

Managing the risks of psychological injury

A toolkit for supporting mountain rescue volunteers

Scottish Mountain Rescue aims to embed an understanding of personal resilience; how to support colleagues; and what to do following incident trauma exposure, into our complete (recruitment to retirement) volunteer experience. It's normal for us all to have different perspectives and reactions to the same event perhaps depending on our involvement, roles, or just how we are in ourselves that day.

We are at risk of psychological injury, it's an occupational hazard.

We understand that volunteering is good for our wellbeing, but also that potential stressors are not only associated with trauma exposure. We aim to understand the risks and impact of both operational and organisational stressors and manage these appropriately. We take a proactive stepped approach rather than reactive post event approach to volunteer wellbeing.

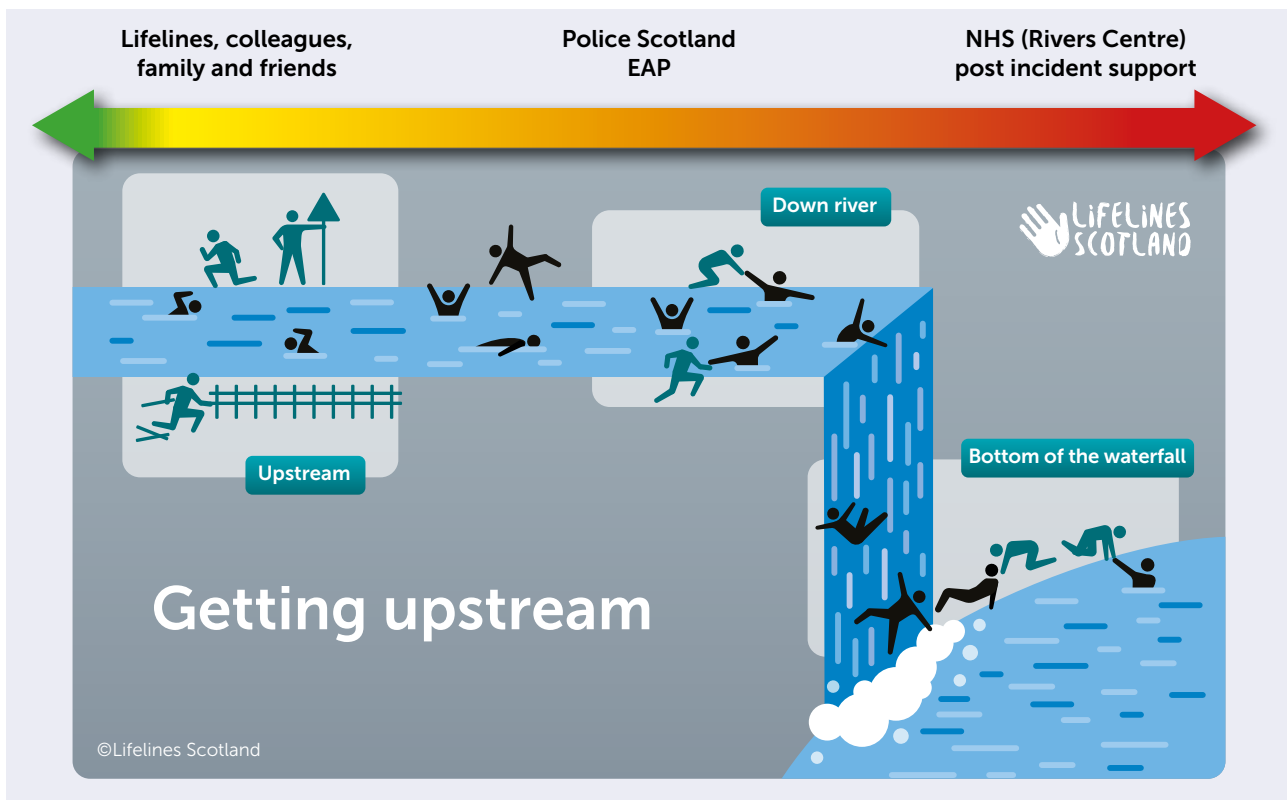
This toolkit contains information and tools we can use to "GET UPSTREAM" – how we can prepare, lower the risk and reduce the risk of potentially traumatic experiences leading to psychological injury. The toolkit can be used to support the "Humanitarian" section of the IIMARCH briefing structure in Incident Management.

