

## After a Traumatic Incident in the Workplace: How the EAP Can Help Managers and Supervisors

No matter how much we try to ensure a safe and healthy workplace, sometimes traumatic incidents occur, such as: natural disasters, workplace accidents, man-made catastrophes, and serious illness and death. As a supervisor, it is appropriate for you to prepare an action plan in case significant incidents do occur in your work area.

Historically, organizations handled traumatic incidents by moving quickly to “business as usual”. This approach ignored or denied the true weight felt by employees. Only recently have many employers acknowledged that the emotional impact of traumatic workplace incidents can impair work performance, safety, group morale, physical health, and psychological well-being. Experts now know that immediate employee support after an incident aids in recovery and helps prevent long-term psychological damage. Studies report that employees who receive such services miss less work, require less medical treatment, and file fewer disability and legal claims against their employer.

Since your organization has an Employee Assistance Program (EAP), you will receive the following services to help you and your employees after a traumatic incident.

### Management consultation

After an incident, EAP professionals can help you with:

- Family notification in case of serious or fatal injury.
- Determining the level of functioning of affected employees and their ability to remain at work.
- Identifying intervention services available to employees.
- Communication to other employees.
- Understanding the symptoms of delayed stress reaction to look for after employees return to work.

**Immediate intervention:** EAP professionals can be available to employees soon after an incident to provide a supportive environment. This helps instill a sense of safety and security. They don’t conduct counseling sessions, but they do validate employees’ experiences by allowing them to tell their stories.

**Debriefings** are confidential, nonjudgmental, emotionally supportive, and educational sessions led by EAP professionals to help employees return to their level of functioning prior to the incident. Typically held 24 to 72 hours after the incident, these sessions are conducted for everyone involved in the incident. Debriefings give participants information about trauma and grief reactions to help them understand that their personal experiences are normal responses. The group experience lessens the isolation that trauma often creates. This also helps employees re-establish healthy social networks and learn coping strategies.

**Follow-up:** For a few people, the trauma may affect them in severe ways for longer periods of time and warrant professional help. If you have an employee whose job performance deteriorates after an incident, it is critical that you consult with an EAP professional for the sake of the employee and workplace. Time away from work and counseling are often needed to prevent the development of post-traumatic stress disorder.

**Self-care:** Supervisors often are the last to realize the personal toll that a workplace traumatic incident can take on their own well-being. Healthy lifestyle habits and finding support from family, friends, and professionals such as EAP counselors are just as important for you as for your employees. Don't forget to take care of yourself, too!

## **Resources**

*National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization*

*Grief in the Workplace: Helping Employees Cope After a Critical Incident*

*By Cynthia Sulaski, MSW, CEAP*

**Looking for additional support? We're here to help.**

**Website:** [carelonwellbeing.com/tenet](https://carelonwellbeing.com/tenet) | **Toll-free:** 866-335-2340