

Helping Employees Cope with the Anniversary of September 11th

Anniversaries of tragedies can be difficult times for many people. For some, especially those family members and friends who were directly touched, the anniversary of September 11th is a powerful reminder of loss. For others, who thought they had put the tragedy behind them, the anniversary may produce unexpected anxiety and grief.

Most Americans were at work when they watched the horror of September 11th unfold. When the second anniversary of that tragic date arrives, Americans will again be at work, perhaps reliving the events of that morning. The anniversary is certain to trigger a wide range of emotions.

How Employers can Help their Employees

- **Mark the day in some way.** This date in our country's history cannot possibly be ignored. It has great significance to everyone. Acknowledge the day in whatever way your organization decides, but do acknowledge it. Get input from your staff. Whether it's a special edition of your employee newsletter, a donation to a local group, or simply a moment of silence, make sure that all employees are invited to participate. Make whatever arrangements are necessary in advance to ensure everyone has the opportunity to take part. Everyone should also have the option to refrain from participating.
- **Educate your supervisors and managers** in advance about the signs of emotional distress and available mental health resources so they can advise their staff. It's especially important for them to be responsive to employees with special needs, whether it's those who lost a loved one on September 11th, someone with a family member on active duty with the military, or someone dealing with a mental health or drug abuse problem. Be alert to new employees, who may have suffered a loss or have issues you don't yet know about.
- **Provide educational resources.** Your employee assistance program (EAP), human resources unit and/or local mental health association may have educational materials and information on covered treatment resources. Make sure to have up-to-date provider listings, as well as information about available benefits and the processes for accessing care.
- **Facilitate communication among employees.** Support from their colleagues can help people work through difficulties. Consider allowing people to break from work periodically to talk. Provide a comfortable environment where they can gather.
- **Promote tolerance.** Warn employees that you will not tolerate hostility directed at members of specific ethnic or religious groups, in the workplace, among your customers or in the

community. Supervisors should challenge discriminatory remarks or actions, or any form of harassment, and take appropriate disciplinary action.

- **Have a professional counselor at the workplace.** This is particularly important if your organization was directly affected by the events of September 11th. A professional, or group of professionals, can lead a group meeting and provide individual counseling. This approach can help lift everyone's spirits and give extra help to those who need it. Look to your company Employee Assistance Program (EAP) for ideas on appropriate topics and guest speakers.
- **Host a community event.** Hold a blood drive at your worksite, collect clothes and household items for a local shelter, collect donations for "care packages" for military personnel, or host a special event for some heroes in your community. Doing something positive for others will help everyone feel they have some control over what happens to them.
- **Make allowances in your leave policy.** Allow people time off who wish to do something positive on this day (volunteering at community organizations, visiting family members, etc). Activities that help people feel they're making a difference will lift their spirits. And they'll share that improved morale at the workplace.
- **Plan for future emergencies.** Use this day as an opportunity to create or review your organization's emergency plan. Make sure to involve all your staff. Knowing there's a plan will help promote some peace of mind.

For More Information:

For a free and confidential mental health screening, go on-line to www.mhacolorado.org.

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