

Peer Support Team

A number of child welfare agencies have instituted a Peer Support Team. The purpose of these teams is to prevent Post-Traumatic Stress and Secondary Traumatic Stress by lessening the impact of trauma.

Peer support members are child welfare staff trained in critical incident stress debriefing and provide educational information on normal reactions to a traumatic event. Ideally a peer support intervention will be provided within the first 24 hours following a traumatic event. Front line staff can call to request support at any time, or Supervisor can be encouraged to access the support for their staff. This service is provided by trained child welfare peers and is offered to all staff, youth in care, foster parents and volunteers. The service is voluntary and anything discussed remains confidential.

Research on the effectiveness of applied critical incident stress debriefing techniques in the workplace has demonstrated that individuals who are provided with Critical Incident Stress Debriefing within a 24-to-72-hour period after the initial critical incident experience less short term and long-term reactions or psychological trauma.

An Example: "While Senior Managers might not routinely avail themselves of the Peer Support Team, on one occasion a Manager in our Agency did. She had participated in a death review that was very distressing. She requested the intervention of the peer support team. A few days after the intervention, she found herself in the grocery store questioning where she was and why she was there. She later reflected that having participated in the intervention made her able in that moment to recognize the impact of the trauma on her concentration and reassured her this was in fact a normal response to her experiences."