



Addressing Stressful and Tragic Events

Communication guidelines for leaders and managers

Introduction

In the event of any tragic and stressful events, how your company and teams address these situations is extremely personal. These decisions are based on your company culture, your leadership's involvement in responding to and addressing these events, and other relevant factors.

Decisions about what and when to communicate regarding these events should be internal, and having a plan in place can be helpful. Modern Health has some recommendations to keep in mind in your responses with the ultimate goal of supporting non-stigmatizing, equitable, compassionate communication that acknowledges the impact stressful events have on your employees' emotional well-being.



Considerations to Keep In Mind

First, loss and tragic community and world events impact mental health. It is important to acknowledge that feelings like anger, grief, and sadness are all normal ways to react to learning of a traumatic event or unexpected loss.

Be mindful of who is most impacted by the event — often, an event might impact a particular group or community more than others.

Many people feel helpless following tragic events, particularly when they feel like they cannot “fix” other people’s pain. Remember that even though you may not be able to take someone’s painful emotions away, **validating and normalizing these feelings is vital in helping employees feel supported and cared about.** Employees often don’t expect you to “fix” the situation but want to know that they are cared about as people.

If you plan to encourage employees to reach out to managers, **work to support managers and prepare them for these dialogues.**

Words and actions should align in these responses. For example, if you are encouraging employees to take time following an incident, it is important that the company, managers, and colleagues support this sort of boundary setting.

Remember that your Modern Health benefits are available to you, your managers, and your employees during difficult times. Resources including guides and other digital content related to stressful events, trauma, and painful emotions, may be useful. Circles may also be helpful, although there are specific instances in which they are clinically inappropriate (a Modern Health CSM can work with you on this). Additionally, one-on-one care may be helpful, especially for individuals with heightened needs.



Think About Your Language

Work to avoid stigmatizing language that may lead others to feel excluded.

Inclusive language is about more than simply replacing words and involves demonstrating inclusive habits and beliefs through language. Inclusion can promote a sense of belonging that is critical to well-being, particularly during times of distress. Inclusive language can relate to diversity in race/ethnicity, physical and mental health needs, families, gender identities, and sexual orientations.

Our Modern Belonging playbooks can support inclusivity topics

- [Modern Belonging Pt. I: Why Belonging is the Missing Piece in Your DEI and Mental Health Strategies](#)
- [Modern Belonging Pt. II: Addressing Mental Health Stigma in the Workplace](#)

Inclusive language guides like this [resource from Northwestern University](#) can be helpful.

Try to use language that demonstrates compassion for your employees by acknowledging and normalizing painful emotions and recognizing that it is okay to seek out resources in difficult times.

Example: After a tragic event, it's normal to experience painful emotions like sadness, anger, and grief. It can be helpful to seek out resources to support yourself and your loved ones during difficult times.

Be specific about how your organization will support employees and address the tragedy if that's the case.

Example: Our organization will be doing x, y, and z to support our employees and is investigating ways we can contribute to victims of the tragedy.

Clarify who employees can reach out to for support and ensure that those people are prepared for this responsibility.

Example: If you have questions about available resources, reach out to the People team at abc@email.com

If you are considering including Modern Health resources in your response, we encourage you to do so in the following way:

"As a reminder, we want to include resources about our mental wellness benefit, Modern Health. You and your [dependents] have access to one-on-one care, Circles, and self-guided resources through Modern Health to support you during this time and always."

