



Supervisor NEWSLETTER

Employee Assistance Program
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Employees with PTSD and How to Help

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2020 was a tough year, and you may be surprised to know your employees may have developed Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) from the fear of dying or getting seriously ill with COVID-19, as well as the fear of being killed or injured from continued racism and discrimination in this country.

You may have employees that have PTSD from being involved in motor vehicle accidents, sexual assaults, domestic violence, combat, occupational trauma (especially medics and first responders), or other events that involved death or serious injury. As a supervisor, it's helpful to recognize the signs and symptoms of this disorder, provide them support, and remind them to use the EAP for help.

What are some signs and symptoms of PTSD?

- Exposure to one or more event(s) that involved death or threatened death, actual or threatened serious injury, or threatened sexual violation.
- Either witnessing the event, a close friend experienced it, or through repeated exposure to distressing details of an event.
- Reliving the event with recurrent thoughts, flashbacks, hallucinations, or nightmares of the incident.

- Avoiding people, places, things, or memories that remind them of the trauma.
- Excessive arousal which causes increased alertness, anger, fits of rage, irritability, hatred, difficulty sleeping or concentrating.
- Negative thoughts or feelings such as guilt, feeling the world is a very unsafe place, elevated self blame or blame of others, and loss of interests.
- The above symptoms have lasted longer than one month and cause significant disruption at work, home, school, and the community.

How might this affect them at work?

Employees with PTSD can often keep this hidden from others and the signs may not be obvious. You will most often recognize irritability and notice that it is difficult for the employee to concentrate. For employees that work in traumatic occupations such as police officers and medics, you may find they actually prefer to be at work where the increased arousal and hypervigilance works well for their PTSD; it's when they get home at the end of the day they suffer more. You might notice folks are more detached, emotionally cold, isolated, and using alcohol to cope. You might hear that their relationships are suffering and they aren't engaging in hobbies or socializing.

Treatments for PTSD

Contrary to popular belief that PTSD is lifelong, PTSD is very treatable. While someone may never be the same person after experiencing trauma, the symptoms can be treated so that their lives are no longer significantly

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disrupted. There are several evidenced based treatment protocols including Prolonged Exposure (PE), Cognitive Processing Therapy (CPT), and Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR) which help alleviate the symptoms and help return the employee back to normal functioning.

These treatments involve exposure therapy in which the employee will talk or write about the trauma repeatedly, as well as confront people, places and situations they have avoided. These treatments are a lot of work and typically provoke anxiety, but they are extremely successful at treating PTSD.

How can you help?

Supervisors should check in regularly with their employees on how they are coping with this difficult year. It's helpful to start this discussion by self-disclosing the hardships you are facing this year and asking them how they are doing. For example, if you hear that an employee has been in a traumatic situation like a motor vehicle accident, you may follow up with them that week, at the two week mark and a month later to see how they're doing. Inquire with them about the symptoms of PTSD.

If you work in a hospital, or with police officers and other first responders, know that PTSD is much more common in these fields. You should be having regular discussions on how they are coping with occupational trauma. To prevent PTSD, it's helpful to debrief several times after a difficult work case. Consider bringing in a trainer knowledgeable about the subject to educate your staff and provide resources to help and refer. It may also be appropriate to schedule an onsite trauma debriefing for group and individual support.

Support from your EAP

First Choice Health Employee Assistance Program has onsite trauma counselors for support after an incident, as well as training to help your team learn about PTSD. Remember that the EAP is also a great referral source for your employees that need help. Contact your Clinical Account Executive to learn more. We are here for you and your employees 24/7 at 1-800-777-4114, or www.firstchoiceap.com.