



Phoenix  
AUSTRALIA

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# Coping with Trauma

## Participant workbook



## **Acknowledgements**

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# Workshop outline

<b>Topic / Activity</b>
Introductions
Aims and rationale for workshop
<b>The impact of trauma</b>
The impact of PTEs and recovery patterns following a PTE
Risk factors for not coping following a PTE
<b>Looking after yourself</b>
Introduction to strategies to help you be prepared for, and cope with a PTE
Managing strong emotions
Helpful thinking to cope better with incidents
Case studies: Coping better during a PTE
Myths about coping, and Do's & Don'ts following a PTE
Getting support from friends, peers and family to recover
<b>Getting help &amp; personal coping plan</b>
When to get help and available supports
Develop a Personal Coping Plan
Close & evaluation

## Introduction

Welcome to the Coping with Trauma workshop. This workshop aims to help you cope with any potentially traumatic events (PTEs) that you may experience in the rail industry.

### What is a potentially traumatic event?

We all experience different forms of stress at work: working long hours, juggling too many deadlines, or having conflict with colleagues, or being performance managed. What we call a potentially traumatic event (PTE) is quite different in nature and can lead to unique problems.

A PTE involves either experiencing or witnessing a situation that involved the threat of death or serious injury. In other words, during a PTE you could be threatened with death, or be seriously injured, or you could witness the death, injury or suffering of others. In the rail industry this might involve:

- hitting someone while driving a train/tram, or being involved in a near miss
- witnessing someone being severely injured
- seeing body parts while trying to help an accident victim, investigating an incident or cleaning rolling stock or tracks
- being assaulted or severely injured
- witnessing an assault.

### Responses to traumatic events

Feeling distressed is very common in the first week or two after a potentially traumatic event. This may involve feeling upset, anxious or agitated, having trouble sleeping and losing your appetite. Some people will also feel fear, sadness, guilt or anger. In most cases, these problems settle down in the days and weeks following the traumatic event. Some people, however, go on to develop longer term problems.

There is no single, or right, way to respond to a traumatic incident. How a person responds will depend on many things, including:

- past difficult experiences
- the way the person normally copes with difficulties
- the intensity of the traumatic event
- the level of support the person receives from friends and family
- the person's lifestyle, e.g., a healthy lifestyle involves actively taking care of self, finding enjoyment and relaxation, versus a stressful lifestyle that involves overwork, neglecting self-care such as sleep and exercise, or drinking too much.

People can react very differently to a traumatic event. Some people will be a little distressed but will bounce back quickly. Others will appear largely unaffected at first, but then go on to experience difficulties. Other people may draw strength from their experience. Some will develop significant emotional or mental health problems such as depression, anxiety, posttraumatic stress disorder, and drug or alcohol abuse.

## How will the workshop help me?

This workshop is designed to help you feel more prepared should you be exposed to a potentially traumatic incident. It will:

- help you get a sense of what you might be confronted with
- provide you with tools to cope with any distress that you may experience both during and following an incident
- help you make a plan for using these tools so you are prepared if something does happen.

To do this, the workshop will cover:

- the types of incidents that you may encounter in your work that may be traumatic
- common reactions to these potentially traumatic incidents
- the kind of response you can expect from your organisation
- simple coping skills to help you deal with stressful experiences
- where you can get support from within your organisation.

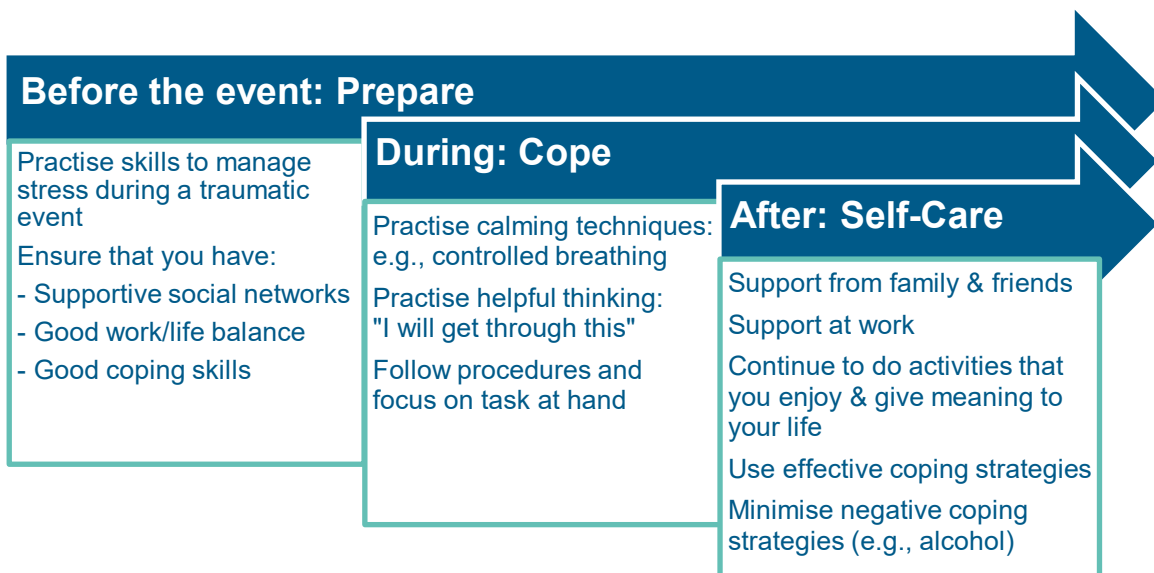
Most importantly, you will have an opportunity to practise coping skills and will have time to develop a personal 'Coping Plan'.

You will also be presented with a resource kit designed to help you look after yourself following a PTE.

## Coping better with traumatic incidents

A number of factors can help someone cope better with a traumatic event. There are some things you can do right now that can help you be better prepared should you be confronted with a traumatic event. There are things that help during a traumatic event and things that can help people recover if they are affected by what they experience.

