

Supporting Employees Affected by a Traumatic Event: Recommendations for Managers



In light of the recent accident north of Tisdale, Saskatchewan, some of your staff may be experiencing various levels of reactions. This will depend on the degree to which employees have been impacted, their exposure, relatability and proximity to the incident itself.

Employees most impacted may exhibit a range of possible reactions; everything from feeling unsettled, appearing distressed, shaken, anxious and disoriented. In the extreme, some employees may exhibit unusual physical responses as they may be in shock in the aftermath of a very traumatic event. Employee reactions also depend on their current life stressors, triggers or how they associate this current incident with previous traumatic events. In addition, returning to work following a traumatic event is a process in which pre-event levels of individual wellbeing may take several days or even weeks to resume.

Typical Stress Reactions

Even after traumatic events, people are generally resilient. However, some of your employees will exhibit clear reactions and may need support to facilitate their recovery. It is not uncommon for some people experiencing stress to minimize or avoid expressing their concerns and reactions. Some observable signs of stress reactions may include: expressions of sadness, anxiety, guilt and vulnerability; unusual anger, irritation and agitation; unusually high expectations directed at managers to answer questions and ensure employee safety; withdrawal; increased fatigue; diminished energy; frequent conversations about safety and personal crisis plans; increased absenteeism; difficulty concentrating, making decisions, attending to tasks or becoming easily distracted; and an uncharacteristic decline in work performance.

Need more information or assistance? All calls are completely confidential.

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What can you do?

Reactions to a traumatic event are strongly related to a sense of loss of control and influence over such events. Therefore, a primary consideration for managers is to provide a supportive environment in which control, confidence, competence and a sense of mastery can be regained. It is helpful to:

- **Identify any employees who are at greater risk** — those who may be more vulnerable as a result of their direct exposure to the incident and/or due to other personal stressors;
 - **Ensure there is a proactive and ongoing plan** to reach out to impacted employees by yourself or designated leaders;
 - **Acknowledge employee concerns** in a respectful and non-intrusive manner;
 - **Acknowledge some of your own concerns** and reactions to the crisis;
 - **Recognize and acknowledge, in a non-judgmental way**, that employees may have different emotions, attitudes and opinions related to this situation;
 - **Remind employees** that they each have their own unique and resourceful ways of coping;
 - **Urge employees to reach out to colleagues**, family, friends and people they feel close to;
 - **Inform staff experiencing anxiety that these feelings may vary from day to day** and may be different than what others are feeling;
 - **Assist and support employees as they resume their work activities** and be mindful that some employees may require a modified work schedule for a certain period of time;
- **Demonstrate a balanced approach** between employee needs and work place productivity;
 - **Supportively and directly address any concerns** about an employee's ability to resume their work tasks, if this in any way impacts workplace or public safety; and
 - **Provide information regarding dedicated resources** to support the coping and recovery needs of employees.

Important considerations for managers

As a manager, you play a significant role in facilitating a quicker recovery of your impacted employees. The active support of leadership in an organization has been shown to make a big difference in employees' recovery rates.

- Communicate frequently and convey information through daily communications. This should ideally occur at the same time each day and contain practical and accurate information for employees.
- Provide employees with clear information regarding how to access internal and external helpful resources, including their Employee and Family Assistance Program.
- Take good care of yourself and seek consultation and/or support, if needed. Reaching out and supporting employees at a time when you may also be affected by these events can be stressful.
- Be visible and manage employee anxiety and fear by routinely checking in with employees, offering support as much as possible.
- Do not hesitate to consult the Homewood Human Solutions Crisis Management Team, if you require any consultation or support in assisting your employees, work teams or yourselves.



Need more information or assistance? All calls are completely confidential.

For more information, to book a counselling session, or to access any of your EFAP services our Client Services Representatives are ready to speak with you 24 hours a day, seven days a week, in English or French. All calls are completely confidential.

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