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## Shoreham Air show Incident Clinician Briefing

Response to Major Incident in Shoreham on 22<sup>nd</sup> August 2015

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The Shoreham Airshow crash is a tragic and unexpected major incident for our community. The deaths that followed, the media broadcasts of the event itself, the search of the wreckage and disruption to many people's lives, leaves us all questioning why and how this happened, and what does it mean that such a tragedy can happen at an event intended to bring communities together.

Tragic incidents of this nature have the potential to overwhelm us or those around us with stress. It may leave us feeling that we cannot or do not want to cope. Witnessing a tragedy, knowing a loved one was at the event, hearing about the death of someone we knew: a natural response is to be upset and distressed. Raw and powerful emotions are very common after experiencing an incident that threatens to overwhelm our ability to cope. Yet it is important to know that, in time, and by reaching out to get support from the people around us, these feelings gradually diminish and settle, without any professional help. It can be helpful to understand that the distress we feel after a totally unexpected event is actually a normal response to a very out of the ordinary experience.

Immediately after a traumatic event, it is common for people to feel shocked and numb. It is also difficult to accept that what has happened has really happened. Over several hours or days, the feelings of shock and denial gradually fade, and other thoughts and feelings begin to take their place.

We all react in ways that are unique to each and every one of us. With this in mind, those affected by a traumatic incident may take different amounts of time to come to terms with what has happened. Some may be surprised initially by the strength of their feelings, particularly if you see yourself as 'a copier.' Others who are used to expressing feelings may have the reverse and find themselves struggling to talk about it. It is really normal to experience a mix of feelings. Such feelings might include the experience of being:

- **Frightened** - that the same thing will happen again, or that you might lose control of your feelings and break down.
- **Helpless** - that something really bad happened and you could do nothing about it. You feel helpless, vulnerable and overwhelmed.
- **Angry** - about what has happened and with whoever might be responsible.
- **Guilty** - that you have survived when others have suffered or died. Or you feel that you could have done something to prevent it.
- **Sad** - particularly if people were injured or killed, especially someone you knew.
- **Ashamed or embarrassed** - that you have these strong feelings you can't control, especially if you need support yourself or feel you should be supporting others.
- **Relieved** - that the danger is over and that the danger has gone.
- **Hopeful** - that your life will return to normal. People can start to feel more positive about things quite soon after a trauma.

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The mind and body are inextricably linked. Strong feelings affect our physical body. In the weeks after a trauma, those affected may find that they:

- cannot sleep
- feel very tired
- dream a lot and have nightmares
- have poor concentration
- have memory problems
- have difficulty thinking clearly
- suffer from headaches
- experience changes in appetite
- have aches and pains
- feel that your heart is beating faster.

There is a strong body of research that highlights ways we can restore our emotional stability after a traumatic event:

- Talking about the experience with those we trust, for instance our family or close friends.
- Taking time out to rest, to do helpful things that calm us down, and beginning to recognise it is impossible for any of us to control everything.
- Not engaging with harsh and self-critical judgments about yourself.
- Ask for support from people who care about you. Talk to them about what you feel would be helpful (a listening ear, a hug, or someone to go for a walk with).
- Eat a well-balanced diet, exercise, get adequate rest, and avoid alcohol and drugs.
- Maintain a daily routine with structured activities.
- Avoid major life decisions, such as changing careers or moving so soon after the tragic event.
- Pursue your hobbies or other interests, things that can make you feel 'normal' again, but do not overdo it or use this as an excuse to withdraw from those around you.
- Spend time with others and try to avoid what may feel like a need to withdraw, even if you do not feel up to it.

### **What should people NOT do?**

- **Don't bottle up your feelings**  
Strong feelings are natural. Don't feel embarrassed about them. Bottling them up can make you feel worse and can damage your health. Let yourself talk about what has happened and how you feel, and don't worry if you cry.
- **Don't take on too much**  
Being active can take your mind off what has happened, but you need time to think, to go over what happened so you can come to terms with it. Take some time to get back to your old routine.
- **Don't drink or use drugs**  
Alcohol or drugs can blot out painful memories for a while, but they will stop you from coming to terms with what has happened. They can also cause depression and other health problems. In particular, they can delay or prevent the mind from processing the emotions associated with what has happened.