The diagram below gives you an overview of helpful strategies:



## What to expect from my organisation after a traumatic event

*< This worksheet will need to be modified for your organisation. This worksheet should provide information consistent with the slide titled 'What to expect after a PTE'. This worksheet aims to inform staff of what to expect after experiencing a trauma in terms of organisational procedures. This worksheet should include at least the following information:*

- *Who will support the staff member in the immediate aftermath of the PTE? For example, first responder?*
- *Who is responsible for the wellbeing of the staff member in the days and weeks following a PTE?*
- *What trauma leave is the staff member entitled to, or what is recommended by the organisation?*
- *Are staff members automatically contacted by EAP and/or peer support after a PTE? (Or does the staff member initiate contact?)*
- *We also recommend that each staff member be provided with an information sheet that includes this information. >*



## Improve your general wellbeing

People feel better, perform better and bounce back faster if they look after their wellbeing. Improving your ability to manage stress now and improving your lifestyle will put you in a better position to cope with the impact of a traumatic event. It is harder to cope with an incident if you are stressed, don't look after yourself, or have few supports in place. In this section, we will take you through strategies and work practices that help you look after yourself.

### Strategies and work practices

#### Make your life enjoyable

Make time for things you enjoy (see the list of pleasant activities if you are unsure about what you could do)

Stay connected with people who make you feel good

Keep yourself healthy: regular sleep, healthy eating, exercise

#### Reduce work stress

Make the most of your work breaks

Manage your time effectively

Don't over-commit: prioritise tasks

Have holidays

#### Practise good coping skills

Ask for help when you need it

Don't rely on drugs and alcohol to feel better

Use the coping skills outlined in this manual (e.g., controlled breathing, helpful thinking) to manage stressful situations

## Improving wellbeing worksheet

Take a moment to consider the following questions and write down your answer.

Do you have regular routines that help you feel good? What are they?

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Do you devote enough time to relationships and activities that you enjoy? Which ones?

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Do you take regular rests from work – breaks during the day and holidays?

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Do you tend to over-commit – never say ‘no’? In what way?

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Are you making time for things that you value?

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## Pleasant activity list

Indoor activities	Outdoor activities	Activities with friends	Helping other people
Watching a DVD	Going for a walk/ run	Having friends come to visit	Making something for friends
Playing cards or board games	Going to the movies	Talking to a friend on the phone	Helping to raise money
Listening to music	Playing golf	Going out to visit friends	Giving gifts
Photography	Fishing	Meeting someone new	Babysitting for a friend or family member
Reading stories, novels, poems, plays, magazines and newspapers	Gardening or landscaping	Having coffee or tea with friends	Making contributions to religious, charitable or political groups
Rearranging or redecorating your room or house	Horseback riding	Being with someone you love	Offering practical assistance to a friend
Writing stories, novels, poems, plays or articles	Playing football or cricket	Having lunch with friends	
Taking a long, hot bath	Shopping	Talking about sports	
Writing letters, cards or notes	Going to a sports event	Seeing grandchildren	
Playing video games	Going to a health club or gym		
Just sitting and thinking	Going to church functions		

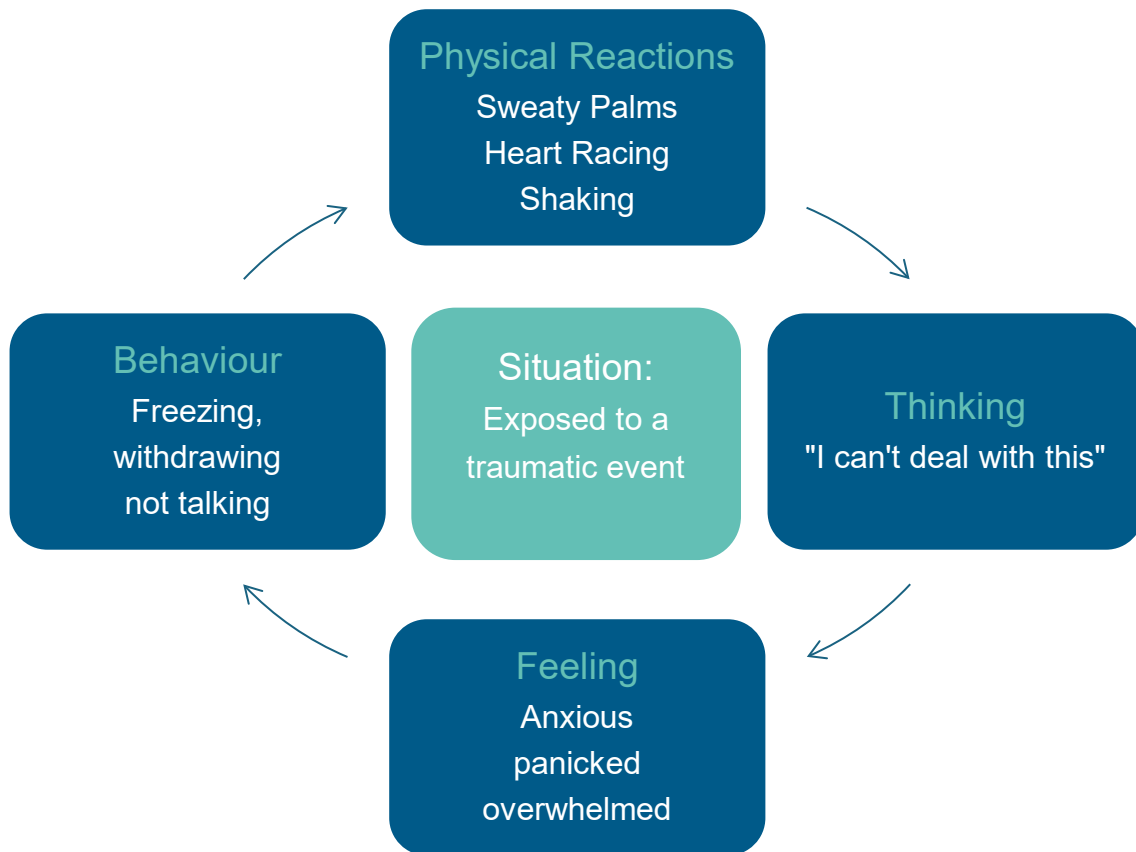
## Looking after yourself: Calming techniques and helpful thinking skills

Traumatic events impact people in a number of ways. They can affect how a person feels (emotionally and physically), how they think, and what they do. When a person is distressed during, or in the immediate aftermath of a traumatic event, they may need different strategies to manage each of these aspects – physical symptoms of stress, negative thoughts, and unhelpful behaviours.

