

How Managers Can Help Staff Cope with a Traumatic Incident or Event

A traumatic incident is any sudden or unexpected traumatic event that affects people's emotional lives, feelings of safety, and ability to cope. It might be a robbery or assault that occurred in the workplace, a sudden accident or death at work or out of the workplace affecting a member of the organization. It may be an incident that is happening on the world stage that affects the overall sense of well-being for individuals in the organization.

Floods, fires, hurricanes, airplane crashes, and acts of terrorism are other examples of critical incidents that may occur outside of the job and significantly impact a large number of staff. Whatever the trauma, staff may be affected for days, weeks, or even months afterwards.

First steps:

Make Sure Everyone Is Safe:

When a crisis, trauma, or critical incident has occurred in your workplace, make sure everyone is safe. Then notify appropriate organizations about the problem. Emergency numbers can be found at:

Contact the Employee Assistance Program (EAP)

You will want to contact PENN Behavioral Health's **Employee Assistance Program at 1-888-321-4433**. Every crisis, trauma, or critical incident is different. An EAP counselor will discuss ways to respond to the crisis at hand, given the specifics of the incident and your organization.

Acknowledge that the critical incident has occurred.

Being forthright and providing factual information to your staff can help stop rumors from spreading.

Provide a consistent message

Providing a consistent message to all groups reduces rumors and confusion. Address any rumors or concerns staff may have. Before making any announcements, be sure to check to see if your company has guidelines or policies about critical incidents.

Second steps:

Set up a Critical Incident Response for Traumatized staff

Traumatized staffs need structure, peer support, facts and instructions on what to expect next. This is particularly crucial if the individual has inadequate supports at home. If staff are being dismissed or leaving because of a personal event, find out what they are planning to do with their time once they leave work. Encourage them to spend time with friends or family members.

Don't force staff to leave if they'd prefer to stay with their co-workers.

Emotional reactions

After a critical incident, staff may feel overwhelmed by the event. People may feel afraid or unsafe. They may experience symptoms of stress. The signs and symptoms of stress can be physical, mental, or emotional. Expect a variety of reactions from staff. Staff may experience feelings of shock, fear, anger, sadness, grief, and confusion following a critical incident. Severe anxiety is commonplace.

The length and intensity of each employee's feelings will vary. Everyone is different and everyone reacts differently to a traumatic event. Some people may experience uncontrollable crying or emotional outbursts. Others may withdraw or appear numb. Reactions may be immediate, delayed, or ongoing.

Third steps:

Management Support from the Employee Assistance Program

Be sure to utilize the Management Support offered by PENN Behavioral Health's Employee Assistance Program. **Call 1-888-321-4433** for assistance with reactions that are affecting individuals or the workplace in such a way as to cause a significant impact on the work and others.

Be Sure to Take Care of Yourself

Take time to consider how this incident is affecting you. Are you interacting differently? Are you angry, frustrated, stressed? Give yourself permission to take care of yourself and get support and care from others in the same way you may be advising your staff. Remember that you have to deal with the incident, too.

For help call: PENN Behavioral Health at 1.888.321.4433
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