



# Police Traumatic Events Checklist (PTEC)

**CASE STUDY:  
Supporting Wellness and Trauma  
Exposure with PTEC**



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## AIM

The aim of this case study is to offer some insight into experiences and areas of UK policing implementing PTEC, the value, the impact, the lessons learned, and the opportunities and challenges ahead. The intention is for this evaluation to provide forces with a user-based and realistic look at the commendable trauma management initiatives using PTEC in 2023 and beyond.

PTEC is a tried and tested tool that has the potential to change the face of trauma management in UK policing from the ground up: from individuals' wellbeing to the HMICFRS' commitment to monitoring how officers and staff are protected in their work.

The science behind PTEC's creation demonstrates that trauma exposure is common ground. It may provide forces with their first evidence of officers and staff experiencing and managing trauma successfully in within the force resources in place.

This example was tested with Surfwell, an innovative activity based intervention to promote psychological, physical and psychosocial wellbeing. The intervention often involves individuals mentioning trauma exposure (sometimes for the first time) and many participants reflect that there is a lot to try and make sense of in order to make any decisions on how to manage how they feel about an incident (or incidents).

PTEC is a way of capturing new reflections and gaining clarity on options going forward for trauma processing and/or accessing further trauma support.

## HOW THE STUDY WAS DONE

### PTEC Implementation

- PTEC was introduced to the supervisory team as a concept initially with a test run with one instructor and a participant on a Surfwell session, observed by a lead researcher.
- A survey was circulated to the instructor team to canvass initial thoughts about using PTEC.
- A pilot train-the-trainer session was delivered with Surfwell instructors prior to a pilot PTEC session delivered with all instructors, observed by a lead researcher.
- A full CPD session for instructors was held with discussions, role play, feedback, with follow up evaluation interviews and observations with participants.

### PTEC Evaluation: How did the risk assessment help leadership?

- PTEC helped people to normalise their responses to abnormal things which also become reality.
- Instructors reported they were more able to communicate that experiences shared in Surfwell are often very common ground in policing and that understanding them is an important step towards improved wellbeing, because of using PTEC.

- Instructors used PTEC to provide participants with examples of how to seek help and support in other settings, such as therapists, line managers, and peers.
- All Surfwell instructors relayed confidence in the efficacy of using the top row of PTEC (situational factors) to show participants there are many common pressures.
- 100% of instructors said PTEC was somewhat, or extremely, appropriate for pointing towards personal resilience. PTEC reminds people of their strength.

## MAIN FINDINGS

### Instructor involvement

Instructors are humans and officers too and the PTEC may be stimulating their own enquiry into how well they have made sense of trauma exposure. 90% of instructors, in their own introductions to participants in the Surfwell session referred to a work-related trauma of which they had tried to make sense.

**“Purely out of interest, I went through the list and related to each one, sometimes multiple times!” (Surfwell Instructor)**

### Instructors need clarification on applying PTEC to cumulative trauma

Prior to training, instructors expressed uncertainty in how to use PTEC with participants who expressed overwhelm and burnout, or whom referred to cumulative trauma or the ‘drip-drip-drip’ effect. The CPD session provided guidance on this and suggested that users start by acknowledging the situational factor of Cumulative Trauma (along the top of the PTEC matrix) and then wait to see over time if any particular type of incident comes to mind. The point here was to reiterate that PTEC simply represents common ground in policing and that relating to the simple fact that trauma builds up over time can be helpful for many.

### PTEC users will differ in how much they talk and respond

Instructors noticed soon that users respond to PTEC in the way that is most natural to them -and there is no requirement to encourage them to either talk or to prevent them from talking. Instructors observed that some participants respond more expressively and physically to PTEC than others, who may just use the time to quietly reflect on their experiences and resiliences. It is key to understand the differences in those with whom you use PTEC and accept the differences there may be in the delivery team too

### PTEC can be really helpful for last minute disclosures

Many instructors agreed that PTEC is ideal to capture those times when a participant takes some time to ‘open up’ about what has been on their mind and that they (as an instructor and listener) are short on time to respond to that disclosure

### PTEC to reflect on resilience or having ‘been lucky so far’

Surfwell instructors noticed how PTEC can also be used with those who do not have a specific trauma or situational factor that is being particularly disruptive for them currently (or in the past). This is because PTEC offers the chance to reflect on the resilience they may have already shown in some situations and also their lack of exposure in their experience to date.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- Trust the process! There is a common (and also understandable) misconception about PTEC and about how the brain makes sense of trauma. Prior to training, instructors expressed concerns that users of PTEC may become overwhelmed by the traumatic impact of each and every incident type and situational factor represented on PTEC. The reality is that when an individual does have a stress response to a traumatic incident, the brain becomes very focused and contracts on that specific incident to try and make sense of it.
- Remind. PTEC is there to capture what already exists. Surfswell instructors discussed how PTEC should be retained, only for active use in one-to-one sessions and only with those who have expressed an interest in discussing traumatic incidents or difficult situations at work during the Surfswell day. For those who have not mentioned any such difficulties, the PTEC will be offered 'for their information' and as an optional tool for future use alongside the Wellbeing Journal and other handouts offered to participants in their regular packs.
- Time spent training wellbeing leads is a real investment and empowers individuals. It enables them to take ownership of PTEC as their own tool in their own way.

For more information visit [www.policecare.org.uk](http://www.policecare.org.uk)