### Introducing Ben

Ben is a driver with a passenger rail service. He has been exposed to multiple near misses around level crossings and station platforms in the past. On this day a passenger attempted to reach the opposite platform by crossing the tracks in front of Ben's train. Whilst the train was travelling at a low speed, the commuter was struck and the young woman was seriously injured. Ben found the immediate aftermath of the incident difficult. He felt very anxious, and was quite panicky as he went through the procedures to secure the train and start to manage the situation. His hands were sweaty, his heart was racing and he was shaking all over. At times he froze, despite knowing exactly what he needed to do. He didn't want to talk to the other staff in case he said the wrong thing, and he wanted to be by himself. He kept thinking that he wasn't dealing with the situation as he should. Now Ben thinks that these reactions might mean he wasn't cut out for the job.

The following diagram illustrates the different reactions he experienced at the time of the incident.



The table below suggests some strategies that Ben could have used to help him at the time of the trauma to manage the reactions he experienced.

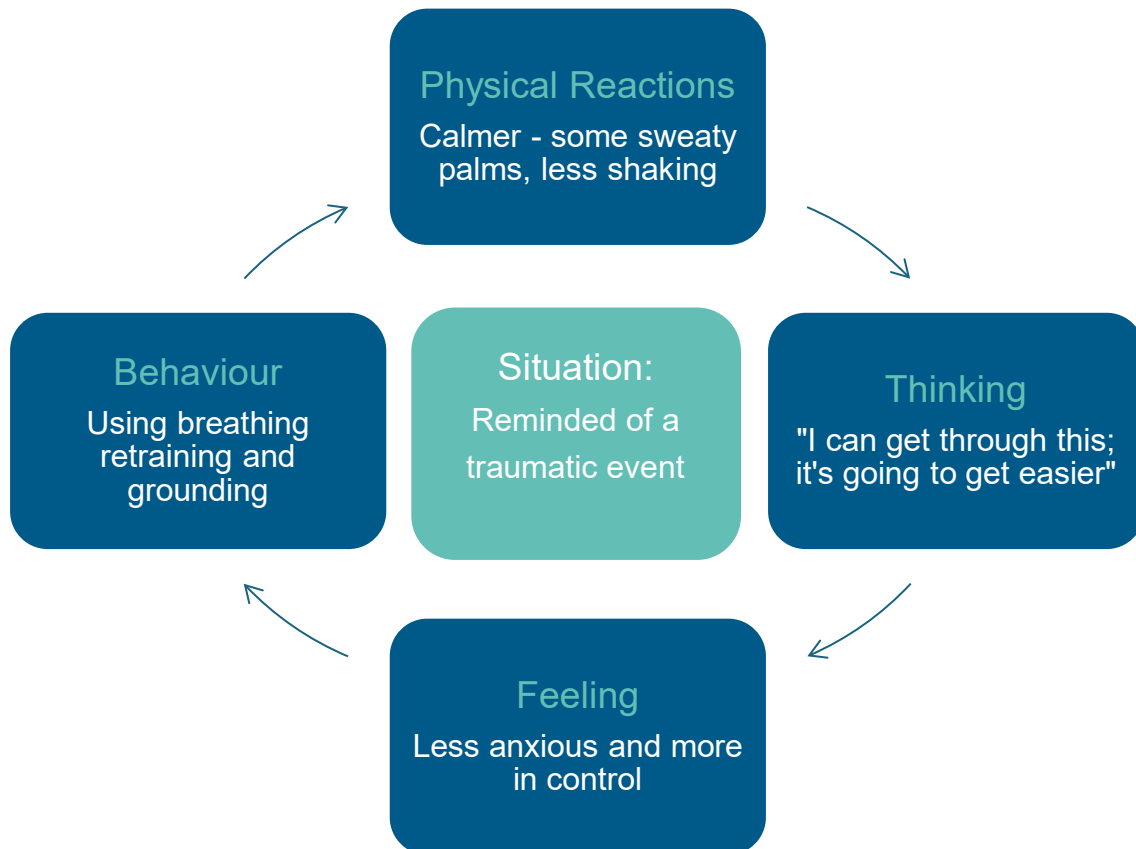
Type of response	What can happen	Strategy
Physical reactions	e.g., anxious, sweaty palms, heart racing	Breathing retraining; grounding
Thinking	e.g., "I can't cope with this"	Simple self-statements
Behaviour	e.g., freezing	Getting support, taking time out, or finding alternative activities
Emotions	panicky, overwhelmed	Address physical reactions, thinking, and behaviours to assist with emotions

## After the event – Reminded of the trauma

Ben has been back at work for a few weeks since the incident, and generally is coping OK, but there are a few reactions he is concerned about. Ben has noticed he gets worried when approaching stations that have a similar physical layout to the one where the young woman was struck. He spends more time scanning the track ahead for people acting carelessly. Ben finds the approach to the station where the incident happened very difficult. He begins to feel anxious and wound up, his hands sweat on the controls, his heart races, and he keeps thinking that someone will jump in front of his train again and be killed this time.

Realising that these reactions are getting in the way of being able to focus on his job, Ben starts using some strategies to help him cope. Before his shift, he spends a little time in his cab rehearsing some helpful strategies. Ben works out that saying, "I am good at my job, and I can get through this", helps. He also finds practising muscle relaxation exercises in his chair or using a breathing technique before he starts his day helps reduce the anxious feelings.

The diagram below illustrates the strategies that Ben used to help manage his reactions when being reminded of the incident.



