

# Practical Post-incident Support

Suggestions for the busy  
Health Care professional

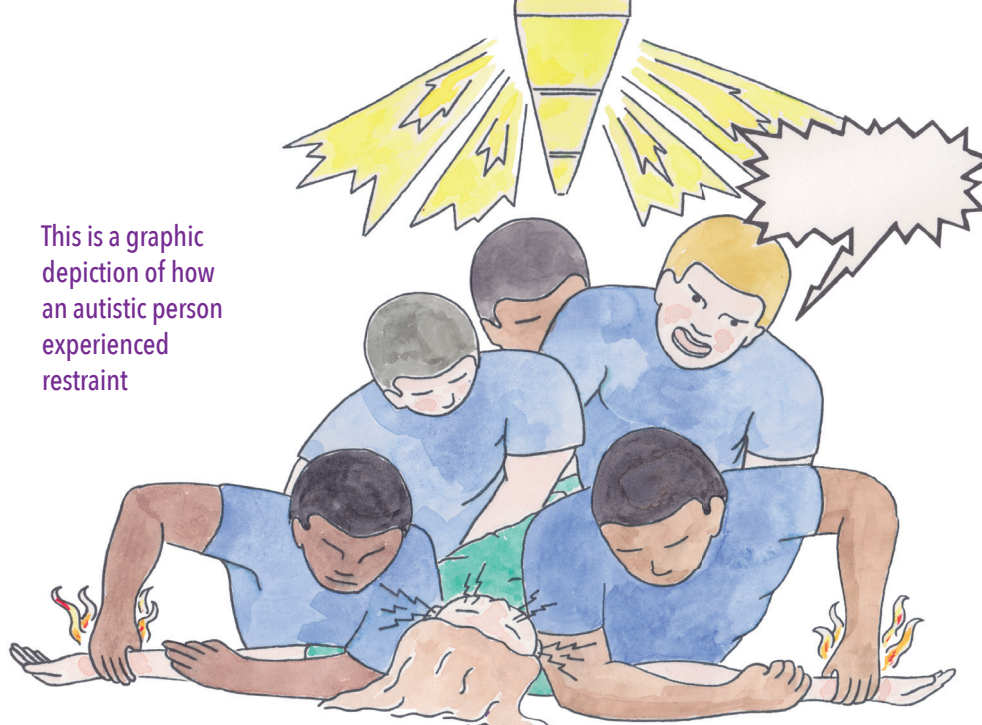




These suggestions are for staff working in inpatient settings to help them provide support to children and young people after an incident has occurred. The Restraint Reduction Network has co-produced this resource with children, young people and their families who have lived experience of inpatient care.



This is a graphic depiction of how an autistic person experienced restraint



## What is an incident?

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**An incident is a highly emotive interaction or event that might cause ongoing stress or distress, sometimes caused by a need not being met** ”

(Co-produced definition)

The ‘emotive interaction’ or ‘event’ causing distress will be different for each person. It is therefore important that staff know the people they are caring for well, so that they understand what each person might find difficult or distressing.



## What is post-incident support?

The main aim of post-incident support is to secure the immediate physical and emotional wellbeing of the people involved. It is about making sure everyone is safe, managing any practicalities (eg injuries) and providing reassurance. It is not about learning about the incident and how it can be avoided in the future. This kind of learning should only be carried out by a skilled facilitator at a later stage.

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## Why is post-incident support important?

Good post-incident support is a crucial element of good care, helping staff to build strong relationships with the young person and their family. It also reduces distressed behaviour and restrictive practices, helping the young person to recover and progress.

