



SUPERVISOR GUIDE

How to lead a crew through difficult calls — and what to do after

LEADING YOUR CREW THROUGH DIFFICULT CALLS

A practical guide for towing supervisors, owners, road supervisors and team leads. The goal is not to turn supervisors into counsellors. The goal is to help you recognize when a call may have an impact, lead your crew safely through the immediate aftermath, and make sure people know where to turn for further support.

THE SUPERVISOR'S ROLE

You are not expected to diagnose, counsel or “fix” someone. Your job is to create a safe first response: notice, check in, listen, protect, connect and follow up. Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety guidance recommends that supervisors reduce stigma, have open discussions when concerns are observed, ask how they can support a worker, help workers find support, and take care of their own health and safety as well.

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WHAT COUNTS AS A DIFFICULT CALL?

- Fatal or serious-injury collisions, especially involving children or young people.
- Calls involving severe injuries, death, suicide or suspected suicide.
- Incidents where the operator knew the person involved.
- Events where the operator feels responsible, even when they were not at fault.
- Calls involving graphic scenes, prolonged recovery work or unusually high emotional intensity.
- Any call where an operator, dispatcher or coworker says, “That one got to me.”

IMPORTANT

There is no requirement that a call meet a specific definition of “trauma” before you take it seriously. Different people can respond differently to the same event. The supervisor's job is to notice the person, not to label the reaction.



BEFORE & DURING THE CALL

Leadership starts before the difficult call happens.

1. BEFORE THE CALL: BUILD A CREW THAT KNOWS IT IS OKAY TO SPEAK UP

- Make it normal to say that a call was difficult without treating that as weakness.
- Know your company's process for serious incidents, employee support and time away from duty.
- Know who your professional supports are: EAP, occupational health, local clinicians or other approved resources.
- Make sure supervisors know the difference between supporting someone and trying to counsel them.
- Have a simple plan for who checks on the operator after a serious call.

2. AT THE SCENE: LEAD THE OPERATOR, DON'T MAKE THEM PROCESS THE EVENT

- Keep communication calm, practical and focused on immediate safety.
- Do not ask the operator for a detailed emotional debrief while the job is still unfolding.
- If practical, reduce unnecessary people, radio traffic and operational pressure around the operator.
- Handle operational and investigative questions through the appropriate process.
- If the operator is visibly overwhelmed or cannot safely continue, address fitness to continue working through your normal workplace process.
- Do not promise that everything will be fine. Instead say that you will stay connected and help them access support.

WHAT TO SAY

WHAT NOT TO SAY

- "You need to toughen up."
- "I've seen worse."
- "Don't think about it."
- "You'll be fine."
- "Tell me exactly what happened." — unless the information is required for the operational or incident process.



THE FIRST 72 HOURS

Use this as the supervisor's response framework after the truck leaves the scene.

0–24 HOURS — STABILIZE

Primary goal: safety, basic support and connection.

Check that the operator is safe. Give them room to decompress. Ask how they are doing right now. Listen without forcing details. Discuss whether they feel able to continue working. If they should not drive, arrange a safe way home. Give them a clear point of contact and let them know you will check in again.

24–48 HOURS — FOLLOW UP

Primary goal: don't disappear after the incident.

Check in again without waiting for them to initiate the conversation. Ask about sleep, concentration, mood and returning to work. Offer reasonable flexibility where practical. Remind them that support is available even if they are not in crisis.

48–72 HOURS — CONTINUE

Primary goal: assess how they are doing now, not just how they looked at the scene.

Ask what has changed since the first day. Discuss whether normal duties feel manageable. Reconnect them with professional resources if needed. Schedule another follow-up. Seventy-two hours is a checkpoint, not a finish line.

WHAT YOU ARE WATCHING FOR

- A major change from the person's normal behaviour.
- Withdrawal, isolation, unusually intense anger or agitation.
- Difficulty concentrating or functioning at work.
- Persistent inability to sleep or significant distress.
- Statements suggesting hopelessness, self-harm or that others would be better off without them.
- A person who is clearly struggling but repeatedly says they are "fine."

