



Spring 2005

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(1) Challenge of the Day - How to Respond to Group Needs after an Employee Crisis

Workplace accidents and medical emergencies can create an atmosphere of confusion and chaos. In addition, when employees are exposed to some types of workplace emergencies, they may experience feelings of fear, guilt, and grief that can overwhelm and linger long after the event.

As a manager or other workplace leader, you need to be prepared to effectively respond to various crisis situations. You'll also want to anticipate and plan to help employees experiencing difficult emotions as a result of the incident.

There are several key preparation steps you can take now. These include identifying important resources for help during emergencies, soliciting information from these resources, developing a plan, and implementing it in coordination with your resource people.

(2) Exploring the Issue - A Medical Crisis

Q. At one of our facilities last month, an employee had a heart attack and died at her desk. I hope nothing like that ever happens here! How can I respond to a situation like that? What should I do to prepare?

A. The only way to prepare for emergencies is by anticipating them and developing a response plan. Then you have to test the plan by conducting regular practice drills. Practice drills pave the way for clear thinking and effective response when a crisis does occur. Knowing where to locate your resources is an important first step:

- Among these resources are your supervisor, occupational health professional (such as a nurse), safety officer, and Employee Assistance Program (EAP).
- In addition, consult with Human Resources (HR) staff for a range of organizational policy, procedures and information involving workplace accidents or critical illnesses.
- Note important information that you gather from these individuals in your response plan. Keep it in an easy-to-reach location, along with the telephone numbers of the recommended emergency medical assistance and other responders.
- Coordinate your response plan with all resource people and emergency responders and include them where possible in your practice drills.

See how a similar situation might occur below:

(3) Play it Out – When Your Employee is Injured at the Workplace

Steps to Take

- Get more information quickly on J.P.
 - his exact location and physical status: is he conscious? Breathing?
- Follow your organization's emergency response protocol and contact emergency medical help. Usually, this means dialing 911, but may vary by agency and building.
- Contact your occupational health nurse, if one is available in your building.
- If the injured person is not breathing and/or does not have a pulse, have a *trained* individual start CPR.

Delegate tasks to those most calm and qualified:

- Continue to assure that required emergency procedures are provided to the injured.
- Establish a perimeter to keep away all persons except those providing assistance to the injured.
- Request that another capable supervisor accompany J.P. to the hospital, if possible.
- Notify HR and any others indicated by your emergency response plan and/or accident/injury policy.

You learn that J.P. was performing tasks on a ladder while arguing with another employee. The other employee is extremely upset. You ask another supervisor to escort the agitated employee to a private room to regain composure.

What Occurs

Walking the hall one workday, you turn a corner and are nearly knocked down by an employee running. "We've got to get help," he yells breathlessly. "J.P. took an awful fall from the mezzanine balcony onto the first floor. He hit his head hard coming down on the concrete. He's bleeding and it looks real bad!"

You summon emergency assistance according to your protocol.

Assign someone to assist the emergency medical team by clearing the way and directing them to the site.

You try to protect the wellbeing of the unconscious employee.

J.P. is transported to the hospital by medical responders.

"Jean, I need to provide you with official notification that an employee has had an accident, so you can get started with any investigation that policy requires."

"Rene, can you accompany Pat into the office where it's private and quiet? Let me know if you need some help."

Assure that J.P.'s family is notified and given the location of the hospital.

On the phone, as gently as possible, you say, "I am afraid that I have some upsetting news about J.P. He had an accident at work and we had him transported to the hospital."

Comply with accident investigation requirements. Ensure medical policy is followed on any necessary contact with blood.

"We need to cordon off this area until it is clean and safe. Ask Sue and Harry from Facilities to come right away and, in the meantime, keep everyone else away."

Be aware of the emotional impact of cleaning up the accident site.

"Harry and Sue, I know you've worked with J.P. in the past. How do you feel about doing this task?"

Determine if the employee who witnessed the accident is needed for an accident investigation and, if so, whether the employee can participate as requested.

"Rene, do you feel that Pat is able to answer some questions and participate in the accident investigation now or would she be calmer tomorrow?"

Offer the EAP and facilitate an appointment.

"Pat, watching a coworker get injured can be very upsetting. Sometimes it helps to talk with a counselor, even by telephone. We can let you use this office to call the EAP, if you like. The EAP can also set up an appointment close to home or work in the next few days. If you go to see the EAP counselor, we can arrange your time off."