**The more available and helpful staff are, the more supported young people and their carers feel**

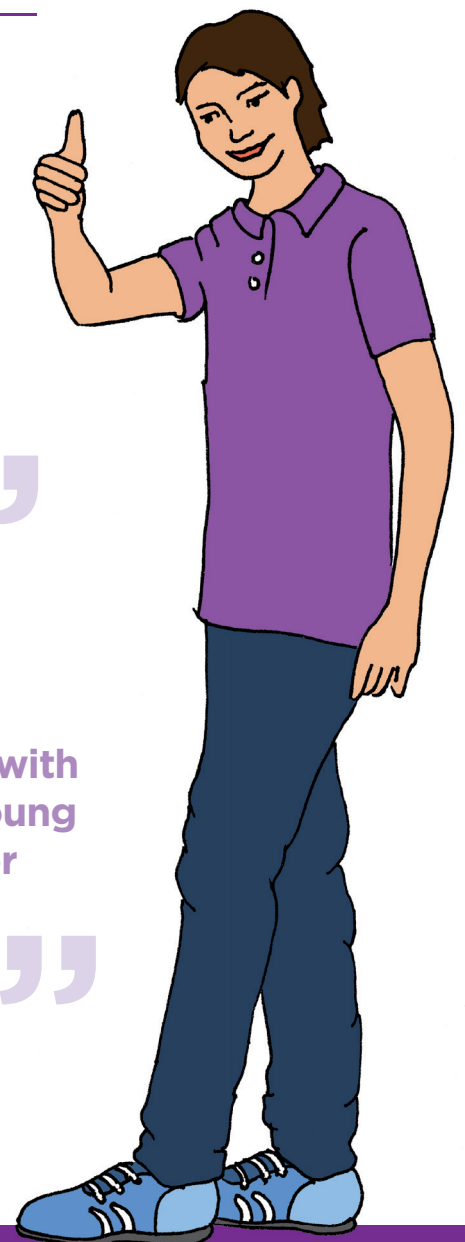
(Biering, 2010; Tas et al, 2010)

**Research shows that children and young people experience good care when staff are compassionate, caring and respectful**

(Weich et al, 2020)

**Supportive relationships with staff help children and young people to progress, rather than feel their behaviour is just being 'contained'**

(National Institute for Health Research, 2021; Reavey, 2017)



# How to give good post-incident support

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Using the initial letters of the word '**SUPPORT**' can help you to remember what helps young people following an incident.

**SUPPORT MEANS SUPPORT** It is not about debriefing or educating. Any post-incident support you give should leave the young person feeling safe and accepted. Avoid interrogating them about what they have done. Instead, say you want to listen and help them when they are ready.

**UNDERLYING REASONS** Distressed behaviour is a means of communication. Listen and be curious about the issues behind the behaviour. Try to understand what it might be telling you about how the young person is feeling.

**PLAN YOUR APPROACH** Ask yourself, 'What do I need so that I can put the young person first?' Get to know the young person's triggers and what helps them to manage their distress. Ask them (and their family) what helps and plan to these (eg dim the lights or allow them to pace or throw a ball against the wall). Use the RRN's 'My Support Plan' to help you with this.

**PROVIDE STAFF WITH SUPPORT** It's important to check that everyone is OK and that you and your colleagues get the help you need.

**ORGANISE THE BEST PERSON TO HELP** For support to be effective, it needs to be personalised and based on good relationships. The best people to provide post-incident support are therefore those who already have good relationships with the young person. However, bear in mind that you too might have been affected by what has happened. If so, it can be helpful to step away and allow a co-worker to take over. This gives you a chance to recover, while doing something else to support the young person's recovery (eg to make them a warm drink).

**RESPONSES** Manage your own Try to develop your powers of reflection and awareness of your own needs. 'Check in' with yourself before you offer support. Remember that you are working with young people who are in psychological (and even physical) pain, and that this can also include families and co-workers. Constant exposure to such pain can have a negative impact on you and make you vulnerable to reacting to a person's distress in a way that isn't helpful. If you think this is happening, it is important to seek the support of a supervisor or trusted colleague.

**TIMING** Get the right. Have you readied yourself to put the young person first? Do they need some time to themselves before they are ready to talk? Offer a choice, "Would it better to talk about this now or later on?" Do they want frequent check-ins or a longer chat? You could ask, "Shall we have a short chat and maybe follow it up later on?" or "Would you like to have a longer conversation?"

# Helpful things to say and do

**Make sure you are in a non-threatening position**

Sit alongside, rather than stand over the young person

**Let the young person know at the beginning how much time you have available for them**

**What happened earlier was really important. I have made five minutes to listen if you want to talk**

**Try to say as little as possible**

particularly if the young person is still showing signs of distress and overload



**Give the young person time to process what you are saying**

You might need to wait longer than feels comfortable before they can process and respond

**I want to make sure that you're OK**

**Open the conversation in a supportive, non-judgemental way**

**Are you hurting?**



**Use communication supports**

that help the young person (eg Makaton, visuals)







## References

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