

Helping Your Employees Cope With the 9/11 Anniversary

Most Americans were at work when they watched the horror of September 11 unfold. When the September 11 anniversary date arrives, Americans will again be at work, this time reliving the tragic events of that morning. Although each person's reaction will vary in degree, the anniversary is bound to trigger a wide range of emotions.

There are many things that employers can do to help their employees get through the day. Here are just a few:

- **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 choice of not 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 11, someone with a family member in 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.
- **Respect feelings of employees** who may not want to travel during the week.
- **Be sensitive to religious and cultural diversity** of your staff in all workplace communications. Always promote understanding and awareness about different religions and cultures.
- **Encourage communication among employees.** Support of coworkers can help employees work through the stress. Allow your employees the opportunity to break from work to talk. Provide a comfortable environment for them to gather. Also provide professional help to those employees who need it, and encourage them to use it.
- **Have a professional counselor at the workplace.** 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, 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.

2001N. Beauregard Street
12th Floor
Alexandria, VA 22311
P.O.Box 16810
Alexandria, VA 22302-0180

Phone
703-684-7722

Fax
703-684-5968

Toll-free
800-969-NMHA (6642)

TTY
800-433-5959

**For more information, contact your local mental health association
or the National Mental Health Association at 800-969-NMHA (6642) or www.nmha.org.**