

Trauma Informed Management Strategies

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AUGUST 4-7 • WASHINGTON, DC

Agenda

- Employer Impact of Traumatic Events
- Trauma Informed Management Strategies
- How to Handle Trauma in the Workplace – 5 Post-Trauma Considerations



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Employer Impact of Traumatic Events

Business Continuity Implications

- 96% of employers say that well-being plays a role in their overall workforce strategy
- Workers who were satisfied with the mental health support provided by their employer were significantly less likely to be concerned about losing their job due to an economic slump (42% vs. 52%)
- 21% of employees report experiencing burnout
- Only 25% of employees strongly agree that their organization cares about their well-being
- Presenteeism costs the U.S. \$1.5 trillion annually
- 64% of employers do not or are not sure if they apply proactive measures to reduce the impact of absence



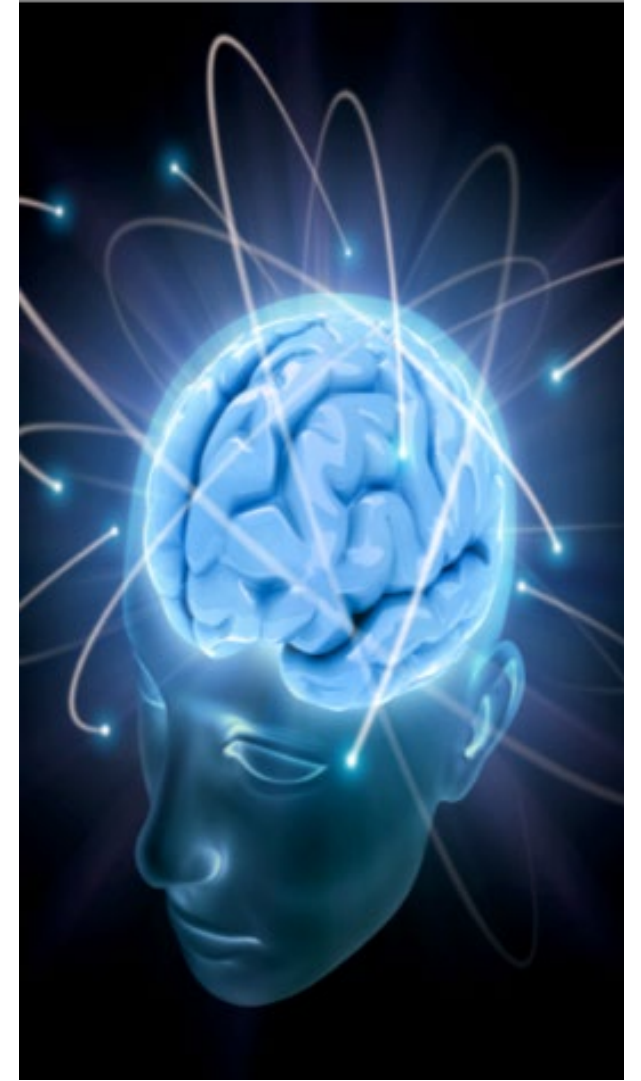
Trauma Informed Management Strategies

Types Of Trauma



The Neurobiology Of Trauma

- Amygdala
- Prefrontal Cortex
- Fight, Flight, Freeze
- Dissociation
- Memories



Common Reactions

Physical:
(headaches, back
aches, etc.)

Emotional:
(angry outbursts,
tearfulness, etc.)

Cognitive:
(focus, memory,
concentration, etc.)

Behavioral:
(alcohol, drugs,
gambling, etc.)

A Trauma-Informed Manager's Role

- ✓ Empathetic leader
- ✓ Manager of performance
- ✓ Knowledgeable about company resources and benefits

- ✗ Therapist
- ✗ Doctor
- ✗ Financial advisor
- ✗ Legal scholar

In-The-Moment Reactions

Behavior	Suggested Reaction
Shock – complete silence	Empathize, validate.
Severe emotional pain – outbursts or tearfulness	Empathize, validate.
Personal blame	Empathize, validate.

Responses To Avoid

- **Minimizing:** “It isn’t as bad as it seems.”
- **Comparing:** “When this happened to me a few years ago...”
- **False assurances:** “I know you’ll get through this quickly.”
- **Attempts to be profound:** “Everything happens for a reason...”

