



THE SUPERVISOR/HR NEWSLETTER

Public Employee Benefits Alliance

HELPFUL RESOURCES FROM YOUR
EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

MAY
2021

MAY ONLINE SEMINAR

Addressing Anxiety in an Uncertain World

Learn how to recognize and manage anxiety to actively combat the physical and mental effects in a practical way.

Available on-demand starting
May 18th at
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UPCOMING WEBINARS

2021 Pandemic Support Webinar Series

How to Deal with Anxiety in the Midst of Stressful Circumstances

This past year, our world has been faced with a series of difficult and stressful circumstances that have left many of us feeling anxious. This timely session will discuss several practical approaches to dealing with anxiety including managing our self-talk, expressing our emotions, and seeking appropriate support from others.

Date/Time: July 12, 2021, 1:00-2:00 PM CT

[REGISTER NOW](#) 

2021 Supervisor Excellence Webinar Series

How to Help Your Staff Cope with Change and Uncertainty

As the pandemic continues, many individuals are facing significant stress, changing circumstances, and uncertainty. This important session will provide supervisors and managers with several practical strategies for helping their employees to better manage stress, adjust to changes, and cope with an uncertain future.

Date/Time: May 10, 2021 1:00-2:00 PM CT

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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, pandemics, 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.

Tips for Breaking Bad News

At times managers are required to deliver bad news. The reasons can vary widely, from the death of a coworker to an imminent layoff or a major problem affecting the future of the organization. Recipients of the news will remember how it was delivered as much as they will remember the content. Therefore, managers must take measured steps when delivering such information.

Not surprisingly, research on the most effective ways to deliver bad news originated from the health care field. Doctors and nurses are frequently required to communicate grave news about their patients to family members. The research found certain factors that family members most appreciated when health care professionals shared such serious information. Those factors were the speaker's attitude, privacy, clarity of message, and the speaker's ability to answer questions. Those findings can be applied to the workplace to help managers determine the most effective way to deliver bad news.

Attitude

Depending upon the situation and available time, managers should first consult with senior management, staff from human resources, or the employee assistance program (EAP). Getting additional points of view, new information, and practical advice will help managers prepare for the meeting.

While planning what to say, managers should think about the perspective of those in the audience. It will be useful to figuratively step into employees' shoes and imagine how the news will affect them. By shifting their perspective, managers will be receptive to experiencing empathy. Empathy is the capacity to understand an individual's emotional reactions. Being able to empathize will help a manager prepare for the audience's responses and consider different approaches or solutions to offer during the meeting.

A manager may also have been affected emotionally by the news. If so, acknowledging that fact and setting aside some time before the meeting would be prudent. Taking a few deep breaths, an opportunity for quiet reflection, and/or a quick walk should help reduce the impact of the news. Projecting a calm demeanor to the group will be critical.

Setting

Whenever possible, holding the meeting in a room with a door is optimal. If it is a meeting or conference room, a generous amount of time should be blocked out. Participants won't want to be interrupted by another group that booked the room right afterward. If space is limited, the manager should find an area that is more quiet and removed from customers or unaffected staff.

The manager should attempt to minimize distractions, including turning off his or her cell phone, other communication devices, or loudspeakers. The manager may also wish to ask the audience to turn off their cell phones while in the meeting.

Blocking out enough time in the schedule will allow the manager to continue speaking to people who may still have questions after the meeting. This is an important time to be as available as possible.

Message

The manager should speak to the group with open body language (for example, direct eye contact, relaxed arms). It may help to begin with a statement that allows people to be forewarned and mentally prepared. For example, the manager can say, "Unfortunately, I have bad news," or "I am sorry to have to tell you some bad news." The manager should pause before continuing, but only for a few seconds.

The information should be given honestly, compassionately, and simply, without being overly blunt. The manager should be clear and direct without giving lengthy introductions, historical digressions, or speculations. False sympathy, euphemisms, or overly technical language should be avoided.

If a death or major accident occurred, the manager should inform the group about the EAP and its services. (Discussing this with the EAP before holding the meeting is recommended. The EAP can be helpful in meeting preparation and follow-up.) If a layoff is announced, the manager should share any career counseling or placement services that the employer offers.