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- **Don't make any major life changes**

Try to put off any big decisions. Your judgment may not be at its best and you may make choices you later regret. Take advice from people you trust.

### **For children and young people:**

When children and young people experience something that threatens to overwhelm them emotionally, their first response is usually to seek out the safety and reassurance from the adults who care for them and that they trust. The most important adults in a young person's life are his/her caregivers and relatives, but might also include teachers or friends of the family. Adults can help them by:

- Answering their questions in words they can easily understand, and checking out that they do understand through helping them to talk about it. Just like adults, young people need time to develop an understanding of what happened and to come to terms with changes in their life.
- Engaging in age-appropriate activities that stimulate the mind and body.
- Finding ways to have fun and relax together.
- Helping children expand their "feelings" vocabulary.
- Honoring family traditions that bring them close to the people they love, e.g., storytelling, holiday celebrations, reunions, trips.
- Looking for changes in behaviors and enabling them to talk to you about what might be going on for them.
- Setting and adhering to routines and schedules.
- Setting boundaries and limits with consistency and patience.
- Showing love and affection.

### **When should I get professional help?**

Family and friends will probably be able to see you through this difficult time. Many people find that the feelings they experience after a traumatic event gradually reduce after about a month. However, you may need to seek professional advice if your feelings become too much for you, or go on for too long.

#### ***You should probably ask for help if:***

- you have no one to share your feelings with
- you can't handle your feelings and feel overwhelmed by persistent sadness, anxiety, or nervousness
- you feel that you are not returning to normal after six weeks
- you have nightmares and cannot sleep
- you are getting on badly with those close to you
- you stay away from other people more and more
- your work is suffering
- those around you suggest you seek help
- you have accidents
- you are drinking or smoking too much, or using drugs to cope with your feelings.

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## Sussex Support - Final briefing to go in here

There will be many people who have been affected by the tragic events at the Shoreham Airshow. Everyone will have some form of emotional response, no matter how directly involved they were with the tragic events as they unfold. Our emotional responses are unique and normal; they are a response to a very out of the ordinary experience.

Primary Care Services in Sussex would like to ensure that people are supported during this time. We have dedicated staff that will be available, by phone, to speak with you and look at what information may be helpful for you at this time. We can also link people in with child and adolescent services as there were a large number of children and young people at the event who may also be affected.

Sussex residents can contact their local primary care service as detailed below to access support for both children and adults following this incident. This dedicated support will be available until the 18<sup>th</sup> September 2015. After this time, please ask for referral from a GP. The services listed below are open Monday to Friday 9 – 5 pm.

The Time to Talk Service is available in West Sussex:

- 01903703548 ( All West Sussex residents)

The Brighton and Hove Wellbeing Service is for residents of Brighton and Hove:

- Tel: 0300 00 20 060
- Website: [www.bics.nhs.uk/patient-information/brighton-and-hove-wellbeing-service/](http://www.bics.nhs.uk/patient-information/brighton-and-hove-wellbeing-service/)
- Email: [BICS.brighton-and-hove-wellbeing@nhs.net](mailto:BICS.brighton-and-hove-wellbeing@nhs.net)

Health in Mind is available in East Sussex (outside of Brighton and hove):

- Tel: 0300 00 30 130
- Website: [www.healthinmind.org.uk](http://www.healthinmind.org.uk)
- Email: [spnt.healthinmind@nhs.net](mailto:spnt.healthinmind@nhs.net)

Further information on trauma:

- <http://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/healthadvice/problemsdisorders/copingaftertraumaticevent.aspx>
- <http://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/coping-with-traumatic-events/index.shtml>

For young people:

- [http://www.youngminds.org.uk/for\\_children\\_young\\_people/whats\\_worrying\\_you/posit traumatic\\_stress/further\\_info](http://www.youngminds.org.uk/for_children_young_people/whats_worrying_you/posit traumatic_stress/further_info)

For Blue Light personnel, volunteers and their families which of helps who want information on services, treatment and how to access support:

- [www.mind.org.uk/news-campaigns/campaigns/bluelight/](http://www.mind.org.uk/news-campaigns/campaigns/bluelight/)