Don't Turn Your Back On Performance

- Common traps:
 - Enabling
 - Denying
 - Withdrawing



Making A Referral During A Performance Conversation

1. Listen With Empathy
2. Thank The Employee For Sharing Information
3. Explain Available Resources
4. Return The Conversation to The Performance Issue

Example

Leader:

“I noticed that it has taken you longer than usual to reply to emails this month.”

Employee:

“You’re right. I’m very sorry. I’m going through a lot at home right now, and it’s been very distracting. I hope it gets better soon.”

Leader:

“That sounds like a difficult situation, and I want to thank you for trusting me enough to tell me about it. It’s a helpful reminder for me to make sure I explain the resources the company offers to help with situations like that... Before we end our conversation, I will make sure I give you the details about how to access those resources...”

“What else can I do to help make sure you’re able to reply to emails in a more timely manner going forward?”

How to Handle Trauma in the Workplace

Five Post-Trauma Considerations

In the wake of a traumatic event, expect that employees' reactions might be *silent or non-verbal communication of need for leave*

- “A person unable to give notice is excused from doing so.” *Tatum v. 10 Roads Express, LLC*, (N.D. Ill. 2023)
- “Crying regularly and uncontrollably” at work may be notice of FMLA leave. *Valdivia v. Township High School Dist. 214* (7th Cir. 2019)
- Manic and non-communicative employee still expressed request for leave when they knew of her underlying disorder. *Ekstrand v. School Dist. of Somerset* (7th Cir. 2009)

Five Post-Trauma Considerations

In the wake of a traumatic event, expect that employees' reactions might be *manifold*

Leave generally affects isolated employees. What if communities are affected?

- FMLA = it's an employee right.
 - DOL: Eligible employees have a right to the leave even when "multiple employees have presented medical certifications for taking FMLA leave" even when difficult for employer. Opinion Letter from Dept. of Labor, Wage and Hour Div. (Feb. 9, 2023), FMLA2023-1-A
- ADA = only if reasonable.
 - Employer allowed to reject ADA accommodation when employer had staff shortages during COVID and only able to allow limited adjustments. Extraordinary situation; not an unreasonable denial. *Tartaro-McGowan v. Inova Home Health* (4th Cir. 2024)

Five Post-Trauma Considerations

In the wake of a traumatic event, expect that employees' reactions might be

delayed

- Employee's condition: re-triggered PTSD. *Simon v. Univ. Hosps. Cleveland Med. Ctr.* (6th Cir. 2025)
- 2020 study. Nearly 6x more PTSD within trauma-inflicted community (school shooting) -- one year *later* and experienced by proximate but indirect community members
 - Engel RJ, Lee DHJ, & Rosen D. (2020). Psychiatric Sequelae Among Community Social Service Agency Staff 1 Year After a Mass Shooting. *JAMA Network Open*; 3(8):e2014050. (20% screened positive for PTSD, and ~19% for generalized anxiety versus normal baseline of 3.6% of U.S. adults had PTSD in the past year.)

Five Post-Trauma Considerations

In the wake of a traumatic event, expect that employees' reactions might be

insensitively received

Need to train managers so that they're ready for what to expect.

- \$175,000 settlement where employer asked staffing agency to replace employee after her "nervous breakdown" because environment too stressful for her. *EEOC v. Pivotal Home Solutions*. (October 2022).
- Employee told to "suck it up!" (after employee requests FMLA for depression) *Bartman v. Wegmans Food Markets, Inc.* (D. Mass 2018)

Five Post-Trauma Considerations

In the wake of a traumatic event, expect that employees' reactions might be

even more challenging to address due to “burnout” and fatigue

The employee's request might be burnout-related, and/or in context of a staff suffering from burnout. Consider

- Court considered the “fatigue to the other LPNs” (as well as overtime costs and “uneven level of care” provided) in decision to deny the ADA leave accommodation request. *Attiogbe-Tay v. SE Rolling Hills LLC* (D. Minn. 2013)
- EEOC: can consider a reallocation of “minor job tasks or provide a temporary transfer instead of leave, so long as the employee can still address his/her medical needs”

Questions?