



# THE SUPERVISOR/HR NEWSLETTER



HELPFUL RESOURCES FROM YOUR  
EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

JULY  
18

## July Online Seminar

### *Eating Your Way to Wellness*

This session focuses on the USDA's MyPlate with tips and resources on how to eat your way to better and long-lasting health.

Available on-demand starting  
July 17th at [www.deeroakseap.com](http://www.deeroakseap.com)

## 2018 Supervisor Excellence Webinar Series & Leadership Certificate Program

*Managers/supervisors who attend 5 of the 6 webinars will receive the Deer Oaks 2018 Leadership Certificate. Attendance is captured when viewing each recording. There is no other registration needed.*

### Session Recording Links

#### *Preparing to Lead Effectively*

<https://attendee.gotowebinar.com/recording/8571220193555391745?assets=true>

#### *Relationship Excellence for Managers*

<https://attendee.gotowebinar.com/recording/8528081955655269121>

Helpline: 866-327-2400  
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# Manager's Response to Traumatic Events

Developing and following an emergency response plan for certain traumatic events has become a standard management practice in many organizations. If your employer established such a plan, take the time to review it on a regular basis. Our hope is that you will never have cause to activate those procedures. But preparing for the possibility now would be a prudent step to take.

Given in that spirit of preparedness, the following information can be applied to events occurring within or outside the workplace that cause moderate to severe stress reactions to employees. Natural or man-made disasters, serious accidents, acts of violence, and suicide at the workplace are classified as traumatic events.

## First Steps

- Focus on feeling and communicating a calm and controlled attitude. Although difficult, reacting calmly as a leader is critical at this point. Recognize your own anger, anxiety, or frustration, but resist acting out of these emotions. Take a few deep breaths on a regular basis to reduce the effect of stress on your body and mind. Speak in a slow, measured way. Consider your course of action rather than making snap decisions that may have to be changed.
- If your organization has one, follow the emergency response plan and assume that everyone else is doing the same. Depending on the situation, contact 9-1-1, senior management, or other internal responders. You may also need to secure the area, shelter yourself and employees in place, or act in other ways to provide for everyone's safety.
- Keep information and communication lines open. As people will quickly begin to respond emotionally to the event, sharing accurate information with them will reduce speculation and anxiety. Don't be afraid to say, "I don't know." Don't pass on information without confirming the source. Follow up with employees as soon as you obtain new information or answers to their questions.
- Unless security would be compromised, encourage employees to contact their loved ones.

## Your Response to Employees

- Don't view the behavior of people reacting to an abnormal event as psychologically abnormal. People will be affected and will react differently to the event, so be sensitive to those differences. Over time, they will feel better and show signs of recovery. If you become concerned about an employee because of continued physical, emotional, or work performance problems, consult with your manager, employee assistance program (EAP), or other professional resource.
- Interacting with your employees in a compassionate and understanding way will reduce their stress response and prevent increased anxiety and conflict.

- Before employees leave work after the incident, gather facts and solicit their input. Show your compassion and understanding for what they've just gone through. Touch base with each one to assess how they're doing and if they can get support from family or friends that night. Don't be afraid to set a positive example by sharing your own reactions. Advise them to care for themselves in a mindful way: Drink water; limit consumption of alcohol, nicotine, caffeine, and junk food; limit unnecessary driving; take a walk or get some other form of exercise; and get some sleep and rest.

