Coping After a Workplace Critical Incident

Deer Oaks EAP Services

What is a Critical Incident?

A traumatic event, known in the workplace as a critical incident, is any event that causes an unusually intense stress reaction.

Some examples include:

- Serious injury/death of a fellow staff member
- Cumulative events involving serious trauma
- Unexpected death of an employee
- Suicide
- Workplace violence
- Stress resulting from impending layoffs or organizational changes

Whether you experience the incident first hand, are a witness, or hear about it from others, a critical incident can jeopardize your physical and/or psychological integrity, as well as those close to you. *It is common and normal to experience emotional aftershocks following a horrible event.* However, distress and substantial stress may limit your ability to cope, impair your ability to adjust and negatively impact your work environment.

Signs & Symptoms of a Stress Reaction

The stress response is a natural reaction to any challenge, no matter how small. Stress levels can increase considerably when unexpected, out of the ordinary events occur that further challenge our usual coping skills. Sometimes the stress reaction appears after a few hours or days following the event. Other times, signs and symptoms will appear after a few weeks or even months.

Some common signs and symptoms of stress include:

- Anger
- Depression
- Frustration, Irritability
- Grief, Fear, Guilt
- Doubt or Anxiety
- Overwhelmed or Disheartened
- Panic, Emotional Outbursts
- Confusion, Memory Lapses
- Suspiciousness, Apprehension
- Withdrawal from other coworkers
- Loss or Increase in Appetite
- Poor Problem Solving & Decision-Making
- Nausea, Fatigue
- Headaches, Dizziness

Steps to Coping with Post-Trauma Stress

DON'T:

- Drink alcohol excessively
- Use legal or illegal substances to numb consequences
- Withdraw from significant others
- Skip work
- Have unrealistic expectations for recovery
- Look for easy answers

DO:

- Get ample rest
- Take time for leisure activities
- Exercise regularly and maintain a good diet
- Spend time with family and friends
- Learn how to talk to others and use your support systems
- Help your coworkers as much as possible by sharing feelings and asking how they are doing
- Normalize post-trauma consequences- accept certain aspects of the circumstance can not be changed
- Develop realistic goals and a plan to move towards those goals
- See crises as challenges- not insurmountable ordeals
- Keep things in perspective and take decisive action

Seek Support From Your EAP

It is a normal and understandable reaction to feel overwhelmed, frustrated, stressed, depressed, confused and worried in challenging times. Sometimes even to feel less confident in yourself. This is especially true if what you are going through has a significant negative impact on your daily functioning.

Seeking professional support is an essential step in dealing with these reactions. Getting help when you need it is a good way to take control of your life. Deer Oaks is here to provide free, confidential guidance and resources when you need it most.

Remember:

- EAP counseling services are a great resource when you are experiencing a very stressful situation
- Short-term counseling can provide you with tools to help you cope with the challenges; it gives you a chance to talk things over with someone supportive who has a fresh perspective
- Your EAP benefit is a great way to access counseling quickly and easily at no cost to you
- Telephonic crisis and supportive counseling services are available 24/7
- Deer Oaks offers other work/life balance services that can help you to ease the burden of daily stressors such as legal/financial consultations, assistance locating child and elder care facilities and a website with tools, tips and resources on a variety of issues
- All services are confidential

Life Can Be Hectic. Your EAP Can Help.

DEER OAKS EAP SERVICES

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