We can build individual and collective capacity through learning (knowledge and skills), looking after ourselves and each other, and through good practice and leadership. Some examples:

- Understand what helps to keep us well – our Protective armour (www.lifelines.scot/my-protective-armor)
- What do we have in our Psychological First Aid Kit (www.lifelines.scot/understanding-resilience#First-aid)
- How can we support others (www.lifelines.scot/im-worried-about-someone-else)
- Understand about possible reactions to trauma and stress (www.lifelines.scot/understanding-responses)
- Understand support processes and pathways (www.scottishmountainrescue.org/scottish-mountain-rescue-wellbeing-information/)
- Encourage regular use of the **Capacity Self-Check Tool** throughout training and incidents
- Clear, succinct briefings for the task in hand
- Give space to encourage / allow everyone to speak up if they need to
- Agree and allocate tasks/clear roles for everyone
- Respect choice and value different perspectives
- Watch out for peers and self
- Be familiar with the **Post Incident Self-check Tool** and encourage use
- Be familiar with the leaflet: **Coping after a potentially traumatic experience**
- Incident Managers / Team Leadership must understand and actively consider if an incident might be a "critical/potentially traumatic event" (see next page)



Getting upstream



We know that psychological injury isn't inevitable and that many of us will cope well most of the time. However, it is helpful to regularly remind team members of the support available and particularly after any incident that could be considered a critical or potentially traumatic event (PTE).

A PTE might involve either a direct threat (eg major incidents / emergencies, hazardous environments, assault/injury to self and/or colleagues, accidents involving self and/or colleagues) or indirect threats such as exposure to the suffering of others, especially the vulnerable (eg young or old). It might involve deaths by suicide; performing or witnessing CPR; dealing with anxious/upset/angry families/friends/bystanders; a lack of understanding; or perhaps very high media interest (potential incident types on page 5).

A complex and extended incident, particularly if there are multiple fatalities, should always trigger the **Post Incident Support Process**.

The **Post Incident Support Process (PISP)** involves working with the Rivers Centre (NHS – services.nhslothian.scot/riverscentre) to offer support to any of our Mountain Rescue volunteers across Scotland who may experience psychological injury and require specialist post-incident trauma support following a mountain rescue incident (or the cumulative effect of a number of incidents). This is **in addition** to what can be provided by colleagues, family and friends, and other sources of support (for example the Lifelines Scotland resources and Police Scotland Employee Assistance Programme (EAP)).

Actions following an Incident



IMMEDIATELY

- Immediately after the incident there should be a quick (hot) debrief which will highlight key aspects of the job and timelines, emphasising positives but recognising the potential for impacts. It should remind folk that it's normal to react to a challenging situation; it's good to talk; encourage use of the **Post Incident Self-check Tool**; point to Lifelines Scotland web resources; and remind about Police Scotland EAP and Rivers Centre PISP support.
- Identify:
 - A) Those who were most directly involved in the incident;
 - B) Those who were there but perhaps less "hands-on"; and then
 - C) Everyone else in the team as a whole (who may have been en-route, or not able to attend).
- Remember, it's normal for us all to have different perspectives and reactions to the same incident perhaps depending on our involvement, our roles, or just how we are in ourselves that day. That's OK, but bear this in mind.
- Agree who will lead on immediate follow-up peer checks if this is felt to be appropriate. The following steps can be used as a guide for this process.
- If appropriate, Incident Managers / Team Leadership declare this as a "critical / potentially traumatic event" as detailed in the PISP **General Information leaflet**. This decision will be recorded along with the Police Incident number and a brief overview of the incident. The Incident Managers / Team Leadership will then send out PISP questionnaires three weeks later (see also action 3 weeks +).

