

# Workplace Traumatic Incident Framework

*A partnership approach for the development of  
Workplace Traumatic Incident guidance*





## Introduction

### Purpose of this Framework

Fife Workplace Team has produced this Traumatic Incident Framework as part of the Workplace Mental Wellbeing & Suicide Prevention [campaign](#), to enable the development of tailored Policies, Plans and Processes to help support your workforce through such incidents.

The overall aim is to ensure that employers, managers, supervisors, staff reps and the wider workforce are prepared to manage incidents effectively when they do occur. It is important to be mindful that communicating unfortunate news can be traumatic. Support may be needed for all levels of workers involved.

The Framework has been designed with focus to specific considerations such as Suicide and Sudden Death although it may be applicable to other situations causing worker distress and trauma, for example, Loss of a Colleague suddenly, through an accident or ill-health.

The Framework showcases examples of Good Practice gathered from previously implemented Traumatic Incident Policies published by organisations such as Fife Council. The Framework has been reviewed by Fife Samaritans – we thank all contributors for their expertise and guidance.

**PLEASE NOTE: This Framework has been developed for guidance purposes only and it should be used to assist workplaces to produce their own tailored Traumatic Incident Policies.**

The threat of situations which can seriously affect workers wellbeing can also cause distress. These threats may be considered as Traumatic Incidents based on the related implications and the workforce reactions to them.

**You should be aware that workforce reactions could be influenced by media coverage and workplace connections to surrounding communities.**

### This Framework is split into three sections:

1. Preparation and Planning in Case of a Traumatic Incident
2. What to do in the Event of a Traumatic Incident
3. Medium and Longer Term Supports after a Traumatic Incident.

**This Framework should be used for the development of guidance which compliments existing workplace Policies and Procedures.**

HR guidance and advice is available via: [Fife Business Gateway](#), Chartered Institute of Personnel development ([CIPD](#)) and Advisory, Conciliation, and Arbitration Service ([ACAS](#)).



## 1. Preparation and Planning in Case of a Traumatic Incident

Preparation and Planning will support your workforce and protect the integrity & continuity of your business if traumatic incidents occur.

Effective Planning should ensure that everyone within the workforce is informed of their general duties in relation to Traumatic Incidents - before something happens.

### Checklist for Effective Planning in Case of a Traumatic Incident

Checklist should be completed by your Workplace Leadership Team.

Suggested Action	Rationale	Date Completed/Updated  Review Date
Nominate a Responsible Person/Responsible Team (and back-ups) to develop, implement and monitor the Traumatic Incident Action Plan. <b>NOTE:</b> Responsible Person/Team may change depending on workers affected.	To ensure actions are implemented methodically in the instance of Traumatic Incidents.	
Keep an up to date contact document for all workers. Consider recording the following information: Home Address Phone Number Email Address Emergency Contact/Next of Kin GP Practice Contact Details  <b>NOTE:</b> Keep this list readily accessible to the responsible person/team in the workplace. Be mindful of confidentiality & GDPR regulations with regards to information handling.	To support swift communications with workers and associated others (as required).	
Develop Traumatic Incident Action Plan Consider processes that support swift and concise communication amongst workers.	Action Planning will support you to implement the required tasks and responses.	
Workplace Leadership Teams, in conjunction with workers, should identify any workforce training & awareness needs relating to Traumatic Incident response.  Examples could include: timely updates on contact details and policy content, regular circulation of policy to workforce, verbal practice of terminology used to inform of unfortunate news. See Digital Toolkit for training and resources which may help.	Training should support staff to carry out duties in relation to the Traumatic Incident response.  Workforce training may be with regards to exercising the policy.	

## 1. Preparation and Planning in Case of a Traumatic Incident (cont)

Consider and familiarise yourself with the Support Services who can assist the recovery of your workforce after Traumatic Incidents.