## Controlled breathing exercise

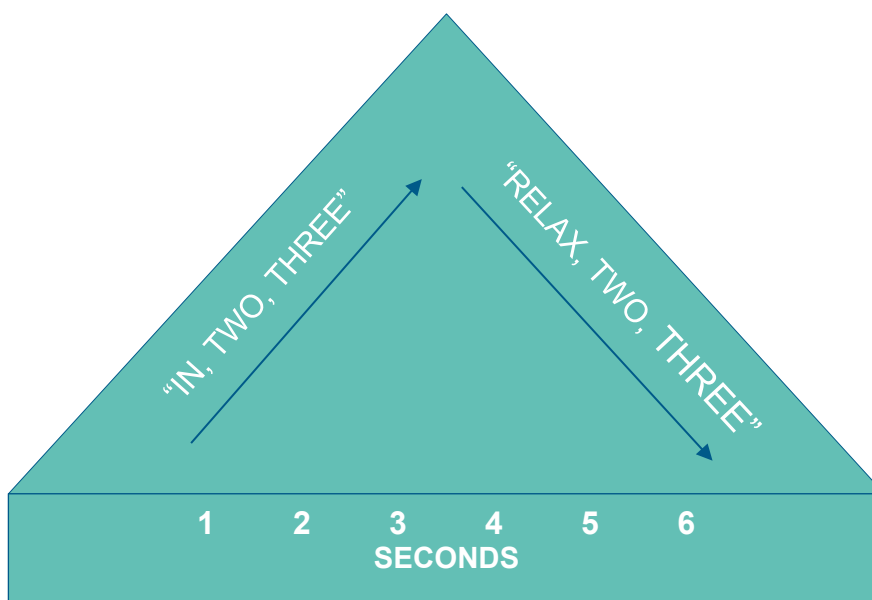
The way we feel is affected by the way we breathe. For example, when we are upset, we may breathe rapidly and shallowly, and we are often told to ‘take a few deep breaths’. This is not quite right, however. When we are feeling anxious or frightened we don’t need to take a deep breath; we need to take a normal breath and exhale slowly. Breathing out is associated with relaxation, not breathing in.

While concentrating on a long, slow exhalation, it is a good idea to say the words ‘calm’ or ‘relax’ to yourself. These are good words to use because they are already associated with feeling peaceful and at ease. They can also be dragged out to match the long, slow exhalation, as in ‘r-e-e-l-a-a-x’, or ‘c-a-a-a-a-l-m’.

The third thing to remember is to slow your breathing down. Often when people are frightened or upset, they start to breathe faster. This is a natural reaction and prepares the body to fight the threat or to run away. If you are not going to fight or run away, however, you may be taking in too much air and start to over-breathe or ‘hyperventilate’. This causes unpleasant physical symptoms. So, you need to slow your breathing down and take in less air.

### Instructions:

Take in a breath through your nose with your mouth closed, to the slow count of 3, pause, and then exhale to the slow count of 3, while saying ‘calm’ or ‘relax’ to yourself. Repeat the process 6–10 times. Try to practise this type of breathing at least twice a day. That way, when you become uptight, you will be ready to use the technique to help you calm down.



COUNT TO YOURSELF

## Grounding

- Grounding is a simple strategy to distract yourself from strong negative emotions (e.g., anxiety, anger). Distraction works by focussing on the external world, rather than on internal feelings or physical responses to anxiety. It can help you feel in control again.
- Grounding can be done at any time and anywhere. You can even do it in public and no one will know.
- There are different grounding techniques – you can pick the one that suits you most:
  - Describe your environment in detail, using all your senses, for example, “The walls are grey; I am sitting on a green chair ...” Describe sounds, textures, colours, smells, shapes, numbers, etc.... You can do this anywhere.
  - You can use counting to help focus: 5 things I can see, 5 things I can smell, 5 things I can feel, 5 things I can hear; then go down to 4, 3, 2 and 1.
  - You can also focus on your senses: Touch objects around you, and describe them (texture, colour): feel the chair/steering wheel, etc...; run your hands under water.
- When doing grounding, avoid any assessments or judgments about what is happening. Simply focus on simple descriptions of what is around you and move on.
- Focus on the present, not the past or future.
- Note that grounding is not the same as relaxation training. Grounding focusses on distraction strategies, and is intended to help manage strong negative emotions.



## Brief muscle relaxation exercise

Physical tension in the muscles of the body is often the first sign of stress or anxiety. Unfortunately, we may not notice the tension until we start to get muscle aches and pains. The benefit of practising muscle relaxation is that it helps us to detect early signs of tension sooner, and have an effective way of reducing that tension.

### **Instructions:**

Begin by noticing where in your body you feel tension and then follow the instructions below.

Take a small breath and hold for 6 seconds. At the same time, gradually tense the muscles in your [area of body tension]. After 6 seconds, breathe out slowly saying the word 'calm' or 'relax' to yourself. At the same time, gradually let the tension go from your muscles. Repeat if necessary with same or other muscles.

### **Instructions for tensing and relaxing different muscle groups in the body:**

#### *Arms*

Build up the tension in your lower arms by making fists with your hands and pulling up on your wrists. Feel the tension through your lower arms, wrists, fingers, knuckles, and hands. Focus on the tension – notice the sensations of pulling, of discomfort, of tightness. Hold the tension (for 10 seconds). Now, release the tension and let your hands and lower arms relax onto the chair (or bed, when you do this exercise at home), with palms facing down. Focus your attention on the sensations of warmth in your hands and arms. Feel the release from tension. Relax the muscles (for 20 seconds). Repeat as necessary.

Build up the tension in your upper arms by pulling your arms back and in toward your sides. Feel the tension in the back of the arms, radiating up into your shoulders and back. Focus on the sensation of tension. Hold the tension for 10 seconds. Now, release your arms and let them relax heavily down. Focus on your upper arms and feel the difference compared to the tension you felt previously. Relax (for 20 seconds). Repeat as necessary.

#### *Stomach*

Build up the tension in your stomach by pulling your stomach in toward the spine, very tight. Feel the tension. Focus on that part of your body (for 10 seconds). Now let the stomach go – let it go further and further. Feel the sensation of warmth circulating across your stomach. Relax (for 20 seconds). Repeat as necessary.

#### *Chest*

Build up tension around your chest by taking in a deep breath and holding it. Feel the tension around the front of your chest and your back. Hold your breath (10 seconds). Now, slowly, let the breath go and breathe normally. Feel the difference in tension as the muscles relax (for 20 seconds). Repeat as necessary.

