



PTSD Prevention Plan

This PTSD Prevention Plan has been developed to outline our approach to managing Post Traumatic Stress Disorder at the Kingsville Fire Department. The goal of this plan is to take a holistic approach across prevention, intervention and recovery and return to work.

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Introduction

The Town of Kingsville Council, Administration and Fire Department are committed to addressing Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) in our workplace. This prevention plan outlines a holistic approach to addressing PTSD and the focus of this plan is to establish foundational elements based on the PTSD Framework below. Specifically, this plan highlights our prevention, intervention and recovery and return to work policies and practices.

This is a living document which will be updated as our organization advances on our PTSD prevention journey.

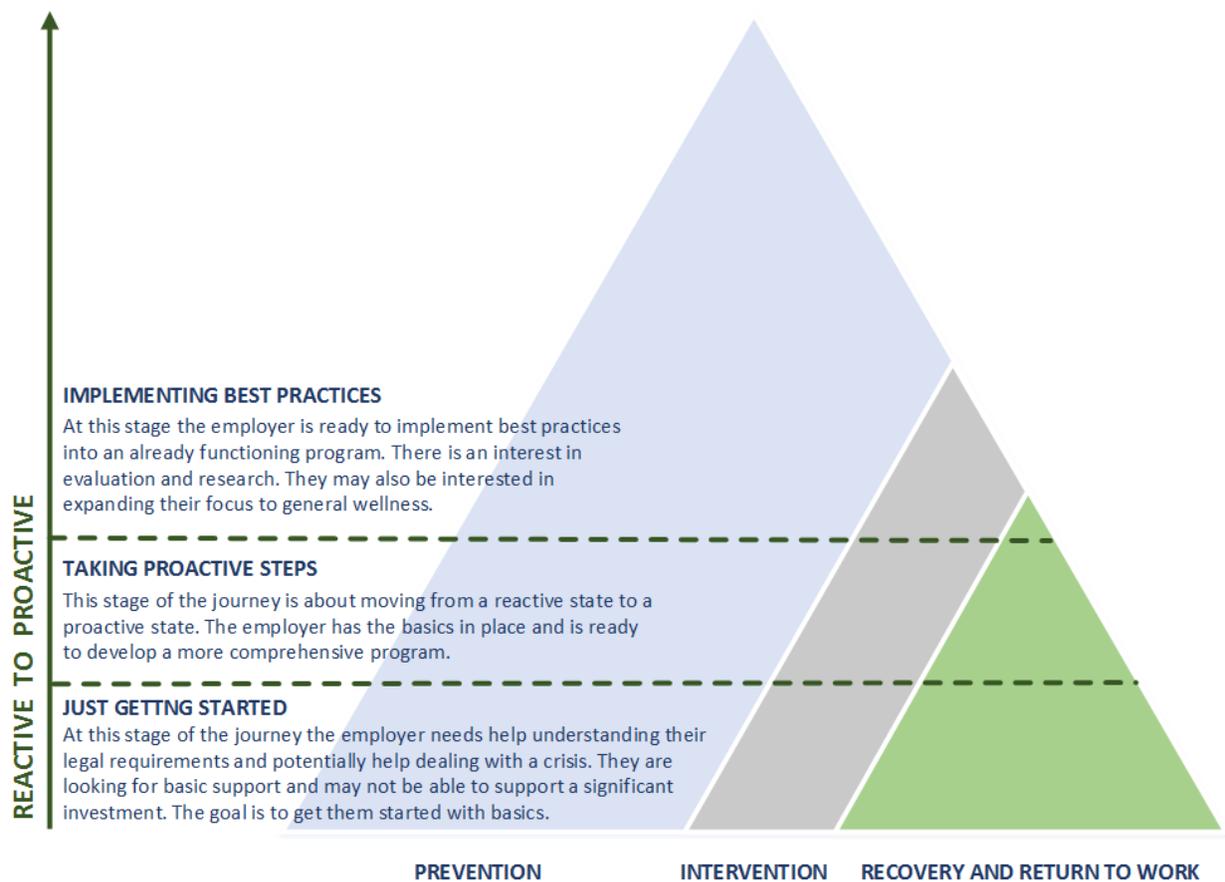


Figure 1: PTSD Framework

Prevention Focus Area

Prevention focuses on outlining the basic elements of occupational health and safety management such as understanding legal responsibilities, recognizing, assessing and controlling the hazard, outlining roles and responsibilities and incident reporting procedures in an organization. The goal is to establish or integrate PTSD prevention

practices for the promotion of a healthy and safe workplace that actively works to prevent harm to a worker's mental health.