- **Occupational Health** - You may be able to refer workers to an established Occupational Health Service provider for assessment/support or utilise Employee Assistance Programmes (sometimes accessed through your existing workplace Insurance Service Provider). If you have not contacted either of these services you may want to look into that further.
- **Working Health Services** - This [programme](#) in Scotland provides free and confidential return to work advice and health support for paid workers in small to medium companies. People who are in paid work can contact this service and receive specific health condition management advice – such as dealing with mental health issues - with the aim to help them stay at work or get back to work as soon as possible
- [Samaritans](#) provides support in relation to emotional wellbeing.
- **Scottish Association for Mental Health (SAMH)** has a helpline available as well as publications such as [After a Suicide](#).
- [Mental Health at Work](#) is a new online gateway, developed by Mind, which provides the advice and tools you need to support the mental health of your workers.
- **Workforce Mental Wellbeing & Suicide Prevention [campaign](#)**.

Use of internal notice boards, website and staff web areas should be considered to signpost workers to support services – as well as to promote staff health, safety and wellbeing.

### Traumatic Incident Response – Preparing Communications

Clear and concise communication is a crucial element of Traumatic Incident response. Good communication can support your workforce and protect the integrity & continuity of your business whilst maintaining professionalism and confidentiality.

Decide on levels and methods of communication both in terms of the workforce and externally.

Importantly, if the traumatic incident occurs in the workplace, identify how next of kin will be consulted or kept informed.

Workers who carry out day-to-day communication duties within your workforce may be best-placed to adopt the role of general communication regarding Traumatic Incidents.

### Suggested Traumatic Incident Communication Duties are as follows:

- Prioritise appropriate communication with workers
- Manage media enquiries
- Facilitate accurate/ongoing crisis communication internally and externally e.g. next of kin as required
- Manage communication content to the general public
- Manage digital communication inclusive of websites & social media - in line with available [guidelines](#).

## Show sensitivity and professionalism when sharing unfortunate news

**Social Media** communication must also be considered. Following a traumatic incident involving the death of a worker, social media may be used positively by colleagues, friends and families to pay their respects or share memories. However, experience has shown that it can also become a vehicle for individuals to express anger and blame, and rumours and hearsay may also occur. It is important for workplaces to be aware of social media discussions and manage this. Social media communication messages should also be mindful and reflective of anxieties being expressed.



## 2. What to do in the Event of a Traumatic Incident

Despite prevention efforts, workplaces may still be exposed to distressing incidents and stressful situations. To know what to do in relation to an incident occurring is crucial for all involved.

### Checklist for responding to a Traumatic Incident

We advise that this checklist should be completed by your Workplace Leadership Team.

This process is summarised in a flow chart diagram on Page 9

Action	Rationale	Date Completed/Updated Review Date
Responsible Person/Team identified within the Effective Planning process should gather factual information on the incident. See Gathering Information section on Page 8 for further advice.	To ensure that information gathered and shared is accurate and that subsequent actions and communication with relevant others can be prioritised.	
Make contact with affected family and offer condolences as required. Discuss the need to inform the workforce of the incident and check what information can be shared. Be sensitive with regards to families' wishes surrounding funeral plans (as applicable). Consider counseling leave for <i>anyone</i> who is affected.	To support relevant others with a compassionate response. To maintain integrity and to show respect.	
Consider who needs to be notified and prioritise the order in which these contacts should be made (internal & external contacts). Depending on the scenario, you may need to contact emergency services first, if not – you may need to discuss the information gathered with Business Management as an initial step.	To support swift, appropriate and accurate communications and implement the Traumatic Incident Action Plan in a methodical manner.	
Establish contact with identified Effective Planning process Communication workers to prepare a response in case of media interest.	To support Communication workers with their role in regards to Traumatic Incident response. To ensure the details shared with media are appropriate.	
Organise a planning meeting to agree the required actions and implement the Traumatic Incident action plan. Include all factual information to ensure clear, concise and appropriate actions. NOTE: Please consider affected families and the requirement to communicate with them as appropriate.	To agree on the approaches required with regards to the Traumatic Incident. To ensure that all workers know of their duties pertaining to the Action Plan. To discuss any queries or concerns.	