If you have concerns about an affected employee's safety in transit, try to assure safe transport home.

"Who can we call now to give you a ride home from work?"

Review J.P.'s work and delegate any urgent responsibilities as needed.

"Jim and Mary, can you share some of J.P.'s critical duties for now?"

Determine whether you or someone else can meet the family at the hospital. Stay with the family for a period of time, or at least until other family and friends arrive.

Greet the family and introduce yourself and coworker. "We are all so sorry this happened to J.P. -- We came to see how he's doing and to find out what we can do to help."

Bring another person who can provide additional support to the family (and to you). Be sure that person can maintain a calm demeanor.

"This is Susan J., who works with J.P. as a Team Leader. She really wanted to come with me."

Be aware of any confidentiality issues that may keep you from discussing the details of the accident with the family until the investigation is complete.

"I wish I had the details to share with you, but I don't. The team is doing an accident investigation now. To protect J.P. and the organization, I can't even speculate until the facts are determined."

Be prepared to take notes, in case you have

follow-up issues.

Take a few EAP brochures.

In speaking with the family, you learn that their concern and grief are compounded by several issues:

- They have a small child in the home and don't know how to explain the accident to him.
- They have financial concerns and need assistance with medical and compensation benefits.

Follow requirements of your organization regarding injury reports.

Consider the EAP for the group – and yourself.

Call the EAP from a private location where you can talk.

Determine what the EAP can offer.

"I know there is a lot weighing on your minds and that explaining things to your little boy is a concern as well. The Employee Assistance Program can offer good advice that may help. Here's the brochure with a toll-free number you can call any time, just to talk. They can set up an appointment near you, as well. Also, I'll ask someone from HR to call you regarding your benefit questions."

Back at work the next day, you make sure you or others are completing forms required by your organization following such an accident.

You notice that some employees can't stop talking about what happened – what they saw and what they did. You understand their need to "talk through" their reactions to the event. But all the talk has been affecting productivity and you wonder if something should be done to bring things "back to normal".

After describing the situation, you find yourself discussing the events and your response to them. With the help of the EAP counselor, you gain some perspective and find you are calmer. You ask, "What can you do for us now?" You learn the following:

- People usually need some time to absorb what's happened.
- The EAP can then send a counselor/consultant to walk around, speak with staff and get a sense of how people are affected.

• In cases of major trauma, the EAP can conduct supportive group meetings to provide information on emotional trauma and how to deal with it. These are sometimes called "critical incident stress debriefings."

They allow people to talk about what

happened in a way that promotes healthy coping. Participation by employees should be voluntary.

- EAP offers confidential follow-up to those who need and request it.

Take advantage of EAP worksite services as appropriate, including counselor feedback and consultation to management.

At your request, the EAP sends a counselor/consultant to walk around and talk with employees. The EAP also offers supportive counseling and follow-up privately to those who may need it. Additionally, the EAP is available as a consultant to you, 24/7.

Support the desire of employees to provide encouragement and assistance to ailing coworkers and their families, as long as it is consistent with organizational policy.

You are briefed by the EAP that employees want to do something for J.P. and his family. You assist people in planning a supportive gesture.

4. Tip of the Day– The Elements of Crisis Response

When you must deal with injury or critical illness at the worksite, remember:

- Reflect upon your experiences with past crises and think about what can be learned from them.
- Don't try to do everything yourself. Survey what's needed, then delegate to those who are calm and appropriately prepared.
- Prepare for your role as liaison between family of the injured employee and the workgroup. Consult with Human Resources staff on what information you may and may not share with each party in order to protect confidentiality.
- Assessing resources ahead of time, consulting with others, developing a response plan and having periodic drills will help prepare you and your team to respond effectively in any future medical crises.

(5) About this E-magazine

Federal Occupational Health (FOH) has a range of programs to improve the health, safety and productivity of the Federal workforce. These programs include Employee Assistance/Member and Family Support, Work/Life Solutions, Clinical Health Services, Environmental Services, and other special programs. The FOH EAP provides assessment, counseling, referral, training and consultation to Federal employees and agencies worldwide. The goal of this e-magazine is to help Federal leaders address their workplace relationship concerns. For further information about FOH and its programs, call us at 1 800 457-9808 or visit our web site at www.foh.dhhs.gov.

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