Intervention Focus Areas

Intervention focuses on outlining actions that can be taken to improve a situation. This includes ensuring that workers know how to report psychological injuries when they occur and are supported in doing so. It also highlights intervention options that are evidence based and that can be utilized in organizations.

Recovery and Return to Work Focus Area

Recovery and Return to Work ensures that managers understand how to accommodate a worker who is suffering from PTSD and that there are clearly established roles and responsibilities for supporting workers through this process. Recovery and return to work is an important aspect of preventing future or further injury.

Goals and Objectives

The goal of this plan is to provide all employees clarity on how the Town of Kingsville and the Kingsville Fire Department is addressing PTSD prevention, intervention and recovery and return to work in our organization.

The specific objectives of the plan are to:

- Define the legal requirements.
- Explain how to identify and respond to PTSD injuries.
- Establish roles and responsibilities within our organization.
- Establish policies and procedures to support PTSD prevention in our organization.
- Establish intervention strategies
- Outline organizational intervention practices and procedures so that all supervisors and managers understand the available intervention options.
- Review the duty to accommodate.

Overview of PTSD, Risk Factors, Signs and Symptoms

PTSD can develop when someone experiences, sees or learns about an event involving actual or threatened death, serious injury or sexual violence.

Causes

It is believed that PTSD is caused by a complex mix of:

- Life experiences, including the amount and severity of trauma you have experienced since early childhood.
- The way your brain regulates the chemicals and hormones your body releases in response to stress.
- Inherited mental health risks such as an increased risk of anxiety or depression and inherited aspects of your personality or temperament.

Risk Factors

- Having a job that increases your risk of being exposed to traumatic events, such as firefighting.
- Experiencing intense or long-lasting trauma.
- Feeling horror, helplessness or extreme fear.
- Seeing people get injured or killed.
- Having experienced other trauma earlier in life, including childhood abuse/or neglect.
- Having other mental health problems such as anxiety or depression.
- Lacking a good support system of family and friends.
- Dealing with extra stress after the event, such as loss of a loved one, pain and injury, or loss of a job or home.
- Having biological relatives with mental health problems including PTSD or depression.

PTSD can increase the risk of other mental health problems such as:

- Depression and anxiety,
- Issues with drugs or alcohol use,
- Suicidal thoughts or actions.

Signs and Symptoms

Symptoms may start within 3 months of the event but can sometimes not appear until years after the event. The symptoms can make it hard for the affected person to live their everyday life and can be accompanied by depression, substance abuse, or other anxiety disorders. Following are three types of symptoms associated with PTSD¹:

Intrusive Memories

Also called re-experiencing symptoms, these memories can start from the persons own thoughts, or can be triggered by words, objects or situations that are reminders of the traumatic event. Intrusive memories include:

- Recurring, unwanted distressing memories of the traumatic event,
- Reliving the event as if it were happening again (flashbacks),
- Upsetting dreams or nightmares about the event, and
- Severe emotional distress of physical reactions (heart racing, hands sweating) to something that reminds you of the event.

Avoidance

Avoidance symptoms may cause a person to change their routine such as avoiding things that remind them of the event as well as negative changes in thinking and moods. This includes:

- Trying to avoid thinking about the event,

¹ Mayo Clinic, 2016, National Institute of Mental Health (2016)
<http://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/post-traumatic-stress-disorder/symptoms-causes/dxc-20308550>

- Avoiding places, objects, activities or people that remind you of the event,
- Increased negative feelings about self or others,
- Feeling emotionally numb or an inability to experience positive or negative emotions,
- Feeling hopeless about the future,
- Losing interest in activities that were enjoyable in the past,
- Feeling strong guilt, depression or worry,
- Memory problems including not remembering important aspects of the traumatic event, and
- Difficult maintaining close relationships.

Hyper-arousal Symptoms

These symptoms are changes in emotional reactions usually constant and can make a person feel stressed, angry, overwhelmed and “on guard”. These symptoms include:

- Irritability, feeling tense or “on guard”,
- Difficulty sleeping,
- Angry outbursts or aggressive behaviour,
- Being on constant guard for danger,
- Feelings of overwhelming guilt or shame,
- Self-destructive behaviour,
- Trouble concentrating or sleeping, and
- Being easily startled or frightened.

Legal Requirements

At the Town of Kingsville and the Kingsville Fire Department we understand that we have a legal requirement under the Occupational Health and Safety Act to take every reasonable precaution to protect workers from harm. Employers and supervisors are required to inform all workers about psychological hazards on the job and provide training to employees on how to prevent these hazards and protect themselves from harm. Workers are also required to follow policies and procedures set out by the employer.