Show sensitivity and professionalism when sharing unfortunate news

Inform workers swiftly with regards to the Incident (factual information).	To ensure workers know the facts and feel supported moving forward.	
Be alert to workers who are more likely to be struggling and need support. Where required, give these workers time to manage their own feelings and the opportunity to discuss them with you.  See Planning Section on Page 4 for support services who may be able to help.	To build and maintain an appropriate level of support for the workforce.	
Encourage workers to follow a normal work routine as much as possible (with flexibility for specific work teams as required)	To provide a sense of purpose which may reduce anxiety and stress, and improving team morale whilst maintaining business continuity.	
Workers who are not due to be present in the workplace should be notified of the Incident by phone/email to avoid news coming from external sources.	To support accurate, inclusive communication with the workforce.	
Prepare a script to support workers in communicating the Incident to others in a consistent and accurate manner.  See further reading section for toolkits which may assist with script development.	To support workers with communication duties and maintain consistent and accurate accounts of the Traumatic Incident.	
Log all contacts/enquiries with regards to the Incident. Include what was asked and what advice was given.	To support a 'paper-trail' of communications and cross-check any information published out with the organisation (as required).	
Consider increasing contact with workers by implementing 'start of day huddle' or 'end of day' briefing. Be mindful of personal circumstances and offer additional support as required.	To identify any difficulties and tailor responses of support.	



