action will help speed up healing time. Allowing feelings out into the open in the safe environment provided is the foundation to a good recovery. A slide into alcohol or drug abuse can result if wrong options are taken at this point. For example, you may feel that too little or the wrong sort of help is offered. You may feel that other’s expectations of you are too high. Both these feelings, possibly others, will contribute to a ‘downward’ slide if not shared and dealt with.

WHAT’S THIS GOT TO DO WITH ME?

More than you may want to admit. Witnessing a traumatic incident happen to someone close to you will have particular effects on you. To see a road traffic accident or someone have a heart attack, even on the field of play, comes with no warning and is particularly difficult to deal with. An incident may not involve physical injury to you, but the sudden death of a person close to you can cause great stress mentally, emotionally and even physically. Particularly so, it might be said, if you were personally involved in the incident in the way of trying to revive the person. It is usual for the incident to be discussed immediately after, it’s important to use this time to be honest about how you felt at the time.

AFTER THE INCIDENT

There are strategies you can use to make things easier to bear. Your mind’s defence mechanisms may not allow you to feel the full impact of the incident, often shock prevents immediate progress toward healing.

*Your feelings will unfold as the days go by.*

You may feel ‘numb’, the event may seem unreal and you may begin to wonder if it happened at all;

Keeping yourself occupied with other things may help to a degree, hobbies, exercise etc;

Talking to those who were also involved in the incident, sharing your feelings with them may help to ease the load;

Returning to the scene of the incident is a way of confronting the reality;

Dreaming of the event is common. This is ‘nature’s’ way of helping you organise and absorb the information;

Support from people is important. Don’t reject an offer of help, especially from someone who has had a similar experience. It is important not to isolate yourself. Whatever your feelings it is likely that others have had similar feelings and can be helpful to your recovery;

There are times when you feel the need to be alone with your thoughts, this is also natural and is equally valuable in right proportion to having the company just spoken of;

Be prepared for the healing process to be emotionally painful. Anticipating that the process may be painful prepares you to respond appropriately.

TRAUMA RISK SUPPORT

If the incident involves death or serious injury it’s advisable to contact the club chaplain and welfare officer, who will help you. Help may be in the form of a trauma risk support meeting. The aim of the support meeting is to discover how much stress you have taken on as a result of the incident.

FOCUS OF THE SUPPORT MEETING

The support meeting is an opportunity for the club to see how you are coping with the effects of the incident and to help you get the appropriate assistance. It’s also hoped that you will gain assurance about natural reactions to trauma, and discuss coping strategies. Finally, the meeting will assist in pooling experience and resources.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Everything said within the meeting is confidential. However, if we become concerned about your personal safety, or that of other’s, we reserve the right to inform your manager, having discussed it with you and informed you of the intention to do so.

SOME DOs AND DON’Ts OF DEALING WITH EMOTIONS

Don’t bottle up feelings;

Don’t avoid talking about what happened;

Don’t expect the emotion of it to go away immediately, it may be with you for some time;

Don’t be hard on yourself. Give yourself time to adjust to what has happened;

DO express your emotions – to someone;

DO share your experience with others – they may have insight to offer;

DO make time to self-review the experience – without isolating yourself;

DO take time to be with your family and friends;

DO share your feelings with those around you as you go about your normal daily routine;

DO try to keep your routines as much as possible;

DO drive with care – your concentration may be impaired;

DO be purposefully careful – accidents are more likely to happen after a trauma as your concentration may be reduced.

WHEN TO LOOK FOR ADDITIONAL HELP

If you struggle to handle ongoing intense feelings or physical reactions;

If you feel numb or ‘detached’;

If you have to keep highly active to cope;

If you continue to have nightmares or sleep badly;

If feelings of guilt persist;

If you have no one to share your feelings with when you feel the need to;

If your relationships suffer;

If sexual problems develop;

If you have mishaps that are out of character or your sporting performance suffers;

If you have begun smoking or drinking to excess;

If you are suffering depression, anxiety or exhaustion;

If you cannot control memories of the incident and they affect your sense of wellbeing.

Remember – you are the same person that you were before the incident, and talking about it, and your feelings toward it can assist. Help is available.

POST INCIDENT

After a traumatic incident you should try to re-establish your normal social, work and training routines as quickly as possible. In the majority of cases people are able to carry on with their daily lives without much difficulty. However, in certain cases people may find that in the weeks and months that follow they encounter intrusive thoughts that are harmful and unproductive. Detailed below are a number of common mistakes made when dealing with heightened stress levels.

NEGATIVE COPING ACTIONS

Before learning effective and healthy coping methods, some people try to cope with their distress in ways that lead to more problems. These are actions that immediately seem effective but will later cause more problems. Some can be addictive like smoking or alcohol and/or drug abuse, habits that will prove difficult to change. Negative coping actions can also include isolation, becoming ‘workaholic’, violent/intimidating behaviour, anger issues, eating disorders, self-harmful behaviours.

The following types seem most common:

Alcohol and drugs use - In the short term alcohol and drug use may help to diminish painful memories, increase social confidence or induce sleep. But it is also likely to cause problems in the long term. Depending on them can cause lapses in sound judgement and mental ability which can cause problems in relationships. Risk of suicide and accidents can grow with increased use of alcohol and drugs.

