

EAP

Employee Assistance Program

TIPS FOR DEALING WITH PEOPLE'S REACTIONS TO THE ANTHRAX THREAT

What can I expect from people?

There is likely to be a wide range of reactions – from no noticeable reaction, to significant, extended changes in behavior. For some people, the current stresses will bring out the “best” in them – helpfulness, understanding, supportive behavior, clear thinking and responsible action. Others' behavior may be much more challenging for you, and for them – anger, frustration, irritability, moodiness, fear and anxiety...

These are unique and frightening times for all of us and as such, require that we be particularly sensitive, thoughtful and considerate in our actions and reactions to people's behavior.

Try to be flexible and practical. Taking time to deal with people in a compassionate and understanding way, may be the best way to help people re-focus on their work. In addition, your calm, reasonable, compassionate behavior can go a long way to help reduce stress and the potential for conflict within your organization.

What do I do if someone starts crying?

- Approach the person gently and supportively.
- Take time to talk to the person, if you can – listen to what the person is saying and demonstrate your understanding and concern by showing the person that you've heard him/her (repeat back, in the same or slightly changed words, what the person said to you.)
- If you can't talk, connect the person with someone who can ... a friend, family member, union member or the EAP.
- Help the person with appropriate requests and needs or, if you can't, try to find someone who can.

What do I do with hostile, angry reactions?

- Stay calm, take a few deep breaths and remind yourself that everyone is operating under some special pressures.
- Try to acknowledge the person's concern, e.g., “you're really upset that you didn't have this information earlier.”
- Try to empathize with the person - “I wish we'd known this too – it's frustrating to deal with it now.”
- A time out or break may be helpful to the person “would you like to take a break and then we can work this out?”
- Pace yourself, take it one step at a time. Once the intense emotion is relieved, move the discussion to problem solving..... “What do you think we should do now?”
- Problem solve together to develop a reasonable course of action.
- HINTS: 1) It's best not to “defend” against people's feelings of anger but to acknowledge them, even when they are attacking something near and dear to us. 2) Sometimes just

“venting” takes care of one’s needs.

What are my best resources when working with people in these times?

- **Stay calm** (it usually helps everything and everyone when we can),
- **Think clearly** (it's easy in these times to react, we do better when our head and heart both are considered),
- **Define your goals and stay focused** (e.g. to help and support my members over the long haul),
- **Be honest with yourself and others** – it can be a great relief when someone says, “I don't know” or, “This is scary”,
- **Seek support when you need it** – in dealing with the issues and needs, mobilizing resources, and taking care of feelings
- **Few situations actually require an immediate response** – when in doubt, create time and space – use your time to gain perspective by talking with someone you trust, by taking a break yourself, or whatever works best for you.

Take good care of yourself and find helpful positive ways to manage your own stress!!!! Working with stressed people is very demanding and difficult, you need to be at your best.