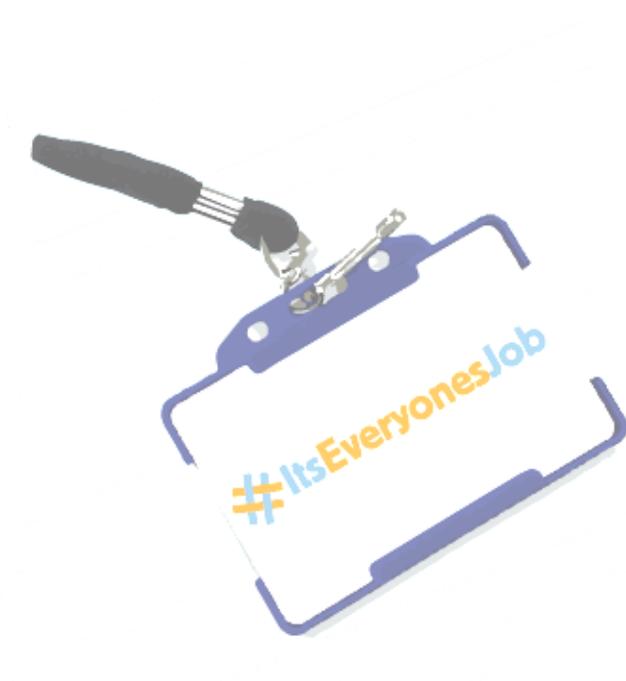
## Gathering Information

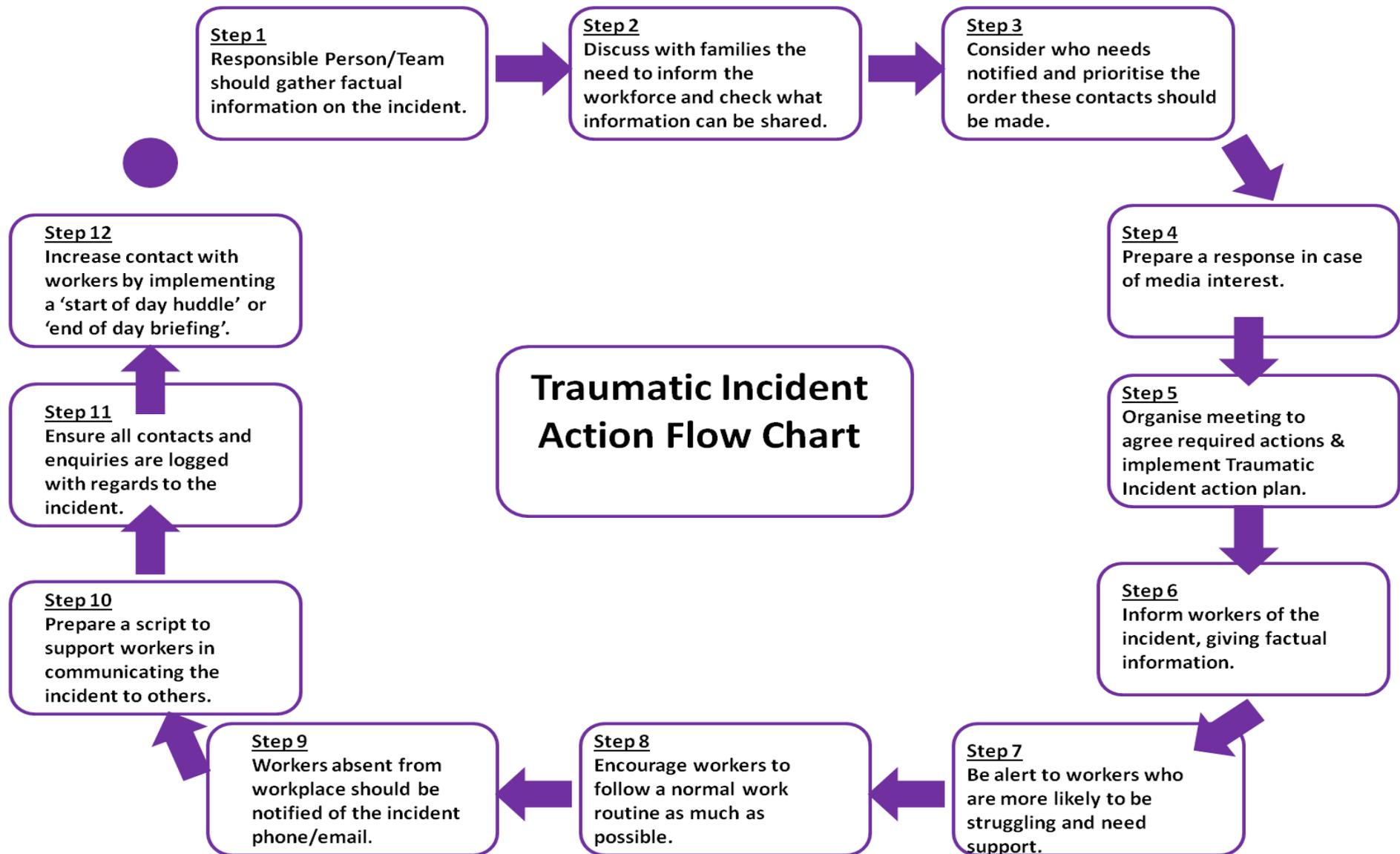
The gathering of information is crucial with regards to Traumatic Incidents. The information you gather and collate must be factual and accurate to ensure that the necessary communications – both internally and externally – are a true account of what has happened and are consistent and sensitive in nature/tone.

The suggested points you should gather information on are as follows:

- Occurrence/Incident
- Location Details
- Dates/Times associated
- People directly involved
- Nature of injuries
- Emergency services involvement
- Actions already taken

**Workplace Management should be made aware of this information as a matter of urgency – they may advise you to inform other relevant departments such as Communications/Human Resources as required.**





## 2. What to do in the Event of a Traumatic Incident (cont)

### Communicating with Supervisors & Team Leads

#### Points to Consider:

- Make contact with affected family and offer condolences as required. Discuss the need to inform the workforce of the incident and check what information can be shared.
- Sensitivity to workers personal circumstances – recent bereavements, recent adverse news, social circumstances. Be mindful that circumstances or factors may be unknown to others in the workplace.
- What support can be offered to workers – time to talk with colleagues/team leads, time away from their duties, a designated 'safe space' for time out.
- The common questions which might arise from any discussions with workers – prepare appropriate responses in advance. See further reading section for Samaritans Fact Sheet covering commonly asked questions.
- Establishment of a communication plan on how to inform workers of the Incident – inclusive of teams who are most affected by the Incident. Consider in-house arrangements for communication with workers.

