



From inConfidence™, your Employee and Family Assistance Program:

PROVIDING SUPPORT TO EMPLOYEES DURING/AFTER A NATURAL DISASTER

Guidelines for Managers and Key Personnel

In light of the current situation related to the impact of the recent floods, many people are feeling anxious and worried about the aftermath of the consequences of this disaster. The impact of environmental disasters tends to result in additional feelings of insecurity and collective vulnerability.

Some of your employees may experience a range of reactions to this unsettling event. Many will be concerned about the damages to their homes and the impact on their families. Some people may become distracted, anxious, and less productive in their day-to-day functioning. These feelings are all perfectly normal and understandable.

Managers will find some employees are more affected than others. Employees' reactions also depend on their current life stressors and their association with previous natural disasters or traumatic events.

It is natural that during this time, and for some ensuing period, collective productivity of your staff will diminish. At the same time, as crisis tends to bring people together, your staff may have developed closer connections and improved relationships within the group.

Returning to work following this event is a process in which levels of well-being may take several days to return to normal. Employees may still face additional responsibilities at home or in their community.

Typical Stress Reactions

Employees are resilient; however some will exhibit more reactions and may need additional support in order to cope. Typically, some people experiencing stress do not openly communicate their anxieties. Often, the only observable signs may be behaviours such as:

- Increased absenteeism
- Difficulty concentrating, attending to tasks, easily distracted
- Uncharacteristic decline or change in performance
- Unusual irritation and agitation
- Unusually high expectations directed at managers to answer questions and ensure employee safety
- Withdrawal as a result of concerns about financial security, housing and other potential losses
- Expressions of anxiety and vulnerability
- Active conversations about safety and personal crisis plans
- Preoccupation with media reports



How Managers can support employees

Disasters are strongly related to a loss of control and influence over what is happening. Therefore, a primary consideration for managers is to provide a supportive environment in which control, confidence and competence can be regained. It is helpful to:

- Acknowledge employees' concerns in a respectful and non-intrusive manner.
- Feel free to acknowledge some of your own concerns and reactions to the crisis.
- Recognize and acknowledge, in a non-judgmental way, that employees may have different emotions, attitudes and opinions related to this situation.
- Remind employees that they each have a very unique and resourceful way of coping with stressful events and to continue to draw on their natural resilience.
- Urge employees to reach out to people they feel close to.
- Inform staff experiencing anxiety that these feelings may vary from day to day and may be different than the feelings and thoughts of those around them.
- Prompt employees to focus their attention on matters over which they have influence.
- Demonstrate that you are as concerned about your employees as you are about work objectives.
- Address critical changes in performance in a timely, clear manner while conveying understanding of anxiety and stress for employees.
- Provide information regarding dedicated resources to address specific concerns.

Resources and Support for Employees

- Provide information on EFAP and other community resources that are available to employees and family members (*see telephone numbers below*).
- Request debriefing to help employees deal with the immediate impact of the critical incident and organizational stress situations.
- Consider Group Stress and Anxiety workshops that provide education on managing anxiety.



Key Considerations for Managers

1. Be visible and manage employee anxiety and fear by walking around, listening, asking questions and being seen as delivering solutions. Effectiveness is increased if leaders receive information and coaching on how to manage affected employees.
2. Communicate frequently. Should this crisis directly affect your organization, conduct regular and daily communications. This should ideally occur at the same time each day and contain practical and accurate information for employees.
3. If your workplace has been directly affected by the floods, ensure that all key roles and responsibilities relating to the effective management of employees during a crisis are clearly understood and communicated.
4. Provide employees with clear information regarding how to access internal and external resources, including the EFAP.
5. Reaching out and supporting employees at a time when you may also be affected by the events of last week can be stressful, so it is essential that you take good care of yourself and seek consultation and/or support, if needed.

The Benefits of *inConfidence™*, your Employee and Family Assistance Program (EFAP)

Sometimes just talking to a professional EFAP counsellor can help you regain a healthy perspective on the traumatic event you've just experienced. EFAP is a free, totally confidential service available to you 24 hours a day, seven days a week. You can reach us anytime by calling us at **1-866-347-2067**.

Visit our online services at www.inconfidence.ca