Notification of Injury/Illness

Following the notification of an injury/illness, Section 51 and 52 of the Occupational Health and Safety Act (OHSA) requires notification to the Ministry of Labour, Joint Health and Safety Committee and the local Association (if applicable) if an employee is critically injured, disabled from performing their own work or receives medical attention resulting from an incident. The details required in these reports, and the parties who must be notified are based on the severity of the injury and are outlined in the OHSA, and in Section 5 of the Industrial Establishment Regulation. Of particular importance is the necessity in Section 5(2)(j) (Industrial Establishment Regulation) includes steps to prevent further illness.

Reporting a Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder through required channels is handled in the same manner as other injuries or illnesses. When an injury or illness occurs, the employer must submit a Form 7 Report of Injury/Illness within three days.

In many cases, an employee with PTSD will require time off from work, but in some instances, it may be possible to accommodate them with alternate work as they are receiving treatment. The same WSIB Form 7 is used regardless of whether the ill/injured employee loses time from work (lost time injury), or only seeks medical attention (no lost time injury). The employee will be sent a Form 6 by WSIB for completion following the employer's submission of the claim.

Organizational PTSD Practices

The Town of Kingsville and the Kingsville Fire Department consider mental health, wellbeing and psychological safety of its employees to be important part of a productive, effective and healthy workplace.

To promote a healthy workplace we will strive to:

- Increase awareness about mental health issues and create an open dialogue between employees, managers and leadership.
- Promote principles of mutual respect, confidentiality and cooperation across the organization.
- Support managers to help address the mental health, wellbeing and psychological safety of our employees and provide them with resources and tools to address demands, conflict, emotional distress or trauma experience by our workers.
- Focus on the organizations impact on the health and well-being of all employees, not personal health status.

Organizational Anti-Stigma Practices

The Town of Kingsville and the Kingsville Fire Department are committed to fostering a workplace where our employees are protected from stigma associated with mental illness. Our organization will ensure that all employees are treated with respect and dignity; this includes those suffering from mental illness and those who support other workers suffering from mental illness.

Harassment and acts of discrimination will not be tolerated. Anyone who is found to be stigmatizing another individual may be subject to disciplinary action. Types of behaviour and acts that contribute to stigma include:

- Prejudicial attitudes and discriminating behaviour directed towards individuals.
- Trivializing or belittling people suffering from PTSD, or PTSD itself.
- Insulting people who are suffering from PTSD.
- Patronizing people who are suffering from PTSD by treating them as if they are not as good as other people.
- Ostracizing people who are suffering with PTSD, or their friends and supports.

To support a stigma-free workplace, we will:

- Provide PTSD awareness training and education.
- Anti-stigma language is part of our corporate philosophy.
- Regularly monitor organizational practices and systems for barriers to achieving a stigma-free workplace.

- Provide an effective and fair complaints process.
- Lead by example.

Managers and Supervisors are responsible for fostering a stigma-free workplace and setting an example of appropriate behaviour.

Employees are responsible for treating coworkers with respect in the workplace, bringing forward complaints and cooperating with investigations into complaints. Employees are also responsible for treating all parties and situations in a sensitive and confidential manner.

Recognizing and Responding to Signs and Symptoms of PTSD

Managers and supervisors are expected to know how to recognize and respond to signs and symptoms of PTSD in a worker, fellow manager or supervisor. If signs and symptoms are found to be present it is expected that the manager or supervisor will:

- Keep the communication lines open with the worker and ask how they or other team members can provide support to the worker. If the worker is not ready to talk, wait for them to open up. If they do start to share, do not interrupt, it is often difficult for people with PTSD to ask for help, particularly if there is a concern about stigmatization.
- Deal with signs and symptoms directly and as soon as possible. If signs and symptoms are recognized it is best to open the dialogue and provide support so that the worker knows they are supported in the workplace.
- Provide information about the options the worker has to address PTSD. Help the worker access support and help resources, if they request or need assistance.
- Encourage the worker to talk to someone they trust about what has happened, this could be team members identified in the workplace to provide peer support, family members, friends or a manager/supervisor.
- Share with the worker that what they are experiencing is a normal reaction. Provide information about signs and symptoms and when they should speak to a professional or seek additional help.

Roles and Responsibilities for Prevention, Intervention, Recovery and Return to Work

Senior Leadership (i.e. CAO, Chief Officers)

Our Senior Leadership will:

- Understand the impact that PTSD and other occupational stress injuries have on the organization.
- Identify what health and safety programs already exist and how a PTSD Prevention Program can be integrated into existing systems. This should consider:
 - Management training
 - Employee engagement
 - Anti-stigma awareness

- Civility and respect, anti-stigma
- Critical incident response and management
- Employee Assistance Program (EAP) or other benefits that support a mental health and wellness program
- Training individuals in strategies for resiliency and health behaviour
- Set the tone and lead by example, reducing stigma and encouraging conversations and take every reasonable precaution to protect workers.
- Makes early and considerate contact with an injured/ill worker.