**NOTE: Workers should be informed of the Incident by familiar Team Leads where possible and in smaller groups to allow for questions/concerns to be raised. See Planning Section on Page 4 for support services who may be able to help.**

### Supervisors/Team Leads Communicating Incidents with Workers

- Share with workers the facts gathered and provide guidance on what they can subsequently share with others.
- Encourage questions & discussion.
- Reduce speculation where possible.
- Offer reassurance & support.
- Discuss any further planned communications with other sources e.g. Media.
- Advise workers not to discuss the matter with press/social media (as required).
- Encourage workers to maintain their normal work routine as much as possible.



### 3. Medium/Longer Term Support for Workers

In some instances, workers affected by a Traumatic Incident, may need longer term support such as counseling to address the social and emotional impacts to their own health & wellbeing. However, people will generally recover from the Incident through short term support such as one-to-one chats with Colleagues/Team Leads, Supervisors/Managers.

**NOTE:** Be mindful that a 'one-size fits all' approach may not be effective and workplace support should be provided in a tailored and needs based approach for workers. Recognise that recovery may not be linear – workers may require different support at different times.

#### Common Emotional and Physical Responses to Traumatic Incidents

Traumatic Incidents may trigger adverse behaviours, feelings and thoughts in workers. It is important to consider some of the common reactions to Traumatic Incidents to be able to identify the need for appropriate support.

<u>Behaviours</u>	<u>Feelings</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Unable to sleep</li><li>• Tiredness</li><li>• Changes in Appetite</li><li>• Introvert</li><li>• Frustration</li><li>• Brain Fog</li><li>• Lowered Motivation</li><li>• Heightened or reduced emotional reactions.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Tired</li><li>• Nausea</li><li>• Sad</li><li>• Angry</li><li>• Confused</li><li>• Apprehension</li><li>• Nervous</li></ul>

This list is not exhaustive.

#### Signposting to Support Services

You may wish to refer workers to your Occupational Health Services to access support to recover from a Traumatic Incident.

If you do not have access to such services, you may find the following support helpful:

**Working Health Services:** This programme in Scotland provides free and confidential return to work advice and health support for paid workers in small to medium companies.

**Breathing Space:** is a website and phone service for anyone experiencing low mood, depression or anxiety. Telephone: [0800 83 85 87](tel:0800838587).

**Samaritans:** provides emotional support for anyone who is going through a difficult time. They operate a 24-hour service available every day of the year. Telephone: [116 123](tel:116123)

**Scottish Association for Mental Health (SAMH):** have supportive advice available as well as publications such as [After a Suicide](#).

**Papyrus:** is a voluntary organisation supporting teenagers and young adults who are feeling suicidal. Telephone: [0800 068 41 41](tel:08000684141)

**CALM:** is specifically for young men. Telephone [0800 58 58 58](tel:0800585858)

**NHS Inform Suicide Information**

**CAMHS Hands On**



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### Further Traumatic Incident Workplace Resources

[Managing Traumatic Events in the Workplace](#) Employee Assistance Professionals Association(EAPA)

[Violence Toolkit](#) Health & Safety Executive (HSE)

[Coping with Traumatic Events](#) Oxford University

[Coping with a Traumatic Event](#) Royal College of Psychiatrists (RCPsych)

[Crisis Management Toolkit](#) Business in the Community (BITC) - includes some case studies

[Myths about Suicide](#) Samaritans

[SHUSH Listening Tips](#) Samaritans



This document has been produced collaboratively by Fife Workplace Team and the Suicide Prevention Officer from Fife Health Promotion Service, part of Fife Health & Social Care Partnership.

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