

When Trauma Strikes Your Organization: Tips for Managers

Whether an isolated catastrophic incident or prolonged chronic stress, trauma can have an emotional, physical and psychological impact on your employees. The goal of this tip sheet is to provide you with a greater understanding of what you and your staff will likely encounter, and some strategies for supporting your employees during this challenging time. With a greater understanding of possible reactions, you will feel better equipped to respond effectively during and after a traumatic situation occurs.

EXPECT A REACTION. People react differently to trauma. The nature, severity and proximity to a traumatic experience, as well as an individual's previous experience with trauma, will influence how someone may be impacted and how they will respond. Initially there can be shock and disbelief. Some staff may feel numb and unable to work. After the initial shock wears off, there may be a period when sleeplessness and worry take over. As a result, you may notice people become short and curt with others. Exhaustion may eventually set in--especially in the absence of effective coping. You might witness anger, crying, irritability, and hear of difficulties with concentration.

BE PATIENT. Productivity will not return to normal for a while, but it will come back eventually. Respond compassionately in the short run. It will be of greatest benefit, in the long run.

DEVELOP CLEAR, OPEN COMMUNICATION. The more information your employees have about what is going on, the more in control they feel. The more in control a person feels, the greater their resilience to cope with difficult situations. A statement of concern and support from management will help your employees feel like you are all in this together.

ENCOURAGE OPEN DISCUSSIONS. Provide opportunities for people to share their reactions with others. Having a chance to discuss experiences in a supportive environment, and within their own limits, will facilitate the process of recovery. Don't force anyone to talk, as some people may not want to be vulnerable to co-workers.

EDUCATE YOUR EMPLOYEES. Providing an opportunity to learn about trauma and how it may affect them helps employees realize they are not alone, not weak and not "crazy." Offer written materials that describe common reactions and offer coping strategies. Coordinate educational sessions that provide a forum to share experiences and to learn stress management techniques.

TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF. Your team is depending on you for leadership. Get plenty of rest. Eat healthy. Avoid dependence on caffeine or alcohol. Connect with your family and friends. Consider forming a support group of other managers to support one another.

CONTACT WORKPLACE SOLUTIONS. Our team of professionals is available 24/7 for consultation, guidance and support in managing during difficult times. [Call us at 800-327-5071.](tel:800-327-5071)