

10 Tips For Supporting Staff After Traumatic Events

After a traumatic event, managers often struggle to know how to help their staff cope.

After traumatic events, people's emotional experience is often the reality that they will remember most clearly.

If staff feel that their manager and the organization as a whole genuinely care about them, that will make the experience easier to bear and less traumatic over time.

This resource offers advice to managers about how they can support their staff and promote resilience and wellbeing after traumatic events.

If you have an Employee Resilience Program with KonTerra, you may also seek support during a Manager Consultation.

Gather the team together: Gather your team together to update them, reassure them, and let them know what you and the organization expect from them during this time.

Discuss what happened: Disclose as much as possible within the boundaries of confidentiality and what you judge is helpful to the people most centrally involved. Provide regular updates as you are able. This will help prevent unhelpful speculation and uncertainty.

Normalize feelings and fears: Acknowledge that staff may experience complex and difficult feelings related to this event (e.g., scared, anxious, guilty, sad) and that this is normal. Provide staff with information on stress/trauma reactions and on taking care of themselves after a traumatic event.

Give staff permission to take care of themselves and encourage them to support one another: If it is not a business-as-usual experience, it cannot be business as usual at work. Let staff know that you do not expect them to continue on as if nothing has happened. Tell them that it is okay to take time off if they wish (and are able) and to take extra breaks. Encourage staff to support each other.

Reduce demands: Staff will be distracted and distressed, so reduce job demands in the immediate aftermath of a traumatic event and allow extra time to complete tasks. Postpone decisions and initiatives. Do what you can to reduce work-related pressure.

Set up rumor control: Let employees know that it is okay to talk about their feelings connected with the event or tragedy but ask them to refrain from unhelpful speculation or discussion. Tell staff you will keep them as up to date as you are able. Designate a person or people (supervisors, team leaders, etc.) to stay in touch with you so that up-to-date information is available to the employees. Keep them informed as new information arises.

Remind staff about the resources that are available to them: Remind staff of any counseling or other support resources that are available to them. Provide them with contact details and other information that makes it easier for them to reach out for support. Remember, you may also reach out for support. Modeling good self-care and seeking support yourself can send powerful messages to your team.

Thank and affirm staff: Tell staff that the organization considers its people to be its most valuable asset and that their physical and emotional safety is a top priority for you and the organization. Thank them for their efforts and dedication to their work.

Invite people to seek you out: Let staff know your door is open to discuss these events or anything else in coming days.

Follow up with those who may have been deeply impacted or who are showing signs of distress: Give people room to react in their own ways but seek out those showing signs of stress after a week or two and follow up with them.