

Editor Perspective: Self-Care Practices and Peer Support for the Newsroom

July 31, 2014

<https://dartcenter.org/content/editor-perspective-self-care-practices-and-peer-support-for-newsroom#.VUIffJTF-20>

A Dart Center Tip Sheet for College Media Advisors, Editors and Student Journalists.

As a college media advisor or editor, managing and mentoring your staff during traumatic news events is essential.

Your reporters, photographers, videographers, designers, and other news staff may undergo traumatic stress during any news event whether they are at the scene or behind the desk. It's important to have specific self-care practices in place to help your staff during these difficult moments.

CREATE AN OPEN NEWSROOM CULTURE

To encourage trauma-informed self-care practices among your staff, your newsroom should nurture and reinforce an open and supportive newsroom culture. Encourage your staff to speak openly with you and with each other and to feel able to do so without sharp criticism or backlash.

TRAUMA AWARENESS – EDUCATE

Set aside time to educate your staff on trauma, traumatic stress, PTSD, and the effects of covering traumatic news events. By educating your staff and making them “trauma-aware,” they will be better prepared to respond and cope when a traumatic event occurs.

EMERGENCY CONTACT LISTS

Create an emergency contact tree for your newsroom. This emergency contact tree should lay out the protocol of who to call during a traumatic news event. This should be accessible to everyone on staff via print copy (you might create a business card with basic information that news staff can keep in their wallets) and digitally. Create back-ups of these lists in case the master list is lost or not accessible.

CHECK IN OFTEN

Before any of your staff go out to cover a traumatic event, let them know that you appreciate and value their work. This will remind them that they have your support as they tackle challenges that lie ahead. Let them know that being in regular contact with you and others in the newsroom is encouraged. They should check in with you and other staff members while out reporting on the event so that you know they are safe.

LISTENING EAR

When your staff is out in the field covering a traumatic event, or even when they are behind the desk, make sure that they know that you are there for them and the newsroom is a supportive environment. Those who feel alone or lack other support networks are more likely to be at risk for traumatic stress than those who have other sources of support. Provide encouragement as they are working on a difficult story and let them know that they should not hide their stress, feelings or emotions in these moments.

Let them know that it's important for them to acknowledge difficult feelings and to express them to you or others in the newsroom.

ENCOURAGE HEALTHY SELF-CARE PRACTICES AND BE A ROLE MODEL

Remind your staff before, during and after covering a traumatic event that they should do their best to take care of themselves: eat healthy food, get exercise, take breaks, and get a good night's sleep. You should also encourage them to talk with family and friends about their experiences. Make sure that you are also practicing what you preach and serve as a role model who is following these same self-care practices.

BE ON THE LOOKOUT FOR TROUBLE SIGNS

Pay attention to any trouble signs your staff members may be showing while covering a traumatic event or afterwards. Some examples are:

- Sleeplessness
- Upsetting dreams
- Intrusive images or thoughts of the event
- Avoidance of reminders of the trauma or feeling numb
- Feeling that bad things are about to happen
- Being jumpy and easily startled
- Anger
- Difficulty concentrating
- Feeling "hyper"
- Physical reactions such as sweating, rapid heartbeat, dizziness or nausea when reminded of a traumatic event

If your staff members show any of these signs, find a way to have a conversation and offer a listening ear. Keep an eye on them and monitor their wellbeing. If they are showing any of these signs for several weeks or months after covering a traumatic event, you might want to refer them to a trauma specialist. Teach your staff members to look out for these signs among their peers – the more people on your staff who are educated about signs of distress, the easier it will be to ensure they get the help they need.

REMIND YOUR STAFF OF THE IMPACT OF TRAUMA

Remind your staff that the adrenaline of the chaos can impair their judgment and they must try to remain centered throughout the experience. They should be reminded that the way they cover the story, how they interview sources, and the way the story is presented to the public can all have an impact on those affected by the event as well as the general public. It is essential to convey the importance of reporting in an ethical, humane and respectful way.