

RESPONDING TO STAFF AFTER ADVERSE EVENTS

Use this checklist to help you to effectively respond to your staff after incidents that may have been traumatic for them.

ADDRESS SAFETY & PHYSICAL NEEDS FIRST

- ☐ If safety is an issue, assist employee in identifying necessary steps to help them feel safe.
- ☐ Ensure staff's physical needs are met (e.g., water, tissues, food).

BE AWARE OF COMMON STRESS/TRAUMA REACTIONS

- ☐ Anger, frustration, irritability
- ☐ Withdrawal, isolation, tearfulness, uncontrollable crying
- ☐ Shock, confusion, disorientation, denial
- ☐ Shaking, dizziness, chest pain, other physical complaints

CONFIRM YOUR SUPPORT

- ☐ Acknowledge that everyone responds to stress differently. Employees may experience many different feelings at the same time; there are no "right" ways to respond to traumatic events.
- ☐ Sometimes just being present and listening is the most important thing you can do. It's okay if you don't know the "right words" to say.

DON'T TRY TO FIX THE PROBLEM

- ☐ Avoid statements with good intentions like "I understand how you feel" and "Everything will be fine."
- ☐ There is often no satisfying explanation for what has happened. Don't try to explain or make sense out of a critical incident.
- ☐ Give information only if you are sure it has been verified. It is common in crisis situations for the "facts" to change and result in miscommunication and confusion.

ENSURE PRACTICAL RESOURCES ARE AVAILABLE FOR STAFF

- ☐ If possible, offer employees a quiet area for making calls or taking a break.
- ☐ Allow flexibility with employees' schedules and time-off. Employees may need time to arrange funeral services, run errands, support family members, or just to process what has happened.
- ☐ Have appropriate handouts available on related topics, such as coping with stress or grief.
- ☐ Provide the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) phone number to any employee who may need one-on-one support. Post the EAP phone number where all employees can see it: (800) 343-2186
- ☐ Empower employees to ask for what they need in order to cope. (e.g., "What would be most helpful?")
- ☐ Encourage employees to rest and take time for personal activities and self-care.

AVOID THESE COMMON MISTAKES THAT SUPERVISORS MAKE

- ☐ Don't ignore the situation. Just because staff seem fine doesn't mean they don't have questions or needs.
- ☐ Don't delay! Respond quickly and provide appropriate supports and resources to staff.
- ☐ Don't stifle communication. Employees need to and will talk through an incident with or without supervisor support. Foster a work environment in which staff can talk openly and get the support they need.

FIND TIME FOR YOURSELF

- ☐ Be aware of your own emotions and needs. It is difficult to support others when you have neglected to take care of yourself.