AFTER (next day)

- Text all at the incident (eg A & B: directly involved and in a supporting role) on the following day (link to Lifelines Scotland and Police EAP etc). Follow up with any replies as needed. In some cases, where the incident has had a potentially wide impact on the team, then a team-wide approach will be best.
- Consider the benefits of organising a team (cold) debrief and the logistics of this appropriate to your team. The debrief can include:
 - Work through a timeline of events
 - What did we as a team do well?
 - What would we as a team do differently?

AFTER (0-3 weeks)

- For those who were sent texts/called the day after, follow this up with text 5-7 days after incident to check in with each person if felt needed.
- Email to **FULL TEAM** 1-5 days after incident. Include copies of (**Capacity Self-Check Tool**, **Post Incident Self-check Tool**, **Coping after a potentially traumatic experience** leaflet). Follow up with any replies as needed.
- Monitor and follow up if necessary (this could be done at times when the team gets together – just checking for anything out of character – or it may be prompted if one of our colleagues starts to miss training or other team activities if that is out of character).
- Team encouraged to follow the stages of support as needed and identified on the **Capacity Self-Check Tool** and **Post Incident Self-Check Tool**: normalising; self-care; peer support, trusted others; EAP, Rivers Centre PISP.
- Follow up as required.

AFTER (3 weeks +)

- **Week 3:** If a "critical/potentially traumatic event" was declared on day one then 3 weeks later send out **Post Incident Support Questionnaires** to ALL TEAM MEMBERS with **covering note** (template provided) along with the **General Information Leaflet** on what PISP involves (as a reminder). (Note volunteers can also self-refer and complete a questionnaire).
- Notify the Rivers Centre of this incident, providing the police incident number, an overview of the incident (the list of potential incident types might be helpful), and the total number of questionnaires sent out at this stage.
- The Rivers Centre will take appropriate action on any questionnaires returned and will deal directly with those individuals.



Potential Incident Types (Mountain Rescue)

This list aims to help categorise the overall “type” of incident that might be declared by a team as a “**critical / potentially traumatic event**”. The list is not exhaustive so please feel free to use “Other” and mention what the job entailed.

- Winter* walking (not avalanche) – fatality/body recovery
- Winter* walking (not avalanche) – serious injury
- Winter* climbing (not avalanche) – fatality/body recovery
- Winter* climbing (not avalanche) – serious injury
- Avalanche – fatality/body recovery
- Avalanche - serious injury
- Hill walking – fatality/body recovery
- Hill walking – serious injury
- Climbing – fatality/body recovery
- Climbing – serious injury
- Mountain Biking – fatality/body recovery
- Mountain Biking – serious injury
- Water related – fatality/body recovery
- Water related - serious injury
- Flight related – fatality/body recovery
- Flight related – serious injury
- Mental Health related – fatality/body recovery
- Mental Health related – serious injury
- Mental Health related – risk of suicide/ suicidal intentions
- Missing person(s) search – fatality/body recovery
- Missing person(s) search – serious injury
- Missing person(s) search – person(s) not found
- Road traffic related – fatality/body recovery
- Road traffic related – serious injury
- Weather related (flood, snow, wind etc)
- Dealing with animals (pets/livestock etc)
- Out of hospital cardiac arrest (may occur as part of the some of the above)
- Dealing with family, friends, bystanders
- Colleagues – fatality/body recovery
- Colleagues – serious injury
- Threat to life – self or colleagues
- Indirect exposure to the suffering of others
- Other type not listed (please note what it is)

*Winter refers to activities in snow and ice

For further information, please email: wellbeingofficer@scottishmountainrescue.org