Social isolation - By reducing contact with people you may avoid situations that make you feel afraid, irritable or angry. However, isolation will cause more problems resulting in loss of social support, friendship and intimacy. It may worsen depression and anxiety further. Less participation in positive activities leads to less opportunity for positive emotions.

Anger - Like isolation, anger can rid you of upsetting situations in the short term by keeping people away. But, long term it also keeps away positive connections and help, and can drive away friends as well as causing difficulties in marriage and family relationships. Playing performance can also be affected.

Continuous avoidance - Avoidance of thinking about the incident or about needing additional help may keep away stress, but prevents progress toward a good coping strategy. Avoidance prevents you from seeking help.

POSITIVE COPING ACTIONS

People who have experienced unpleasant events need to be active in dealing with their problems. Often these steps involve a series of thoughtful changes in lifestyle to reduce symptoms and improve quality of life. Common lifestyle changes you may wish to consider include:

Increasing contact - The best way of dealing with this is to seek the camaraderie and support of team-mates and coaches who are closest to you or who were also involved in the incident, and

by sharing with people who have been through similar trauma. This can often be of help to others as you share your stories and coping strategies together. By decreasing isolation and increasing contact, other symptoms are often dealt with in turn.

Re-invest in relationships with family and friends - Take action to have more contact with family and friends and work at improving them. You may feel that you are unable to recount your experiences for fear that the listener is unable to cope. Remember that people generally have more strength and understanding than we give credit for. The majority of friends and family would rather share in, than be excluded from your pain.

Stop excessive drink and drug intake – Many people experiencing unpleasant events use alcohol and drugs to help cope with symptoms. It is important to stop using them as your coping strategy. This will see an increase in sound judgement and mental ability, and decrease the risk of suicidal thoughts and accidents causing physical hurt. These lifestyle changes will benefit you and aid your recovery.

Get back into training – Physical exercise benefits those suffering from trauma symptoms. It Reduces physical tension and distracts from painful memories, which in turn can relieve invading negative emotions. Perhaps most importantly through exercise, self-esteem and personal control can be re-established.

Volunteer in community ventures – On your journey to re-establish your ‘self’, it is important you feel that you have a significant contribution to make. When you’re not feeling 100% it is difficult to generate positive feelings. One way to do this is to volunteer within a local community venture or perhaps your club’s nominated charity. This will help you realise your worth once more.

Journal your thoughts

It may be useful to write down your thoughts regarding the event. The next two pages of this handbook are therefore blank and are included for you to write down your emotions and reactions. In time it may be useful to read your notes and reflect on your feelings following the incident.

LIFESTYLE BALANCE

Besides being more aware of coping strategies there are many complimentary ways to restore lifestyle balance and help make progress. By adopting some changes you will discover a path to regain balance after being exposed to a traumatic experience.

Physical self-care – Eat regularly, e.g. Breakfast, lunch and dinner; eat healthily; Exercise; Sleep enough and at the right times; Take a break and go away to do something you enjoy; limit use of smart phone; seek help if feeling unwell.

Psychological self-care – Make time for self-reflection; read literature that is unrelated to your sport; Do something at which you are not an expert or in charge; Listen to, and share your thoughts, judgements, beliefs, attitudes and feelings; practice receiving help from people (help, advice, friendship)

Emotional self-care – Spend time with people whose company you enjoy; stay in contact with important people in your life; Re-read favourite books/watch favourite movies; Identify comforting activities, objects, people, relationships and places and seek them out; find things to make you laugh; relax.

Spiritual self-care – Make time for reflection; consider a place of honest prayer, either on your own or with a friend or the chaplain; be open to inspiration; cherish optimism and hope.

FINALLY

Try not to give yourself a hard time over events clearly outside your control. Instead, try to think about *your part* in the incident in a positive way. Try to gain a realistic perspective of it in your life. (Like a small stone on a big beach). Sharing thoughts with someone really helps this process. Think about the part you played and remember the positive intent you had to help. It may be that you could not help, seek to settle in your memory that this was because it was impossible, not because you were unwilling. To do this effectively takes real effort for most. But like physical exercise it gets easier with practice. In that respect determination brings positive rewards.

FOR FAMILY, FRIENDS, TEAM-MATES AND CLUB COLLEAGUES

After a traumatic incident, you may become aware that the character of a person close to you has changed. This is likely to be temporary and, with your support they will quickly ‘become themselves’ again. To help a person who has been exposed to traumatic events it may be useful to employ at least some of the following steps:

Listen carefully; Spend time with them and offer assistance; even if they haven’t asked for help, reassure them; Help with everyday tasks; Allow them some private time; Don’t take their anger or other feelings personally; Don’t use phrases like ‘you’re lucky it wasn’t worse’ or ‘pull yourself together’ or ‘you’ll get over it’. Such statements don’t console traumatised people. Instead tell them that you know they are going through a difficult time and you want to try to understand and help them through.

Be aware that there are specific stages to the bereavement process through which affected people pass. These stages may typically, but not always include: 1- Shock, 2 - Denial, 3 - Anger, 4 - Bargaining, 5 - Depression, 6 - Acceptance. The order of these emotions can also change.

CONTACT DETAILS

YOUR CLUB CHAPLAIN IS:-

Telephone:-

E-mail:-

Dates of future meetings:-

YOUR CLUB WELFARE OFFICER IS:-

Telephone:-

E-mail:-

Dates of future meetings:-

**NOTES**

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