#### *Shoulders*

Imagine your shoulders are on strings being pulled up toward your ears. Feel the tension around your shoulders, radiating down into your back and up into your neck and the back of your head. Hold the tension (10 seconds) and then let your shoulders droop down. Feel the sense of relaxation around your neck and shoulders. Focus on the comfort of relaxation (20 seconds). Repeat as necessary.

### *Neck*

Build up tension around your neck by pulling your chin down toward your chest. Feel the tightness around the back of the neck spreading up into your head. Focus on the tension (10 seconds). Now release. Focus on the relaxation (20 seconds) and feel the difference in tension. Repeat as necessary.

### *Face*

Build up tension around your mouth and jaw and throat by clenching your teeth and pulling the corners of your mouth back into a forced smile. Hold the tension (10 seconds). Feel the tightness. Now release the tension, letting your mouth drop open and the muscles around your throat and jaw relax (20 seconds). Repeat as necessary.

Build up tension around your eyes by squeezing your eyes tightly together for a few seconds and releasing. Let the tension disappear from around your eyes. Feel the difference as the muscles relax.

Build up tension across the lower forehead by frowning, pulling your eyebrows down and toward the centre. Feel the tension across your forehead and the top of your head. Focus on the tension (for 10 seconds) and then release, smoothing out the wrinkles and letting your forehead relax. Repeat as necessary.

Build up tension across the upper forehead by raising your eyebrows as high as you can. Feel the wrinkling and the pulling sensations across your forehead and the top of your head. Hold the tension (10 seconds) and then relax, letting your eyebrows rest down and the tension leave. Focus on the sensation of relaxation and feel the difference in tension. Repeat as necessary.

### *Legs (you need to be sitting to do this)*

Build up tension in your lower legs by flexing your feet and pointing your toes toward your upper body. Feel the tension as it spreads through your feet, your ankles, your shins, and your calf muscles. Feel the tension spreading down the back of the leg and into the foot, under the foot, and around the toes. Focus on that part of your body (for 10 seconds). Now, release the leg tension. Let your legs relax heavily onto the seat. Relax (for 20 seconds). Repeat as necessary.

Build up the tension in your upper legs by pulling your knees together and lifting your legs off the seat. Focus on the tightness through your upper legs. Feel the pulling sensations from your hip down and notice the tension in your legs. Focus on that part of your body (for 10 seconds). Now, release the tension, and let your legs drop heavily down onto the seat. Focus on the feeling of relaxation (for 20 seconds). Repeat as necessary.

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## Helpful thinking examples

During a PTE, people may tell themselves things that reinforce how overwhelmed or distressed they feel: “This is too horrible, I can’t bear this”, “I can’t breathe, I’m going to choke”.

After a PTE, it is common for people’s thoughts about the world and themselves to change. For example, staff who have experienced a PTE often see the world as stressful, unpredictable, or a dangerous place. They may have trouble trusting other people or see their situation as hopeless.

These types of beliefs can lead to intense and ongoing distress. Thinking that “absolutely nothing is going well”, or “things will never get better”, can leave a person feeling hopeless and overwhelmed. In the same way, thinking that “I will never be safe again” can lead to feeling tense and anxious.

Learning to identify thoughts that create negative feelings is an important skill. It’s very difficult to detect negative thoughts because they occur almost automatically, like breathing. However, if you pay attention to your breath, you can control it. It is the same with thinking; if you become aware of what you are thinking and how it makes you feel, you can understand your thoughts and develop the ability to control them.

Helpful thinking is about looking at alternative ways of thinking about a situation, not denying the person’s experience.

- The main aim of using this skill is to reduce distress by at least considering alternative, more helpful ways of viewing a person’s situation. The goal is not to eliminate negative thoughts or to replace them with thoughts that have nothing to do with the person’s situation like “everything is all right”.
- “Positive thinking” is not always realistic or accurate. Often you hear people say things like, “If you’d only see things more positively, you’d be OK”. This does not acknowledge that people who have experienced trauma have come into contact with the darker side of life (e.g., death, someone being assaulted, or suicide), and may be worried about their reactions (e.g., nightmares, panic when reminded of trauma etc.).
- However, an over-focus on negative aspects of an experience leads to more distress. This needs to be balanced with thinking about other aspects of a person’s experience, e.g., “I’ll never get better again” versus “I will struggle for a while but I know my family will stick with me”.
- Focussing on helpful thoughts can mobilise and energise.

This table lists common categories of negative thoughts that can occur after a traumatic event, how these thoughts may make a person feel, and some more helpful thoughts to replace them. Once you identify some of your negative thoughts, the key to helpful thinking is to practise the helpful thoughts often.

Common unhelpful thoughts	Resulting emotion	Alternate helpful thoughts	New emotional response
<p>“Things will never get better.”</p> <p>“My future is hopeless.”</p>	<p>Hopeless</p> <p>Sad</p> <p>Scared</p>	<p>“It may take time, but I will feel better.”</p> <p>“With some changes, I can still achieve my goals.”</p> <p>“It feels hard now, but I’m doing what I can to get back on track.”</p>	<p>Hopeful that things can get better</p> <p>Happier</p> <p>Stronger</p>
<p>“I have no one to turn to if I need help.”</p> <p>“My family will never understand what I went through.”</p> <p>“I can’t handle this anymore.”</p>	<p>Scared</p> <p>Lonely</p>	<p>“I have my wife who cares about me and John at work who has gone through the same thing.”</p> <p>“My family may not know what it’s like, but they care about me and can be there for me in other ways.”</p> <p>“I know it seems hard right now, but it will get better.”</p>	<p>Stronger</p> <p>Happier</p> <p>Connected</p> <p>Hopeful that things can get better</p>
<p>“If I shared how I feel with others, they wouldn’t care.”</p> <p>“I’ll never be able to feel confident driving a train again.”</p>	<p>Unloved</p> <p>Lonely</p> <p>Fearful</p>	<p>“My wife is willing to listen. I just need to tell her what I need.”</p> <p>“I need to see how I feel about what happened in a few days before I decide where I’m at with work.”</p>	<p>Loved</p> <p>Happier</p> <p>Less fearful</p>
<p>“Bad things always happen to me.”</p> <p>“The world is a dangerous place.”</p> <p>“I’m not safe.”</p>	<p>Sad</p> <p>Scared</p> <p>Hopeless</p>	<p>“Good things happen to me too, yesterday....”</p> <p>“The world is not always dangerous.”</p> <p>“Feeling unsafe isn’t the same as being unsafe.”</p>	<p>Happier</p> <p>Stronger</p> <p>Hopeful that things can get better</p>

