

## Resiliency Center

# How to Recover from Adverse Events

Frequent exposure to adverse events (second victim experiences, occupational trauma, unexpected death or injury, moral injury, medical error and malpractice lawsuits, etc.) often leaves health care workers struggling to recover. Use this guide as resource to recover from adverse events or to support colleagues who are struggling.

### IMPACTS OF ADVERSE EVENTS

**Professional impact:** When workers feel isolated or unsupported after adverse events, they become more prone to medical errors, worse patient outcomes, and decreased patient satisfaction.

**Institutional impact:** Self-doubt drives people to question whether they can or want to continue working in their field. From a human capital perspective, that's an immense loss of investment in training, expertise and skills, and costs of recruitment and retention will increase.

**Personal impact:** Many people struggle with family disruption, anxiety and depression, substance abuse, and even suicidal thoughts.

### HOW ADVERSE EVENTS LEAD TO STRESS INJURY

**1. Life threat:** A traumatic experience or exposure to an intense or gruesome situation, injury, or death.

**2. Loss:** Intense grief triggered by the loss of people, things, or parts of oneself.

**3. Inner conflict:** Engaging in or witnessing behaviors that violate moral values.

**4. Wear and tear:** The accumulation of stress from all sources over time without sufficient rest and recovery.

### STRESS CONTINUUM MODEL

We conceptualize stress on a continuum that ranges from transient and mild to chronic and debilitating:

READY (Green)	REACTING (Yellow)	INJURED (Orange)	ILL (Red)
<p><b>DEFINITION</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Optimal functioning</li> <li>Adaptive growth</li> <li>Wellness</li> </ul> <p><b>FEATURES</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>At one's best</li> <li>Well-trained and prepared</li> <li>In control</li> <li>Physically, mentally and spiritually fit</li> <li>Mission-focused</li> <li>Motivated</li> <li>Calm and steady</li> <li>Having fun</li> <li>Behaving ethically</li> </ul>	<p><b>DEFINITION</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Mild and transient distress or impairment</li> <li>Always goes away</li> <li>Low risk</li> </ul> <p><b>CAUSES</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Any stressor</li> </ul> <p><b>FEATURES</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Feeling irritable, anxious or down</li> <li>Loss of motivation</li> <li>Loss of focus</li> <li>Difficulty sleeping</li> <li>Muscle tension or other physical changes</li> <li>Not having fun</li> </ul>	<p><b>DEFINITION</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>More severe and persistent distress or impairment</li> <li>Leaves a scar</li> <li>Higher risk</li> </ul> <p><b>CAUSES</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Life threat</li> <li>Loss</li> <li>Moral injury</li> <li>Wear and tear</li> </ul> <p><b>FEATURES</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Loss of control</li> <li>Panic, rage or depression</li> <li>No longer feeling like normal self</li> <li>Excessive guilt, shame or blame</li> <li>Misconduct</li> </ul>	<p><b>DEFINITION</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Clinical mental disorder</li> <li>Unhealed stress injury causing life impairment</li> </ul> <p><b>TYPES</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>PTSD</li> <li>Depression</li> <li>Anxiety</li> <li>Substance use disorders</li> </ul> <p><b>FEATURES</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Symptoms persist and worsen over time</li> <li>Severe distress or social or occupational impairment</li> </ul>

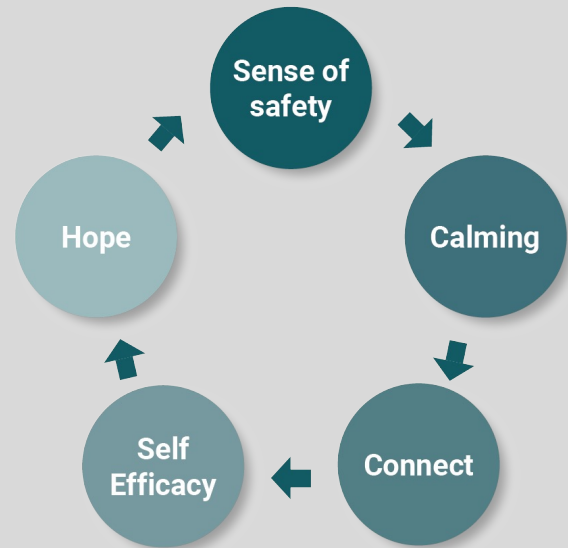
[https://www.ptsd.va.gov/professional/treat/type/stress\\_first\\_aid.asp](https://www.ptsd.va.gov/professional/treat/type/stress_first_aid.asp)

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## HOW TO RECOVER

- **Promote a sense of safety:** Reestablish physical and situational safety by reassuring workers.
- **Engage in calming activities:** Restore your body's resting state through physical activity, breathing exercises, creative endeavors, etc.
- **Connect with colleagues:** Social connectedness is one of the strongest protective factors against stress injury and leads to emotional well-being.
- **Encourage self-efficacy:** Engage in rewarding activities to help rebuild confidence. People who believe they can overcome adversity are better equipped to handle stress and recover.
- **Promote hope:** Through hope we can encourage optimism that things will work out for the best. Remind your team that you're all in this together.



## PEER SUPPORT FUNDAMENTALS

Try using these four fundamentals when supporting a struggling peer:

**Simply listen:** Don't jump to problem-solving – trying to fix things isn't always helpful. One of the core aspects of peer support is just listening.

**Validate emotions:** Reflect on what you hear, identify the person's emotions and what's being talked about, and validate their emotional experiences.

**Check-in on coping strategies and support:** If they seem comfortable, try to respectfully ask if they use any coping strategies or have additional support.

**Provide resources:** If they seem receptive, provide additional resources where they can find further support.

[https://www.ptsd.va.gov/professional/treat/type/stress\\_first\\_aid.asp](https://www.ptsd.va.gov/professional/treat/type/stress_first_aid.asp)