

## Managing the Impact of Random Violence

Random violence may spark intense feelings of fear and anxiety. These feelings may affect every aspect of a person's life. Traumatic stress overwhelms a person's coping mechanism, leaving him or her feeling helpless. Symptoms of traumatic stress can include:

- disbelief
- anxiety
- depression
- numbness
- fear
- anger
- gastrointestinal upset
- chest pains
- nightmares
- intrusive stimuli
- rapid heart rate
- headache
- poor concentration
- forgetfulness
- distractibility
- startle response
- hypervigilance
- avoidance behaviors

While coping with traumatic stress is an individual process, there are some steps managers can take to help an employee in distress. When responding to employees under significant stress, it is helpful to keep in mind the acronym "ACT": **A**cknowledge, **C**ommunicate and **T**ransition.

### **Acknowledge the event as traumatic.**

Don't minimize the situation or try to make your employee "feel better."

Make frequent but not constant eye contact.

Keep your arms and hands in a relaxed, open and helpful posture. Avoid standing with your arms folded in front of your chest.

Physical proximity communicates support. Individuals in distress may want you to be near but may not want to be touched.

### **Communicate care and confidence.**

1. Convey care, concern and commitment to action.
2. Speak in a calm, confident and controlled manner.
3. Reflect back what you hear the other person saying.
4. Keep communication simple, direct, repetitive and precise.
5. Respond to the anxious by calmly reassuring.
6. Allow those who are angry to ventilate (don't personalize).
7. Provide information to those who feel a loss of control and social support to those feeling alienated.

### **Transition toward next steps.**

1. Limit exposure to stressful stimuli.
2. Help reunite natural groups.
3. Refer to appropriate support person/caregiver as needed.

4. Facilitate short-term problem solving.
5. Respond to chaos by adding structure.
6. Provide direction to those who feel helpless.

Sometimes an employee may need the assistance of a professional. If this is the case, call your Employee Assistance Program (EAP). Professional counselors are available 24 hours a day to address your concerns and assist you in referring an employee to the EAP.

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