## Helpful thinking worksheet

<b>Unhelpful thought or way of viewing things</b>	<b>Emotion: Rating out of 10 (1=not distressed, 10=extremely distressed)</b>	<b>More helpful thoughts or ways of viewing things</b>	<b>Outcome: What was the result? Rating out of 10?</b>

## Self-care after a traumatic event

If you have been affected by a traumatic event, there are several things you can do to improve your ability to cope. Even if you feel unmotivated and apathetic, try to do some of the things listed below. They will help you to cope with the stress and improve your ability to manage problems.

- Recognise that you have been through an extremely stressful event. Give yourself time and space to acknowledge what you have been through and accept that you will have an emotional reaction to it. Give yourself permission to feel rotten, but don't overreact – it is unpleasant, but you can cope with it.
- Look after yourself: get plenty of rest, even if you can't sleep, and try to eat regular, well-balanced meals. Regular exercise, like walking, cycling or jogging, is very good for reducing the physical effects of stress and trauma; try to do a little every day. Relaxing activities such as listening to music, yoga, meditation, or taking a hot bath may also be of use.
- Cut back, or cut out, tea, coffee, chocolate, cola and cigarettes. Your body is already 'hyped up' and these substances will only add to this. Do not try to numb the pain with drugs or alcohol; this will lead to more problems in the long term.
- Spend time with people you care about, even if you do not want to talk about the event. Contact friends and, if necessary, have someone stay with you for a few hours each day. Sometimes you will want to be alone; that's OK, but try not to become too isolated.
- Recurring thoughts, dreams and flashbacks are normal. Don't try to fight them. They will decrease in time. Try not to block them out or bottle up your feelings. Confronting the reality, bit by bit, will help you to come to terms with the experience.
- Be more careful than usual, for example when cooking, driving or using machinery. Following a critical incident you may be more vulnerable to accidents and physical illness.
- Try to resume a normal routine as quickly as possible.
- Avoid making any major life decisions, such as moving house or changing jobs, in the period following the trauma. On the other hand, make as many smaller daily decisions as possible, like what you want to eat or what film you'd like to see. This helps to re-establish feelings of control over your life.
- A traumatic event can have an impact on how you see the world, your life, your goals and your relationships. Giving yourself time to re-evaluate what you think, and talking to others about it may help.

You may wish to provide support to others who have been through similar situations, especially as you start to feel better.

## Do's and Don'ts after a traumatic event

Do	Don't
spend time with people who care	use alcohol or drugs to cope
give yourself time	work too much
find out about the impact of trauma and what to expect	engage in stressful family or work situations
try to keep your routines	withdraw from family and friends
return to normal activities	stop yourself from doing things that you enjoy
talk about how you feel or what happened when you are ready	avoid talking about what happened at all cost
things that help you relax and that you enjoy	take risks, e.g., dangerous driving, picking fights

## Connecting with others

People with good support networks tend to cope better with the impact of a traumatic event. Getting support from those you love and trust is therefore one of the most important things you need to do. After a traumatic event, it is also important to stay connected with networks and groups of people that provide enjoyment and meaning in your life (e.g., a sports club, church group, etc...)

There are many different kinds of support you can access:

1. **Practical support** – for example:

- A co-worker helping with paperwork or taking a shift.
- A neighbour mowing the lawn for you.
- A family member babysitting for you so you can relax or talk to someone about what happened.
- A supervisor making sure you have the time off that you need and providing you with all the contact numbers you need.

2. **Emotional support** – for example:

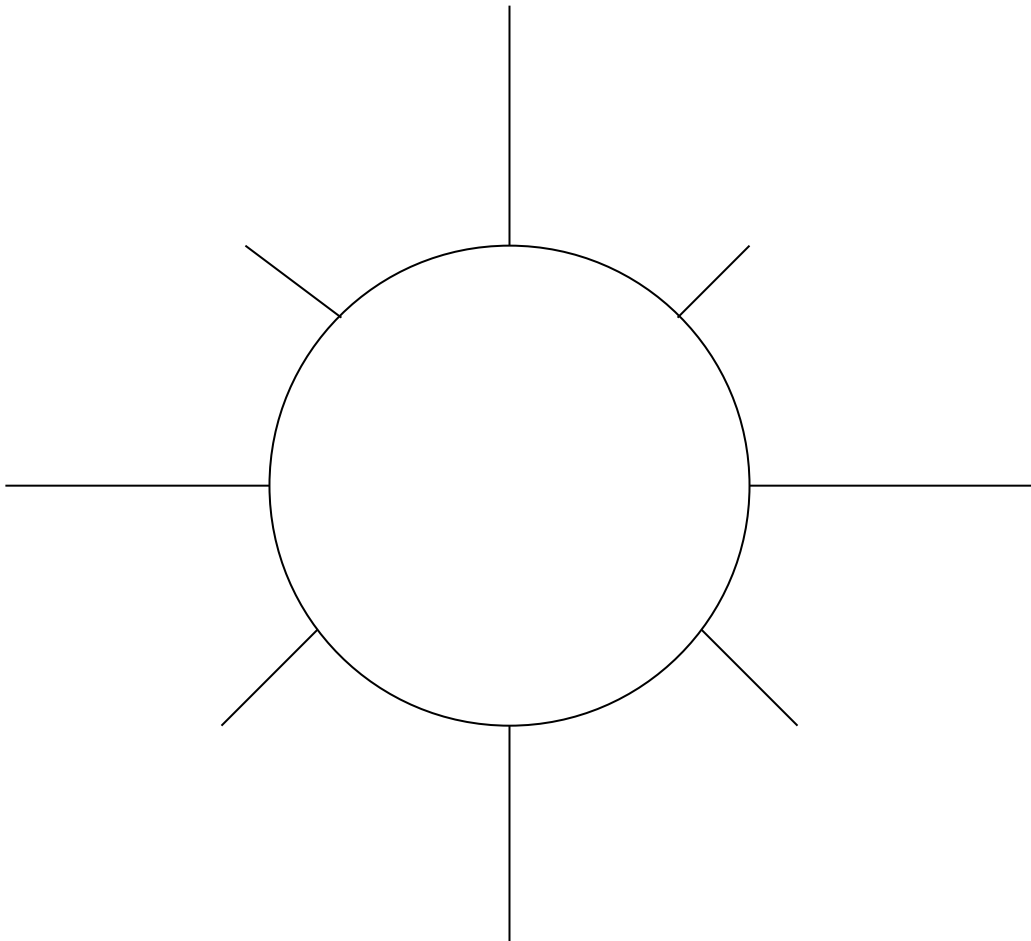
- A friend or family member listening to your experience.
- A partner or child spending time with you doing things you like, not necessarily talking.
- Someone, or a pet, being companionable – just being there for you.
- A friend or co-worker giving you a hug when you need it.
- Someone giving you space when you need it.



