

How Managers Can Help Employees Cope with Trauma

Keep in mind:

- Everyone responds to trauma in different ways, and individual healing times may vary. Respect your own feelings and those of others.
- Employees may have difficulty concentrating and making decisions. Forgetfulness, irritability and anger may be apparent. These are normal reactions to this situation and they will diminish over time.
- There may be an increase in absenteeism and missed deadlines.
- Some employees may be reluctant or unable to work in certain areas. Various odors, sounds and other sensations may upset them. They may also have difficulty with changes in their work routine or responsibilities.
- Work relationships may be impaired and an increase in employee turnover is a potential occurrence.

What you can do:

- Give employees opportunities to vent or discuss their emotions within a structured setting. Contact the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) to allow for a Critical Incident Stress Debriefing (CISD), a constructive way to process feelings surrounding the trauma.
- Employees sometimes see management as insensitive and in a hurry to get back to work. It is vital to acknowledge employees' feelings and reactions and let them know that you care about them. Tell them you understand, while gently reminding them that getting back to a routine can help contribute to the healing process.
- People have a strong need to do something to help in this situation. Allow employees to come up with a plan of how they can make a contribution to recovery efforts. Examples include a department blood drive or a campaign to raise money for victims' surviving relatives.
- Some employees will have a strong reluctance or refusal to fly, and other phobias may also surface. Urge these individuals to call their EAP for help.

- Be prepared to make some temporary adjustments in deadlines, workloads and expectations. Encourage employees to take breaks away from their work area for a few minutes.
- Practice being a great listener. You don't have to have all the answers. Suggest the EAP as a resource.
- Remind employees to take care of themselves through eating well and getting enough sleep and exercise. Be aware that in stressful situations some individuals may have a tendency to try to "numb the pain" by abusing alcohol or drugs.
- Take good care of yourself. You cannot be in the position to manage and support others if you do not acknowledge your own needs. The EAP is for managers, too.
- Use the EAP as a resource in dealing with employees who don't seem to be showing that they are bouncing back in a reasonable period of time (generally after a few weeks; it's different for everyone depending on their closeness to the trauma and previous experiences). Call for a Management Consultation and speak with a Workplace Support Specialist.