

## ***What do we mean by stress and trauma?***

**Stress** is a common way to describing the pressures people experience in their day to day living.

**Occupational stress** is a build up of tension over time caused by work demands. If an individual does not develop ways of managing this tension, more serious problems can develop.

**Critical Incident Stress** (CIS) is stress from situations or events which causes an individual to have strong emotional reactions. The incident makes overwhelming demands on a person's coping ability, such that they find it extremely difficult to cope in the short term. Reactions include moderate to high levels of anxiety and apprehension, as well as despair and detachment. Other reactions, such as anger and depression may occur, as well as sleep disturbances, poor concentration, nervousness and feelings of insecurity. People who have been subjected to a critical incident while attending to work or emergency duties commonly report physical discomfort in the form of muscle tension, headache, nausea and indigestion. Most stress can be helped by the understanding and support from those around them; these stress reactions usually pass within a short period of time.

**Post-traumatic Stress Disorder** (PTSD) may develop in some people following a traumatic or a particularly disturbing incident. Even though the incident is over, the strong emotional or physical reactions are not. When these emotional aftershocks (**stress reactions**) occur from remembering the event, an individual may experience a post trauma stress reaction. For some, the incident may be long passed, but the stressful and disturbing memory remains and interferes with that person's ability to cope. With post trauma stress, the disturbing memory becomes the factor, which triggers the stress reaction.

**PTSD** comprises three groups of symptoms:

- Frequent trauma memories of repetitive thoughts, images, and dreams.
- Staying away from reminders, withdrawal from social interaction, and difficulty responding emotionally to others.
- Heightened arousal, reduced sleep, increased irritability and anger.

In time, the symptoms of **PTSD** disappear in most people, but with some they can persist. Occasionally, they may appear some time, even years, post-trauma.

### ***Seeking Treatment***

Not all people who experience trauma require treatment. Most are able to recover with the help of peers, family and friends. However, if the event was especially severe, or the person was simultaneously dealing with problems in their life, **PTSD** can become a chronic disabling disorder. It is important that effective diagnosis and treatment is obtained at the earliest opportunity. Survivors may also need professional help to restore well being. A range of health professionals can assist.

Help should be sought where the individual:

- Experiences severe problems, which last for more than a month.
- Is constantly on edge or irritable.
- Has difficulty responding emotionally to others.
- Increasingly uses alcohol or other drugs.
- Becomes unusually busy to avoid dealing with issues.
- Has a strong need to share experiences, but no one is available to listen.

**PTSD** is a serious problem needing medical attention. Rather than attempting to treat a colleague, advise the Skipper of the situation and he/she will arrange professional help.