## Helping Staff and the Organization Recover

- Walk through the workplace, and talk with all employees in a caring way. One of the biggest factors in helping the workplace heal is for management to show understanding about how the incident impacted the employees. Inform them that the EAP is an excellent resource for situations like this one.
- If death resulted from the event, give employees the information about the funeral or memorial service and encourage them to attend. If possible, attend yourself, and invite senior management to accompany you. Ask employees if they would like to plan a way to honor the deceased. Allow them time to meet and work out the details.
- Provide regular updates with new information when available. Make sure all employees are informed, even those who did not attend your update meetings. Accurate information is part of the process of recovery and de-escalation from the event.
- Accept that normal work productivity will be reduced for a time. Workloads may need to be temporarily redistributed and deadlines changed. Discuss the changes with employees before making them. Ultimately, a return to normal work schedules and routines will help to establish a sense of normalcy again. Good communication and developing a shared story—"We're all in this together"—will also help restabilize the workplace.
- Consult with your manager and the EAP about the possibility of inviting a counselor from the EAP to meet with your staff. An EAP consultant can also give you guidance about how to manage any employees who are exhibiting behaviors that concern you.
- Based on the circumstances of the traumatic event, you may want to discuss with your manager the need to review security or safety procedures and develop or revise the emergency response plan.
- Lastly, follow the advice you gave employees. Choose healthy and positive ways to manage your own stress response. Monitor your reactions regularly. If you notice that your choices aren't working, consider reaching out to your EAP or another reliable resource to find alternative ways to take care of yourself. Remind yourself that this experience will end, the workplace will stabilize and return to normal, and you will be able to move forward.

## References

*Center for the Study of Traumatic Stress. (n.d.). Psychological first aid: How you can support well-being in disaster victims. Retrieved July 10, 2014, from <http://www.counseling.uconn.edu/>*

*Center for the Study of Traumatic Stress. (n.d.) Recovery in the aftermath of workplace violence: Guidance for supervisors. Retrieved July 10, 2014 from <http://www.docstoc.com/>*

*Source: Sulaski, C. (Reviewed 2017). Manager's response to traumatic events. Raleigh, NC: Workplace Options.*

# Ask Your EAP!

**The following are answers to common questions supervisors have regarding employee issues and making EAP referrals. As always, if you have specific questions about referring an employee or managing a workgroup issue, feel free to make a confidential call to the EAP for a management consultation.**

*Q. We have conducted sexual harassment prevention training for employees and supervisors. I know a channel for bringing complaints forward is also crucial. Can you discuss that, and in particular, precautionary tips for the supervisor who receives such complaints.*

A. Although education is an important prevention measure, another piece of the “prevention/intervention pie” is reinforcement of a complaint procedure so employees understand it and are encouraged to use it. You want to know when employees are being discriminated against, being harassed, or facing other problems like bullying on the job. Periodically remind employees about the complaint procedure, and if you are a supervisor, be careful not to minimize or ignore complaints brought to you by employees. It is easy to ignore indirect complaints, “slight mentions,” and passing comments about problems from victims or third parties. No matter how it is couched, minimized, or diplomatically described to you, treat a complaint as a complaint. Anything less may cause you to overlook victimization. Do not treat harassment complaints as “personality conflicts” in need of some sort of coaching or mediation. Steps like these taken by supervisors that minimize or “define problems down” place organizations at risk of later legal claims that you knew or should have known about the harassing behavior, but did nothing about it.

*Q. How do I coach an employee with a negative attitude? Until now, I have ignored or avoided this employee. Should I continue this approach and coach others to do the same, or intervene? If I intervene, what steps can I use before finally referring to the EAP?*

A. Negativity is an attitude issue within the definition of job performance. Other factors include quality of work, quantity of work, attendance, appearance, behavior, and availability. Meet with your employee and discuss the negativity. Share examples so there is no dispute over what you observe. Negative attitudes can stem from many causes. Some are benign, but off-putting, like a cynical sense of humor. Others are more serious, like major complaints about the organization or supervisor or dislike of one’s job. Your conversation will probably yield a good explanation for the negativity, because most employees are aware of their personality issues gained from past confrontations or relationship struggles with others. Ask your employee how your relationship with him or her can facilitate a more positive disposition. Do not tell others to cope better with negativity.

*Q. A couple of weeks ago, I met with my employee to discuss attendance issues and make a referral to the EAP. The EAP referral was rejected, but surprisingly, attendance has been perfect ever since. Should I tell the EAP about this meeting?*

A. Although this meeting was two weeks ago, let the EAP know about it. Inform your employee you have done so. Encourage use of the program once more. There are a few reasons for doing this. (1) The EA professional may offer guidance to you on managing your employee’s attendance issues. (2) Your employee’s knowledge of your contact with the EAP may facilitate changing his or her mind, and information you supplied will allow a more complete assessment. (3) Your employee may have attendance issues in the near future and realize help is needed, thereby self-referring in a crisis. (4) The EAP would encourage and educate the employee about the value of signing a release.

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