

Common reactions to trauma

Following a major change, a loss or a sudden, unexpected or traumatic workplace event, employees will often look for guidance and support from leadership. Sometimes, managers are unsure how to respond. While each situation is unique, there are some general guidelines that managers can follow to ensure that they are able to address some of the most important needs of employees immediately following a traumatic event.

Tips for Managers

- Take practical steps to reduce the source of the stress.
- Communicate frequently with your employees.
- Encourage teamwork and cooperation.
- Set clear work standards.
- Consider modifying rules/procedures that are counterproductive, especially following a traumatic event.
- Take steps to prevent accidents and illness.
- Prevent overwork and exhaustion.
- Make it clear that this may be a difficult time, and that is okay to share feelings of stress, worry or frustration.
- Acknowledge the benefits of counseling during stressful times and encourage employees to contact the EAP or support.
- Provide opportunities for employees to talk about their stressful experiences.
- Remember that the EAP is a resource for employees and managers.
- Don't underestimate the impact of stress on you as an individual - take care of yourself.

For additional information regarding assisting employees following a traumatic event, contact

Cognitive Reactions

- Confusion/Difficulty Concentrating
- Difficulty Making Decisions
- Decreased Alertness
- Memory Lapses
- Frequent Thoughts of the Event

Emotional Reactions

- Anger
- Anxiety
- Depression
- Emotional Numbness
- Apathy/Boredom
- Frustration

Physical Reactions

- Fatigue
- Insomnia
- Headaches
- Nausea/Gastrointestinal Problems
- Hunger or Loss of Appetite

Behavioral Reactions

- Withdrawal from Others
- Restlessness
- Hyper Vigilance
- Blaming Others

Practical Tips to Help You Cope

- **Find Someone You Trust:** Find supportive people (family members, friends, colleagues) and talk with them about your experience. Don't carry this burden alone - share it with those who care about you.
- **Give Yourself Permission to Feel:** Acknowledge your feelings as they arise and that they are normal reactions.
- **Take Care of Yourself:** Get enough rest and eat regularly. Keep up your exercise routine if you have one.
- **Don't abuse drugs or alcohol -** they can hinder your coping abilities.
- **Know Your Limits:** Avoid other stressful situations for a while.
- **Practice Relaxation:** Meditate if you know how; if not, visualize a quiet scene. You may not always get away, but you can hold a vision in your mind that will temporarily take you out of the turmoil of a stressful situation.
- **Take One Thing at a Time:** For people under tension, assignments or responsibilities may suddenly seem overwhelming. This is a temporary condition that you can work through, one step at a time.

When Additional Help is Needed

You don't have to go through this experience alone. If your reactions are very overwhelming or persistent, remember that you can always seek professional help. Sometimes a situation is so complicated or stressful that professional assistance may be beneficial. Your Employee Assistance Program (EAP) is a valuable resource can provide you with additional support and guidance as you cope with your reactions to a traumatic event.