

Dealing With Traumatic Events - A Manager's Guide

When traumatic events take place in our society, we may notice certain behavioral or emotional changes in ourselves and in our work colleagues. During this time of uncertainty, employees typically display a number of different signs and symptoms. These symptoms can result in decreased productivity and focus in the workplace.

Employee Signs to watch for.

Nervousness in the office	Withdrawal from other colleagues
Agitation/Quick temper	Lack of focus at work
Poorly prepared or incomplete work	Poor concentration
Lethargy	Indecisiveness
Confusion or forgetfulness	Depression
Frequent breaks	Signs of alcohol/drug use
Fear of the future	Frequent conversations about the event

The majority of these signs/symptoms are normal emotional reactions and generally change after a couple of weeks. However, if you see these signs persist it may be an indication that the employee is struggling to come to terms with the situation.

What can you do to help your employees.

As a manager, you can have a profound effect on your employees by acknowledging your awareness of stress and anxiety, and by showing concern for an employee's well-being. Many of your staff will be looking to you as a source of strength, stability and guidance. You can help your staff, and yourselves, through this period by keeping in mind the following guidelines:

- Listen and be supportive of your staff. Avoid advice giving. Focus on hearing your employee's concerns.
- Be calm and supportive of your staff. Your staff will respond to and follow the example that you set.
- Encourage discussion of concerns but during appropriate times, such as lunch or after work.
- Be understanding if your staff's focus and efficiency is not at optimum levels during this period.
- Keep to routine as much as possible.
- Ask your staff what would help them through this time.
- Do not dismiss employee concerns with statements like, "It's not so bad", or "You should just get over this and get back to work."
- Be clear and honest about the limits of your ability to help. Do not take everyone's problems as your own and do not feel like you have to have a solution for every problem. Refer your employees to your Johns Hopkins Employee Assistance Program (JHEAP) for more professional help, when necessary. Their 24/7/365 toll-free line is 888-978-1262.

Finally, be aware of your own feelings and concerns during this period. JHEAP is available to assist you and your staff through this time. Please give us a call if you need any help.