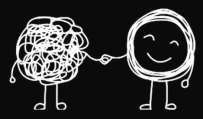


Silence Between Sirens

SILENCE BETWEEN SIRENS · FOR SUPERVISORS

AFTER A DIFFICULT INCIDENT

Looking after your team, and yourself, in the weeks that follow.

Some jobs stay with us. When a team has been through something highly charged or traumatic, the supervisor sets the tone for what happens next. That does not mean having the answers. It means being present, noticing, and making it normal to talk. Most people recover well with good support from those around them. Our job is to make sure no one carries it alone.

1 THE FIRST FEW HOURS

- Check in with everyone involved, in person where you can, including anyone who has already left the scene.
- Look after the basics: food, water, a break, a quiet space, and a safe way home.
- Make sure nobody goes off duty alone or unaccounted for. Ask who they will be with tonight.
- Let people talk if they want to. Do not push anyone to talk if they do not.
- Remember the people who were not at the scene: control room staff, those who took over, and colleagues on rest days who will hear about it later.
- Activate your organisation's post-incident process early, such as TRiM (Trauma Risk Management), and tell the team it is happening and why.

2 WHAT TO AVOID

- A compulsory group session where everyone has to describe what they saw and felt. NICE guidance (NG116) advises against psychologically focused debriefing to prevent PTSD. Listening, practical support and checking in again work better.
- "You will be fine", "it is part of the job", or comparing this job with worse ones.
- Assuming the quiet ones, or the experienced ones, are unaffected.
- Making support feel like a performance or fitness issue. It is neither.

3 THE NEXT FOUR WEEKS

Most reactions ease over the first few weeks. Keep watching, and keep checking in, at about one week and again at about four weeks. Signs that someone needs more than peer support:

- reactions that are getting worse, or not easing after about a month
- withdrawing from the team, family or things they usually enjoy
- drinking more, sleeping badly for weeks, or not coming back to work
- a change in their humour, temper or reliability

If you notice these, have a private conversation and help them reach professional support. Do not wait a month if someone is struggling badly now.

4 WORDS THAT HELP

Many supervisors want to help and are not sure what to say. Simple and honest is enough.

- "How are you doing after that job? Really?"
- "There is no right way to feel about it."
- "I have been thinking about it too."
- "What would help right now?"
- "I will check in with you again next week."

Then listen. You do not need to fix anything.

5 DARK HUMOUR

Dark humour is a normal way teams cope, and it often helps. Keep an ear out for when it changes: someone who stops joking, or whose humour turns sharper or more personal, may be telling you something.

6 LOOKING AFTER YOURSELF

You went through the same incident, and you are now carrying the team as well. The same reactions apply to you. Talk to a peer, your own supervisor or one of the routes below. Using support yourself is the clearest signal to your team that it is safe for them too.

7 SUPPORT IN YOUR ORGANISATION

Add your local details before sharing.

TRiM / post-incident support

Occupational Health

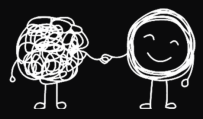
Employee Assistance Programme

Staff association, Federation or union

Welfare or wellbeing lead

For policing, Police Care UK supports serving and former officers, staff, volunteers and their families harmed by police service.

Samaritans	call 116 123, free, 24/7
Bluelight	text BLUELIGHT to 85258, free, 24/7
Emergency	call 999 if life is at risk



Silence Between Sirens

SILENCE BETWEEN SIRENS · FOR THE TEAM

AFTER A DIFFICULT JOB

What you might notice, what helps, and when to reach out.

What we see in this job does not end when the shift does. After a highly charged or traumatic incident, it is normal to feel affected, whether you were at the centre of it, on the radio, or picked it up afterwards. These are normal reactions to an abnormal event. For most of us, they ease with time and with the support of the people around us.

1 WHAT YOU MIGHT NOTICE

In the days and weeks that follow, some people notice:

- ↦ replaying the scene, or images and sounds coming back unexpectedly
- ↦ trouble sleeping, or vivid dreams
- ↦ feeling on edge, irritable or quick to anger
- ↦ feeling numb, flat or detached
- ↦ feeling fine, and then not
- ↦ guilt, or going over what could have been done differently
- ↦ tiredness, headaches or poor concentration
- ↦ wanting to avoid reminders, places or people

Some people notice none of this, and that is normal too. There is no right way to feel.

2 WHAT HELPS

- ↦ Talking to someone you trust, when you are ready: a colleague, a friend, family.
- ↦ Keeping to routines: eating, moving, sleeping as well as you can.
- ↦ Time with people who make you feel like yourself.
- ↦ Going easy on alcohol. It can blunt things for a night and make them worse over weeks.
- ↦ Being patient with yourself, and with each other.

3 LOOK OUT FOR EACH OTHER

We are often the first to notice when a colleague is not themselves. A quiet "are you alright after that job?" can make a real difference. Ask twice if the first answer is "I'm fine". Then listen.

4 WHEN TO REACH OUT FOR MORE

Speak to your supervisor, Occupational Health or your GP if:

- ↦ things are getting worse, or are not easing after about a month
- ↦ it is affecting your sleep, home life or work
- ↦ you are drinking more to cope
- ↦ you feel you cannot talk to anyone around you

You do not have to wait. Speaking up early is not weakness, and it does not have to wait until you are at breaking point. If you or a colleague have thoughts of suicide, or of not wanting to be here, talk to someone today. The services below are there day and night.

5 WHO YOU CAN TALK TO

Supervisor

TRiM / post-incident support

Occupational Health or Employee Assistance Programme

Federation or union representative

If you are struggling, you do not have to be at breaking point to reach out.

Samaritans	call 116 123, free, 24/7
Bluelight	text BLUELIGHT to 85258, free, 24/7
Emergency	call 999 if life is at risk

#NEVERALONE