

# EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE AND COUNSELING CENTER

## Supporting Employees

### The signs and symptoms of trauma:

Following a traumatic incident it's likely that an employee will experience a range of reactions, which may or may not be directly related to the incident, for example flashbacks, a sense of fear, intrusive thoughts and hyper-vigilance. Other signs of trauma might include sleeplessness, anger, relationship issues, avoidance, emotional detachment, feelings of suicide, absence or depression and increased use of alcohol or drugs.

Although it's not possible to predict precisely how people are going to react in the short or long term, it's important for HR and line managers to understand the context of trauma and individuals' reactions to it so that, should an incident occur, reassurance is available for the employee that their reaction is normal.

Employers need to be vigilant to changes in behavior, work, attendance and relationships. An employee who is withdrawn, non-participative and generally not themselves may be experiencing difficulty coping.

- **How someone processes stress or trauma is dependent on that individual.** There's a delicate balance between re-traumatizing someone by forcing them to talk about a traumatic event and being able to process the feelings in a supportive environment.
- **Encourage employees to reach out for support** by informing them of the organizational and community resources available to them.
- **Help employees gain an objective perspective of trauma** that was outside of their control, especially if they may feel responsible or have been blamed for the incident.
- **Ensure adequate time and space to grieve** and support each other after a traumatic loss.
- **Ask the employees what they need**, rather than telling them what they need to do.
- **Ask employees who are struggling what they want their team to know**, and what they need to feel safe while at work.
- **Show concern for employee well-being** by asking questions such as "How are you doing today?" rather than "How are you?" or "How is work?" Keeping the focus on "today" is important as it helps the employee respond from where they are at, rather than how they felt the day before or how they may feel in the future. **Be conscious of disability or absence processes that may be stressful.** Where possible, communicate in person before sending a letter or other written communication that could be misunderstood by a distressed employee.
- **Check in with employees at regular intervals** to avoid any surprises regarding their coverage, claim or plans for supporting their work.

**UAB EACC 205-934-2281**

**UAB Crisis Text Line: Text "UAB" to 741-741**

**Birmingham Crisis Center: 205-323-7777**

**24hr National Suicide Prevention Hotline: 1-800-273-8255**

Please go to any Emergency Room if you are feeling suicidal and need assistance.