



**Procedure Statement:**

On occasion, employees may be exposed to abnormal situations that may cause critical incident stress. The Flower Cart is committed to a safe and healthy workplace for its employees.

**Definitions:**

Critical incident stress – is a normal reaction to an abnormal situation. It occurs when an individual exceeds his/her capacity to cope with stress.

Normal reactions - reactions that are common and result from the understandable stress linked to the event

Abnormal situation – a situation that is not normal, average, typical, or usual.

**Procedure:**

**After an Abnormal Incident:**

Numbness immediately after an incident may occur. Symptoms of critical incident stress may appear days after an incident.

Symptoms of critical incident stress are usually temporary and can be expected to subside within 3 to 6 weeks and may include:

Physical: sleep disturbance, persistent headaches, nausea, chronic lack of energy, change in eating habits

Emotional: Increased anxiety, increased irritability, sense of loss (innocence, unfairness of world), sense of isolation, persistent flashbacks to incident(s), guilt, depression

Cognitive: Change in ability to do simple tasks, change in ability to concentrate, change in ability to focus

When possible supervisors provide support to lessen the potential, long-term impact of the stress of an abnormal incident(s).

Potential supportive actions by a supervisor include:

1. On the scene of the incident

Walk & Talk - Remove the employee from the presence of the individual involved in the incident or the incident itself and:

- Provide reassurance
- Check on the effects of stress, and
- Permit him/her to individually defuse

2. Individual defusing - Immediately after an incident

Purpose: To allow & encourage individual employees to express emotional reactions to incident.

Talk briefly with the person. Allow them to talk about what they experienced. *Do this only when the employee chooses to talk!*

- Ask if anything stands out for him/her from the incident
- Alert the person that she/he may experience symptoms of stress later.
- Establish life lines with him/her, e.g., if the person is leaving the workplace, where are they going? Is there emotional support available to him/her after hours? Should you arrange to speak with him/her later that day? That evening? That week?

3. Check in with the employee(s)

During informal contacts, meetings scheduled for this purpose, or during supervisory meetings, check in with the employee to see if signs of critical incident stress are appearing. If signs are present speak to the Executive



Director as soon as possible. The employee may require critical incident stress intervention by a person trained in critical incident stress management.

4. Reactive information for employee(s)

At any point after an abnormal incident you may decide to bring an employee's attention to, or give them a copy of the following stress management techniques:

1. Don't consume extra amounts of alcohol or caffeine, they simply add to the chemicals you're trying to flush out.
2. Exercise. Don't over do it, but physical exercise is one of the best known stress reducers. It really helps your body burn off the excess chemicals.
3. Eat balanced meals. Don't overdo your white sugar intake. Try to eat fresh fruit and vegetables.
4. Even though you may have trouble sleeping, go to bed at your regular time. The important thing is that your body is resting even if you are not sleeping.
5. Continue whatever you normally do to relax. Don't overdo it, maintain whatever is normal for you.
6. Talk about the incident with your spouse, trusted friends, colleagues. Talking, like exercise, is one of the best stress reducers

Potential supportive intervention utilizing external resources:

Team Debriefing - After 24 Hours

Purpose: To allow the team to express their emotional reactions to the incident together.

- All employees are encouraged to bring concerns or questions arising from an abnormal incident and its impact on themselves or their co-workers to the attention of their supervisor. The supervisor and the Executive Director determine if and when a team debriefing will occur. When in doubt, suggest that the need for a team debriefing be explored!
- The Team Debriefing is led by a person trained in critical incident stress management. The Team Debriefing provides an opportunity to talk about the incident and the personal impact felt by team members.

**Related Information:**

**Contact:**

Human Resources Department

**Roles and Responsibilities:**

Supervisors

- To recognize the situation as being abnormal
- Need to be in touch with your employees
- Lead a team meeting immediately after the incident
- Monitor employees and then intervene if professional help is deemed necessary

Employees

- To participate in the team debriefing
- To look after oneself after an incident
- To seek professional assistance if necessary

**Revision History:**

October 2018