The manager should convey any solutions or next steps that were identified prior to the meeting. There may be several or only one. The crisis may present opportunities for the manager and team to make some basic or significant changes. On the other side of the continuum, the manager may only be able to invite the audience to discuss how they would like to respond as a group to a coworker's death. The key is that the manager has come to the meeting prepared to bring up the discussion of "what now?"

Answering Questions

Managers should be prepared for their listeners to react with a possible range of emotion, from crying and tears to anger and raised voices. Each situation will be different based on the circumstances and people involved. A manager should use active listening skills to provide a calm, understanding, and accepting environment. Validating emotions, even if the manager doesn't feel the same way, will be an effective response.

Even if unable to answer every question, the manager should reply to all of them. When necessary, the manager should admit the need to consult with others and promise to get back with the answer. That promise should be kept.

Following Up

When subsequent details or next steps are appropriate to share, managers should develop a system for communicating them. They should be aware of differing reactions among employees, and consult with their manager or human resources if a particular employee is having difficulty coping after the stressful event. Offering information about resources like the EAP and being available for further discussions is necessary at this time. When a significant event affects the workplace, management should remain visible and accessible whenever possible.

References

Millikan, J. S. (2003). *On the other side of the door*. *The Journal of Trauma, Injury, Infection and Critical Care*, 55, 1007-1013. doi: 10.1097/01.TA.0000083339.93868.13

Mind Tools. (n.d.). *Delivering bad news: Communicating well under pressure*. Retrieved July 10, 2014, from <http://www.mindtools.com>

Source: Sulaski, C. (Reviewed 2017). *Tips for breaking bad news*. 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. I understand that presenteeism is the practice of employees coming to work while sick or adversely affected by emotional distress. What about employees who work remotely? What can supervisors do to help them, and do they have the same issues?

A. When applied to remote workers, presenteeism is sometimes referred to as “e-presenteeism.” With any type of presenteeism, employees are “there without really being there.” They are working while sick or emotionally stressed or with distracting concerns that diminish their ability to be fully effective. E-presenteeism is a more recent concern among human resource professionals; it appeared in the literature coinciding with the coronavirus pandemic. Most people have been affected by the pandemic. Employees experiencing anxiety, burnout, isolation, and loneliness may wander into their home office, log long hours, do so sick or not, and not perform to their fullest capacity. One survey found 80% of human resource managers fear a subculture of this low-level productivity could slowly dominate the remote worker environment. Ultimately, loss of workers is the risk if employees burn out and quit. Awareness of e-presenteeism is important. As a supervisor, be a good listener, delegate assignments with awareness, and don’t hesitate to recommend the EAP for life stressors employees disclose. Learn more at www.theundercoverrecruiter.com/epresenteeism-burnout/.

Q. I need to be more self-confident. I don’t know if it is a learned trait or a natural part of one’s temperament, but can the EAP help? Also, how does acting and feeling confident influence the work unit?

A. Confident supervisors have more resilience when the going gets tough. Confidence is also an attractive feature of a leader because it in turn inspires employee confidence as it is modeled by subordinates. Confident supervisors who communicate and are empathic are less likely to have high turnover in their work units. Ask the EAP how it can coach you or identify resources to speed you toward your goal of being more confident. The following are habits of confident supervisors: 1) viewing yourself as confident; 2) fending off self-doubt; 3) making decisions with higher risk-reward outcomes; 4) visualizing goals and behaving as though success is certain; and 5) viewing setbacks as opportunities for correction and greater achievement.

Q. I want to show maximum respect to my employees rather than overlook important ways to demonstrate that I value their expertise. I know this will build morale and enhance my relationship with them. So, what are the areas of interaction with them that I should consider?

A. The more you engage in respectful behaviors, the more your relationship deepens. Consider the following. 1) Respect and value your employee’s time by acknowledging it when delegating assignments. 2) If you promise something to an employee, deliver on it. 3) If you set a meeting time, don’t forget it. 4) Don’t offer an assignment without explaining what’s expected. 5) Use empathy to identify what employees need in order to be productive. 6) Reach out; don’t wait for a request or complaint to come if you anticipate it. 7) Never act like an employee is replaceable. Ultimately, an employee might be easily replaced, but don’t use this as a force in your relationship. 8) Treat employees as the experts, which means asking them for their ideas, opinions, and suggestions first. For example, if you need a new file cabinet and want an opinion on what kind, ask the administrative assistant first.

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