WHEN IT BECOMES AN URGENT SAFETY ISSUE

If someone is in immediate danger or needs urgent medical support, call 9-1-1. If someone is thinking about suicide, they can call or text **9-8-8** for Canada's Suicide Crisis Helpline, available 24/7. Supervisors should not attempt to manage an acute crisis alone. ■cite■turn0search0■turn0search7■



LEADING THE CREW

A difficult call can affect more than the operator who attended it.

THE WHOLE CREW MAY BE AFFECTED

Dispatchers, backup operators, supervisors, mechanics, managers and other employees can be affected by what they hear, see or learn about an incident. CCOHS notes that serious incidents can increase stress and anxiety among workers, including workers who were not directly involved. ■cite■turn0search12■

HOW TO LEAD THE CREW AFTER A SERIOUS CALL

- Acknowledge that the call was difficult without forcing anyone to discuss personal reactions.
- Give the crew accurate operational information and avoid unnecessary graphic details.
- Stop rumours by communicating what is known and what is not known.
- Let people know they can speak privately with a supervisor.
- Offer access to the same support resources to coworkers who were affected.
- Watch the people who seem unaffected as well as the people who are visibly upset.
- Avoid turning the incident into a repeated story around the shop or dispatch office.

A SIMPLE CREW CHECK-IN

KEEP IT SHORT. KEEP IT HUMAN.

WHAT NOT TO DO AS A LEADER

- Don't make the incident the centre of every conversation for days afterward.
- Don't compare employees' reactions.
- Don't reward emotional suppression as "toughness."
- Don't publicly identify who is struggling or who sought support.
- Don't try to conduct a group therapy session.



THE CONVERSATION

Simple language works better than a perfect speech.

A FIVE-STEP CHECK-IN

1. OPEN	"I've been thinking about that call. How are you doing?"
2. LISTEN	Let them talk. You do not need to fill every silence.
3. VALIDATE	"That makes sense." / "I can understand why that stayed with you."
4. OFFER	"What would help right now?" Offer practical workplace support and professional resources.
5. FOLLOW UP	"I'm going to check in again tomorrow. You don't have to come to me first."

IF THEY DON'T WANT TO TALK

- Respect the boundary.
- Don't interpret silence as proof that they are okay.
- Say: "That's okay. You don't have to talk about it with me. I just want you to know I'm here."
- Still follow up later.

IF THEY SAY "I'M FINE"

- Accept the answer without arguing.
- Ask one practical follow-up: "Okay. Is there anything you need from me?"
- Let them know you will check in again.
- Continue to observe changes in behaviour or functioning.

YOU DON'T HAVE TO HAVE THE RIGHT ANSWER

A supervisor can be supportive without being a mental-health professional. CCOHS specifically recommends that supervisors ask how they can support a worker, help them find support and encourage workers to talk to someone they trust. [■cite■turn0search8■](#)



BUILD THE SYSTEM

A strong response should not depend on which supervisor happens to be working.

EVERY TOWING COMPANY SHOULD KNOW THESE FIVE THINGS

- Who is responsible for the first supervisor check-in?
- Who is the backup if that supervisor is off shift?
- What professional or EAP resources can employees access?
- What is the process for deciding whether someone can safely continue working?
- How and when will follow-up happen after the first 72 hours?

DOCUMENT THE SUPPORT — NOT THE PERSONAL DETAILS

Keep required operational and incident documentation separate from unnecessary personal details. Record that a check-in occurred, that resources were offered, and any workplace actions required under your normal policies. Follow applicable privacy, occupational-health and employment requirements.

THE SUPERVISOR ALSO NEEDS SUPPORT

Supervisors can be affected too — particularly when they respond to repeated fatalities, serious injuries or incidents involving their own crew. CCOHS advises supervisors and coworkers to take care of their own health and safety as well. [cite turn0search8](#)

THE BEYOND THE CALL APPROACH

SUPERVISOR QUICK CHECK

- Did I check on the operator?
- Did I listen without forcing details?
- Did I make sure they were safe to continue or travel home?
- Did I offer support and resources?
- Did I check on the rest of the crew?
- Did I schedule a follow-up?
- Did I look after myself, too?

BEYOND THE CALL • MENTAL HEALTH & TRAUMA RESOURCES FOR CANADA'S TOWING INDUSTRY

Some calls stay with you.