

# Employee Assistance Program *Tip Sheet*

## Trauma in the Workplace: A Guide for Managers



Following a traumatic workplace event, getting work done while taking care of employees can be one of the most difficult challenges a manager can face. There are, however, some management approaches that have proved helpful in these situations, which your Employee Assistance Program (EAP) has outlined below.

- **Communicate with your employees.**

Keeping open lines of communication is important at all times, but especially during times when tensions may be running high. Provide accurate and up-to-date information and permission for your employees to approach you with their questions. It is also important to take stock of your own reactions to an event. It may be difficult for you to communicate with employees if you find yourself withdrawing from other people or becoming less flexible than usual. Both are common stress responses but can interfere with your leadership effectiveness if left unmonitored.

- **Encourage teamwork, cooperation, and support.**

In stressful situations there is no substitute for a supportive, caring work group. Employees will have an easier time coping if they are surrounded by coworkers who care about them and will listen if they need to talk or lend a hand if they need help. A group accustomed to teamwork rather than internal competition may be able to cover for members who are temporarily unable to function at 100% effectiveness. Encourage and validate teamwork, cooperation, and taking care of each other. Make it clear that this is a difficult period, and it is ok to share feelings of anxiety, sadness, fatigue, frustration, and other responses.

- **Set clear work standards.**

Maintain your typical standards but allow as much flexibility as possible in terms of how the work gets done. For many, returning to a routine is beneficial. Set clear standards but give employees some freedom in working out ways to meet them during this time. Check with your human resource department about how much flexibility you have with regards to temporarily adjusting work hours, approving administrative leave, and options to work from other locations. You and your employees may have options that you have not considered.

**“Occasionally, the traumatic event is so painful that professional assistance may be necessary. This does not imply mental instability or weakness. It simply indicates that the particular event was just too powerful for the person to manage by himself.”**

*International Critical Incident Stress Foundation, Inc.*

- **Encourage your employees to use the EAP.**

Long term stress can wear down the coping resources of even the strongest person, and it makes sense to get extra support in order to process the event and minimize long term impacts. One strategy is to bring in an Employee Assistance Program (EAP) Counselor to talk to the group about stress management. Besides learning from the presentation, your employees will develop a personal contact which can make it easier to turn to the EAP if they need it. If an employee comes to you directly and is in distress or having a hard time coping, an option is to encourage them to let you call the EAP, introduce them, and then turn the phone over to them. Step away and give them privacy while they talk to the counselor.

- **Help facilitate a connection to the EAP.**

If an employee comes to you directly and is in distress or expresses that they are having a hard time coping, an option is to encourage them to let you call the EAP. You would call the toll-free number below, introduce them, and then turn the phone over to them. Step away and give them privacy with they talk to the counselor. They EAP can offer support as well as connecting them with a local counselor that they can meet with at no cost.

If you have particular concerns about an employee, your team, or want to be sure you're doing everything you can to help your team recover following an incident, reach out to your EAP. Our experienced Workplace Specialists can offer advice and guidance to help support you during this time. Consultation services are unlimited for managers and completely confidential. Call the toll-free number and choose the option for a management consultation.

- **Call the EAP to consult with a member of our Management Services Team.**

You may have already contacted the EAP to set up a *Critical Incident Stress Debriefing* (if not, reach out to us to discuss this option by calling the number below). Debriefings are facilitated by a crisis intervention specialist and conducted soon after the event. Debriefings cover: understanding stress responses; what to expect in the weeks and months that follow; coping and stress management strategies; and when to seek help. The goal of the CISD is to mitigate long-term negative impacts of having experienced a trauma, both first-hand or second hand, such as post-traumatic stress disorder.

- **Take care of yourself.**

Don't underestimate the impact of stress on you as an individual. Make sure you're noticing any signs of o your own stress management program and use your resources for professional consultation and counseling. Making sure others are taken care of can take a toll physically and emotionally. Your EAP can support you during this time.



**CALL TOLL-FREE, 24/7:**  
1.800.833.3031



**WEBSITE:**

[www.EAPHelplink.com](http://www.EAPHelplink.com)  
Code: IOWA