

Employers Can Help When Tragedies Affect the Workplace

These seven ideas will help you to help your employees as they experience either a national, regional or local tragedy, or the life-changing tragedies that occur within your own workplace and life experiences.

Provide Places for People to Gather and Talk

Many people take comfort in being close to others when tragedy strikes. Employers can informally provide opportunities for this interaction by encouraging staff to gather in conference rooms, break rooms, etc. Wheel the television into a break room. Bring in lunch for your staff so people are encouraged to spend time with each other for encouragement, shared grief and support.

Suggest a potluck lunch for the second or third day, depending on the nature of the tragedy. Many people talk incessantly during a tragic event; others suffer silently. You will want to draw your silent people out when possible. Central gatherings will help.

Schedule a Meeting to Share Information

In a national tragedy, people want to know the latest information about what is happening. They want reassurances that they and their loved ones are safe. When tragedy strikes the workplace, it is crucial that leadership be prepared to present a combination of compassion and competence. How leaders respond during the first hours after a disaster can have a lasting impact on the future of the organization. An organization's leader must acknowledge and communicate the personal impact upon the people involved and the organization, sharing as much information as possible while at the same time projecting confidence of transitioning the organization from chaos to structure.

The leader must present as a confident, competent person who is not minimizing the effect of the disaster, but communicates an expectation of recovery.

Without breaking the confidentiality of the people involved, and with their permission, tell people as much as you can. The more legitimate information people have, the less likely they are to depend on rumors, the less time they will spend seeking information. During stressful times, people may not like what they hear... but at least they have information to make better, less impulsive decisions.

Give People Something to Do to Help

In times of sorrow, when people draw together for sustenance, many want something to do to help resolve the problem or to ease the situation. In the instance of terrorist attacks on America, stories of volunteerism, sharing of food and space, giving blood and helping out neighbors and friends abounded. The same kind of stories dominated the response to other natural tragedies, such as hurricanes, tornadoes and floods.

People have a strong desire to help. They may want to bring a casserole to the bereaved family, send flowers to honor the dead and the living, send memories of the employee to the family, and make donations to favorite charities.

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Leaders may hold company meetings, or send electronic communications to bring people up-to-date, sharing how to donate to relief funds, and the location of the nearest blood donor center.

Some organizations hold company raffles, with the money designated for donations; they purchase raffle items with credit card travel points and employees donate other offerings for the raffle. Many employers match the amount collected. Some companies match employee donations up to a certain dollar amount with a receipt from the charity. You can imagine more ways to help that are congruent with your workplace culture.

Make Managers and HR Staff Available

Supervisors and HR staff members are critical company ambassadors during a tragedy. In a study done by the American Psychological Association, employees overwhelmingly listed personal attention from their supervisor as one of the most rewarding aspects of work. Free up your work calendars when tragedy strikes and spend some time walking through the workplace and meeting with people who need support or just provide a listening ear. Be visibly available.

Be Prepared Before a Disaster or Tragedy Strikes

Every organization needs a disaster plan. You also need plans for fire, tornadoes, hurricanes, earthquakes, and any other natural or terrorist disaster that can occur in your area. All employees should be trained in the specifics of the plan. Prepare people about what actions to take if they are confronted with potential injury in the workplace. Think about whatever is likely to happen and make a plan to handle it—in advance.

How Health Advocate Can Help

Turn to your Health Advocate EAP+Work/Life Program:

- **Remind Employees of the Health Advocate Employee Assistance Program**

Our team of trained EAP Professionals are available 24/7 to talk with your employees about dealing with loss, assist with relocation, offer resources for legal and financial issues, help find community resources, and more.

- **Consider Onsite Critical Incident Support**

When tragedy strikes, people are uncertain about what to do. The Health Advocate EAP experts can help educate your staff about grief and loss, the stages of grief, how to deal with grief individually and with coworkers, how to tell children about a tragedy, and more. We will build workplace morale and employee self-confidence, and lessen the long term impacts of tragedy.

Contact us today!

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