

Response Resources for Leaders

During stressful events, employees rely on leaders to make decisions and provide support. Please remember that sudden, stressful traumatic events make us forget that we are competent and in control. We may not have had control over the event but we do have control over our collective response.

Effective leaders understand how stress affects their staff. Common reactions to stressful events fall into physical, emotional, cognitive, behavioral and spiritual categories:

- Feelings of stress, grief, fear, guilt or anger.
- Struggle to carry out routine activities or lack of interest in activities they usually enjoy.
- Sleep disturbances, often including nightmares and thoughts about the event.
- Changes in appetite, tiredness, headaches, and stomachaches.
- Needing to talk, often repeatedly, about the event(s) and feelings associated with the event(s).
- A sense of meaninglessness; e.g., asking, “What’s the point?”
- Realize people may be working below their capacity.

These are normal reactions to an abnormal event and for most people they are time-limited. Research demonstrates that the vast majority of people are resilient following a crisis—we are stronger than we give ourselves credit for.

Be Aware of You.

- First stop and take time to understand your own reactions.
- Take a moment to decide how you are going to take care of yourself later.
- Be mindful and intentional of your own expression and tone—they will take their cues from you.
- Leaders are often the face of the response. Resist any desire to isolate.
- Practice what we preach and engage in healthy self-care.

How to Support Coping:

- Knowing there is not right way to react and recover.
- Provide opportunities for employees to talk about their stressful experiences.
- Acknowledge and encourage teamwork and cooperation.
- Take steps to reduce any additional stressors.
- Provide as much information as possible and continue to update.
- Express empathy and listen carefully.

- Utilize Duke's wellness resources like Live for Life and the Pastoral Services that you can bring to the work area.
- Increase your visibility.
 - Acknowledge the value of professional counseling and encourage your employees to get whatever help they need.

Tips for compassionate communication.

- Show Respect: Respectful communication is particularly important when people feel vulnerable.
- Express empathy by acknowledging the emotions of those who are suffering.
- Listen and allow emotional expressions or crying without interruption.
- Do not answer questions outside of your expertise. Refer people to appropriate experts.
- Be aware of potential re-traumatizing events.

Encourage employees to use self-care. Specific self-care tips:

- Buy some flowers
- Sit outside and listen to the birds
- Cook a favorite meal
- Scroll through pictures on your phone
- Blow bubbles
- Light a scented candle
- Take a bubble bath
- Play with a pet
- Read a good book or listen to music

Warning signs

- Constant feelings of sadness or anxiety that prevents the completion of regular tasks.
- Constant fixation on the event and inability to focus.
- Misuse of drugs or alcohol.
- Inadvertent or flagrant disregard for safety.
- Marked change in mood.
- Statements that suggest potential self-harm.

Please **contact PAS at 919-416-1727** if you see any of these behaviors in staff or colleagues.