

The Days and Weeks After Workplace Violence: Practical Tips for Supervisors

Workplace violence is unexpected and traumatic. People directly affected can undergo stress and trauma that disrupt feelings of safety in both the personal and employment worlds. Of the many steps to healing, there are four in which a supervisor can take **immediately** to help employees deal with, heal and move forward after experiencing violence in the workplace:

- **Restore a sense of control** – Provide employees with information about what will be happening immediately and over next few hours and days as far as assistance from law enforcement (e.g. security, FBI, police interventions).
- **Help calm nerves** – Give the employees water to drink, a place to sit down, fresh air and a reminder to breathe deeply to calm the body's reactions.
- **Emphasize community** – Support from management and co-workers is **very** important.
- **Request professional guidance** – Call your EAP for a consultation: **800-EAP4YOU (TTY: 877-492-7341)**

As with any managerial challenge, your prior experiences and personal coping style will influence how you handle the situation, but the following tips will help you be better prepared.

Immediate actions to help your employees cope:

Assess your own responses – Do a self-inventory. In a crisis, do you remain calm or become anxious? Along with taking care of the business needs, do you attend to human and emotional needs? Is your first reaction to jump to conclusions and/or be critical, or is it to get all the information before responding? Knowing how you respond to a crisis is valuable. Check if you are thinking clearly or whether you need help yourself before you can help others.

Assess what the employees need – Check in with each employee. Explain to everyone, particularly to the affected employee(s), that they may be asked to tell what happened multiple times. This isn't because law enforcement and other authorities don't believe them, it's because they hope to get more information with each retelling. Each agency has its own objectives.

Arrange transportation home for the affected employee(s) – They often won't want to leave the work-site alone. Affected employees may be scared and this is a normal response.

Seek consultation with the EAP and Human Resources – The USPS EAP provides support services at all phases of adjustment following community and workplace violence. Responses can include printed material distribution, phone consultations, on-site debriefing and in-person appointments.

Assisting your employees in the days ahead

- **Check in with the affected employee(s)** – If the employee isn't at work, take time to call him or her at home, even if it's the weekend. Let them know you are thinking of them and they have a support system. If you have performance concerns, wait to discuss them.
- **Don't forget other employees' feelings** – Check in with each employee individually, even if they were not directly involved. You never know how individual reactions can vary. Violence can stir up prior confrontations with danger or trauma.
- **Ease the affected employee(s) back into work** – If the incident was severe or if the employee is reluctant to return to work, consider changing their assignment within that workplace when possible. This changes the visual reminders of the traumatic event, which can speed up the healing process.
- **Encourage a return to normalcy** – Getting back to a normal routine will help with healing. Be supportive and check in with the affected employee(s) on how they're doing, coping, etc.
- **Reinforce a sense of community to aid healing** – Bring in donuts or lunch for all. Help the employees feel welcome and safe again in their work environment with simple, caring gestures.

Managing continued employee stress over the coming weeks

Emotions can remain high for days and even weeks that follow a violent event, so continue to check in with everyone. Even though you may have moved forward to business as usual, some people may still be feeling the effects of the trauma, especially those directly affected by the event. Be sure to remind everyone that the affected employee(s) may take longer to heal emotionally.

Be sure to keep Human Resources apprised of your employees' emotional recovery. They are your partners in helping people remain productive and healthy. If you have questions or need further assistance helping employees work through specific emotional issues, call the EAP staff at New Directions Behavioral Health. Trained counselors are available 24/7 to help you resolve questions and concerns which can come up after a traumatic event.

Your EAP is here for you.

We're available to talk 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

This material was developed exclusively at the private expense of New Directions Behavioral Health, L.L.C. and constitutes limited rights data/restricted special works consistent with the provisions of the United States Postal Service (USPS) Supplying Principles and Practices. Use of this material is authorized in connection with EAP services provided by New Directions under contract no. 2BMICS-18-0013 and conveys no additional rights.