## Connecting with others worksheet – 1

### Making a social connections map

On the social connections map below, write your name in the middle and then around the outside write the names of the people you like to spend time with, who help you and who care about you.



## Connecting with others worksheet – 2

The following questions will help you identify areas of your social networks that may need improvement:

**Please take some time to answer the following questions**

Are there areas of your life where support is missing (e.g., someone to listen to you, to help you with advice, help with the additional responsibilities, to do things socially?)

Are there loved ones or friends who you are not currently connected with, but want to be?

Who do you want to spend more time with?

Who do you want to spend less time with?

Are there some relationships that are needing improving?

Do you want to increase your social activities or give to others by joining a community group?

## Helping a colleague after a traumatic event

*<Note: If you're a peer supporter then refer to information from the "Providing Support after Trauma" participant workbook for more detailed information. >*

Traumatic events involve situations that are either life-threatening or have the potential for serious injury. People in the rail industry often experience several traumatic events during their career, including incidents such as hitting or almost hitting someone while driving a train, seeing body parts, being assaulted or witnessing an assault.

After a traumatic event, many people experience strong feelings of fear, sadness, guilt, anger, or grief. They might find it hard to cope and it might take a while to come to terms with what has happened. Most people will not experience lasting difficulties as a result of these experiences, but some do. The cumulative strain of experiencing many different traumatic events over the course of a rail career could lead to more distress or longer-term problems for some people.

Some people can be open about the fact that they are going through a difficult time and are able to ask for help. Others try to cope on their own and may need to be encouraged to get support. If one of your colleagues has gone through a traumatic event and experiences some of the following problems, they may benefit from help:

- trouble getting along with people (e.g., colleagues, supervisors)
- angry outbursts
- poor performance at work
- more physical complaints or sick days than usual.

## Providing support

After someone has been through a traumatic experience, re-establishing a normal routine can help to restore a sense of order and control in their life. Some of the ways you can help them return to their normal routine include:

- **Check in** and ask how they going after the incident.
- **Recognise that they have been through an extremely stressful event** and may need time and space to deal with it. You can help them to find that time and space by providing practical support, such as offering to help out with paperwork or cover a shift.
- **Encourage them to ask for help** if they are still finding it hard to cope more than two weeks after the traumatic event.

Your colleague may or may not want to talk about their experience or feelings. If they do want to talk, the following tips may be helpful.

- **Choose a time to talk** when you won't be interrupted, or feel rushed or tired.
- **Provide reassurance** that distress is to be expected after an experience like theirs.
- **Understand that talking about trauma can be painful** and the person may get upset. This is a natural part of coming to terms with their experience. Don't feel that you have to make their distress go away.

Listening is very important, but it can sometimes be hard to know what to say. Don't worry about having to say 'the right thing'. There is no right thing to say, but here are a few pointers:

- **Try to put yourself in their shoes**, don't interrupt, offer examples from your own life, or talk about yourself. Avoid offering simple reassurances such as, *"I know how you feel"* or *"You'll be OK"*.
- **Acknowledge their distress** with statements like, *"It's really tough to go through something like this"*, or *"This is such a tough time for you"*.
- **Ask leading questions** like, *"Would it be helpful to talk about what happened?"*, *"You've had a rough time, how are you going?"*, or *"How's Sarah going?"*
- **Show that you understand** by re-phrasing the information they give you. Try starting with something like, *"You seem really..."*, *"It sounds like..."*, *"Did I understand right that you..."*, *"No wonder you feel..."*

If they don't want to talk, you can still show your support by spending time with them, talking about other things, and doing practical things to help.

## Helping a friend or family member after a traumatic event

Traumatic events involve situations that are either life-threatening or have the potential for serious injury. In the rail industry, this might involve hitting or almost hitting someone while driving a train, seeing body parts, being assaulted or witnessing an assault. People in the rail industry often experience several of these types of incidents during their career.

After a traumatic event, many people experience strong feelings of fear, sadness, guilt, anger, or grief. They might find it hard to cope and it might take a while to come to terms with what has happened. Most people will not experience lasting difficulties as a result of these experiences, but some do. The cumulative strain of experiencing many different traumatic events over the course of a rail career could lead to more distress or longer-term problems for some people. The support of family and friends is particularly important in the early days and weeks after a traumatic event, and this fact sheet will provide you with some ideas of things you can do to help.

### Provide practical support

After someone has been through a traumatic experience, re-establishing a normal routine can help to restore a sense of order and control in their life. Some of the ways you can help them return to their normal routine include:

- **Recognise that they have been through an extremely stressful event** and may need time and space to deal with it. You can help them to find that time and space by providing practical support, such as offering to take care of the kids or mow the lawns.
- **Encourage them to limit their exposure to media coverage of the event.** You might offer to keep track of the news so that they don't feel the need to monitor it continuously.
- **Encourage them to look after themselves** by getting plenty of rest, eating well, exercising regularly, making time for relaxation, and cutting back on coffee, cigarettes, drugs, and alcohol.
- **Join them in doing enjoyable things** and encourage them to plan to do at least one enjoyable thing each day. You may need to help the person come up with ideas of things they can do. For example, ask what activities they used to enjoy before the traumatic event.
- **Acknowledge their achievements.** Sometimes it's hard to see that things are improving, and the person may need you to point out when they have achieved a goal, no matter how small.
- **Encourage them to seek professional help** if they are still finding it hard to cope more than two weeks after the traumatic event.