Managers and Supervisors (i.e. Chief Officers, Captains)

Managers and Supervisors will:

- Participate in training to be aware and ready to address the day to day aspects of PTSD prevention and management.
- Receive training on how to recognize signs and symptoms of PTSD, understand the causes and risk factors and understand how to support workers suffering from PTSD.
- Identify individuals at risk of PTSD.
- Be prepared through training, coaching or other means to engage workers in discussions about psychological health and safety.
- Encourage active discussion with workers about mental health and psychological safety.
- Implement processes to report concerns and provide support to workers in need.
- Help identify control methods that support PTSD prevention such as workplace rotations for highly exposed individuals.
- Reduce stigma by participating in positive conversations.
- Understand how to accommodate a worker suffering from PTSD.
- Actively participate in a systematic, structure and coordinated Return to Work process and plan.

Employees (i.e. Firefighters)

Employees will:

- Participate in training and education about PTSD.
- Report concerns, incidents so that they can be investigated and addressed.
- Listen to coworkers and encourage engagement.
- Reduce stigma by participating in positive conversations.

Human Resources

The Human Resource department will:

- Assist the injured/ill worker to remain or return to work while they recover, while also ensuring that the workers return to work date is sensible, flexible and safe for the worker.
- Help the worker return to the workplace post-injury/illness.

- Connect and consult with the injured/ill worker, treating health professional and WSIB representative and make sure that everyone understands what to expect and what is expected of them.
- Monitor the workers progress towards returning to work.
- Help resolve issues or disputes related to the return to work.

Training

PTSD Awareness and Anti-Stigma Training

The Town of Kingsville and the Kingsville Fire Department are committed to providing PTSD and anti-stigma awareness training to all workers within our organization. Our organization will:

- Provide PTSD and occupational stress awareness training to new recruits.
- Implement and maintain the awareness training program so that all staff is familiar with the signs and symptoms of PTSD.

Recognizing Signs and Symptoms and Responding to Signs of PTSD

All managers and supervisors will receive training on how to recognize the signs and symptoms of PTSD and learn the organizations expectations on how to respond to and address these signs and symptoms.

Post Exposure Education and Awareness

Education and awareness will be offered to those who have experienced a traumatic event. This education will focus on providing information about signs and symptoms, how to access care if needed and provision of contact information if they require assistance and/or resources.

The Kingsville Fire Department has supplied and made available to its members the following Quick Series Pocket Guides:

- Preventing & Recovering From Traumatic Stress
- Stress Management For Emergency Personnel

Copies of the above noted guides are also made available in the training rooms at each fire station.

Training Roll-Out

The Kingsville Fire Department is committed to ensuring that all members of the department will receive Road to Mental Readiness (R2MR) training. Preparations are underway to ensure that this training has been provided by the end of November 2017. Firefighters will be provided with the 4-hour primary course. Fire officers will be provided with the 8-hour leadership course. Additional sessions will be made available when needed, and as required for new hires.

Early Intervention Strategies

When workers are exposed to a traumatic event, the Kingsville Fire Department will provide those workers with the following early interventions (if required) to minimize stress and promote prevention of PTSD:

- Using debriefing sessions that focus on helping the worker put their experiences in perspective and validates what they have seen, done, thought and felt.
 - A social worker who specializes in treating persons who suffer from critical incident stress and PTSD can be made available as required for debriefing sessions. The phone number is posted in a visible area at each station and is available upon request.
- Allowing time off for the workers who have been involved in a traumatic event.
- Providing workers with stigma-free counselling services to address the emotional aspects of what they have experienced. Counselling services are provided through the Employee Assistance Program (EAP). EAP information has been distributed to all members, is posted in a visible area at each station and is available upon request.
- Providing ongoing education that gives information on PTSD, stress management and actions that workers can take for themselves.
- Offering peer support.

Resources

Internal Resources:

Homewood Health Member and Family Assistance Program:

- (800) 663-1142 website: www.homeweb.ca

External Resources:

Jim Jeanette (Registered Social Worker):

- www.jimjeannette.com

First Responders First website:

- www.firstrespondersfirst.ca

PTSD Association of Canada website:

- www.ptsdassociation.com

Ontario Mental Health Helpline:

- (866) 531-2600 website: www.mentalhealthhelpline.ca

Distress and Crisis Ontario (Windsor & Essex County):

- (519) 256-5000 website: www.dcwindsor.com

Canadian Mental Health Association (Windsor-Essex County):

- (519) 255-7440 website: www.windsor.essex.cmha.ca

Approval:

Fire Chief

CAO

Date

Date