

Your Employee Assistance Program is a support service that can help you take the first step toward change.

Disasters

Wikipedia defines the term disaster quite nicely:

"A disaster is a natural or man-made event that negatively affects life, property, livelihood or industry often resulting in permanent changes to human societies, ecosystems and environment."

As the definition suggests, disasters are highly disruptive events that cause suffering, deprivation, hardship, injury and even death, as a result of direct injury, disease, the interruption of commerce and business, and the partial or total destruction of critical infrastructure such as homes, hospitals, and other buildings, roads, bridges, power lines, etc. Disasters can be caused by naturally occurring events, such as earthquakes, hurricanes, flooding, or tornadoes, or they can be due to man-made events, either accidental (such as an accidental toxic spill or nuclear power plant event), or deliberately caused (such as various terrorist bombings and poisonings).

Certain types of natural disasters are more likely to occur in particular parts of the world. For instance, areas near coastline, lakes or rivers are more likely to experience flooding problems than are land-locked areas. However, most every place you could live is prone to one type of natural disaster or another. No place is absolutely safe from natural disaster. And, of course it goes without saying that no place is safe from the threat of terrorism and other man-made disaster events.

It may be impossible to avoid disasters, but it isn't impossible to plan ahead of time so as to minimize the impact that any given disaster might have on you or your family's health, safety and property. There are steps you can take ahead of time, including, purchasing the proper types of insurance, preparing a disaster kit and supplies, making a disaster plan and rehearsing it with your family, and staying informed so that you can do your best to get out of the way of predictable dangerous occurrences, that can help you, your family, and your property stay as safe as possible.

Helping Employees Cope with a Natural Disaster

Some steps you can take to help employees cope:

- Acknowledge the event as tragic and, at this point in time, perhaps ongoing.
- Provide those employees who are affected with an opportunity to talk about their fear, horror, helplessness and grief.
- Allow them to talk about what they saw, felt, and experienced, including physical reactions in response to this tragic event (such as nausea, sleeplessness, and loss of appetite).
- Let employees know that it is completely normal to be experiencing such a wide range of reactions in response to this event.
- Encourage employees to do all that they need to do to feel safe, while at the same time acknowledging and talking about the traumatic nature of the event.
- Remind employees to work towards normalizing and focusing on their daily experience as much as possible – eating regular meals, getting periods of rest and reducing the amount and frequency of mentally demanding tasks.
- Encourage employees to stay in close contact with loved ones, and keep close communication with their children.
- Provide employees with written information acknowledging the nature of the event, and what kind of services may be available to help them.
- Encourage employees to call, as needed, and speak with an EAP counselor.

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- Provide written information, in the form of handouts, concerning what they can do to help themselves and one another cope and recover from the traumatic impact of this event.