## Provide emotional support

Your friend or family member may or may not want to talk about their experience or feelings. If they do want to talk, the following tips may be helpful.

- **Choose a time to talk** when you won't be interrupted, or feel rushed or tired.
- **Provide reassurance** that distress is to be expected after an experience like theirs.
- **Understand that talking about trauma can be painful** and the person may get upset. This is a natural part of coming to terms with their experience. Don't feel that you have to make their distress go away.
- **Make another time to talk** if it seems like the person is too distressed to continue.

Listening is very important, but it can sometimes be hard to know what to say. Don't worry about having to say 'the right thing'. There is no right thing to say, but here are a few pointers:

- **Try to put yourself in their shoes**, don't interrupt, offer examples from your own life, or talk about yourself.
- **Avoid offering simple reassurances** such as, *"I know how you feel"* or *"You'll be OK"*.
- **Acknowledge their distress** with statements like, *"It's really tough to go through something like this"*, or *"This is such a tough time for you"*.
- **Ask leading questions** like, *"Would it be helpful to talk about what happened?"*, *"You've had a rough time, how are you going?"*, or *"How's Sarah going?"*
- **Show that you understand** by re-phrasing the information they give you. Try starting with something like, *"You seem really..."*, *"It sounds like..."*, *"Did I understand right that you..."*, *"No wonder you feel..."*

If they don't want to talk, you can still show your support by spending time with them, talking about other things, and doing practical things to help. Let them be alone for a while if that's what they want, but encourage them to have company for some time each day. Becoming isolated or cutting themselves off from other people is likely to make matters worse, rather than better.

## Getting help: Help within your organisation

If you feel that things are not improving, then it may be time to seek help from your organisation.

*<The following section is to be completed by each organisation>*

At the time of incident, contact immediately:

Peer support contact:

Ongoing support through your EAP:

If you have serious concerns about yours or someone else's mental health and wellbeing, arrange a referral for specialist mental health care by contacting: *[work medical officer/GP]*

If there is an urgent concern of suicide or harm to others contact:

*<end of modifiable section>*

## Getting help: Other sources of information and professional help

Your GP can be a good starting point for getting help. He or she can help confirm what is going on and refer you to an appropriate organisation and practitioners that can offer further assistance.

**If you need immediate assistance or support, call Lifeline on 13 11 14** for confidential 24-hour counselling and referrals.

### **RailRes**

The RailRes App is a resource that has been developed by TrackSAFE as part of its suite of trauma management support tools. The App is designed to assist rail employees in managing stress if exposed to a traumatic event and build long term resilience to help employees stay healthy. The RailRes app has been informed by an industry reference group and the unions, to ensure that the app is relevant and beneficial to rail employees. The RailRes app will test a rail employee's physical, cognitive, emotional and behavioural reactions to stress, while helping the user adapt their response to the situation in real time.

The App is available for free download (for both iPhone and Android devices) via the App Store. More information can be found here: <https://tracksafefoundation.com.au/service/railres/>

### **Posttraumatic mental health**

Phoenix Australia - Centre for Posttraumatic Mental Health provides free downloadable fact sheets about trauma responses and evidence-based treatments. This information is available at <https://www.phoenixaustralia.org/recovery/fact-sheets-and-booklets/>.

### **Alcohol and other drugs**

The Alcohol and Drug Foundation gives comprehensive information and a list of resources available across Australia at <https://adf.org.au/resources/drug-information-directory/>.

### **Depression and anxiety**

Several organisations offer access to information, resources and services, including *beyondblue* at <https://www.beyondblue.org.au/> and the Clinical Research Unit for Anxiety and Depression at [www.crufad.org](http://www.crufad.org). Moodgym is a free self-help program to teach cognitive behaviour therapy skills to people vulnerable to depression and anxiety, available at <https://moodgym.com.au>.

### **Psychologists**

The Australian Psychological Society has a register of psychologists who list their speciality at <https://psychology.org.au/> or call 1800 333 497.



### **Information for people from non-English speaking background**

The Multicultural Mental Health website has a list of information sheets, and agencies that provide support, advocacy and treatment at <http://www.embracementalhealth.org.au/>. You can select a number of languages on the site.

### **Sexual assault and family violence**

Rape and Domestic Violence Australia provides a free 24/7 telephone and online crisis counselling service for anyone in Australia who have experienced or is a risk of sexual assault, family or domestic violence. Information can be found here: <http://www.rape-dvservices.org.au/>

## Personal Coping Plan

Try to list at least five things you can do, with at least one for each of the following:

<b>PREPARE</b> <b>Before a PTE</b>	<b>COPE</b> <b>During a PTE</b>	<b>SELF-CARE</b> <b>After a PTE</b>
Skills you can practise to manage stress better during a PTE  1. _____  2. _____	Skills to help you cope  1. _____  2. _____	Skills to help you recover  1. _____  2. _____
What can you do at work to improve wellbeing?  1. _____  2. _____	Procedures to follow  1. _____  2. _____	Support at work  1. _____  2. _____
One or two things you can do at home to improve wellbeing  1. _____  2. _____	Who to call  1. _____  2. _____	Support at home & activities that help you feel better  1. _____  2. _____

Pick one or two activities that you can start practising now and note them down in the box below.

When you are not working, you should ensure that you maintain a healthy lifestyle (eating, sleeping and exercising appropriately), spend time with friends and family, and spend time engaged in enjoyable activities.

**Feel free to transfer the information that you have written in this plan to a place that will be easy for you to access. For example, your computer, personal organiser, or onto the back of a business card (which you can keep in your wallet).**

**Put it into action!**

If it doesn't work out, you can always try another skill.