

## RECOVERY IN THE AFTERMATH OF WORKPLACE VIOLENCE: GUIDANCE FOR WORKERS

Returning to work routines following any violent incident at the workplace can be very challenging. Even after the work area is secured, and victims or perpetrators are no longer present, emotional reactions and distress may reduce concentration, motivation, and performance. However, there are steps you can take to reduce the negative impact of your traumatic experience.

The first requirement for individual and office recovery after violence is assuring safety. You should know that victims, intended victims, colleagues and bystanders may experience significant emotional distress whether or not they were physically injured. People closest to the event or those with close relationships to the victim(s) or perpetrator(s) will likely be most affected. For the majority of people the cornerstone of emotional recovery is talk. You can help yourself and your colleagues by talking with them. When you demonstrate your willingness to discuss the event and your own emotions, you help others do so. Some people will not want to participate in group discussions. If you are very uncomfortable in group settings it is important to speak one-to-one to a supervisor. After workplace violence many supervisors have an “open door policy” to allow this to happen.

Since a sense of “normalcy” and a return to normal work schedules and routines helps most people adjust after violence, your supervisors will encourage this. A sense of normalcy occurs gradually. The more traumatic and dramatic the event, the more likely that people will be emotionally affected, and these memories and reactions will only gradually fade. Most people move on to integrate a tragedy or otherwise significant event into their consciousness without continuing mental distress or disability.

The actions below will help you develop a sense of safety and speed return to normalcy.

Returning to work routines following any violent incident at the workplace can be very challenging.

**Immediately after the event, make sure that:**

- All employees or others at the workplace are accounted for.
- Medical attention has been received or ordered for all who need it.

- You have a way to contact family and friends.
- Others who are distressed have someone to look out for them.

**As soon as possible after the event**, help clarify what actually occurred and provide accurate information. Help supervisors discuss:

- What is known about the event?
- Who was the victim?
- Who was the perpetrator?
- How did the incident happen?
- Why did the incident happen?

**Before you leave work on the day of the incident**, make sure your questions have been answered about what is known and further instructions. Try to provide as much information as you can about what occurred. When you go home:

- Limit your use of alcohol, tobacco, and “junk food” to usual levels.
- Drink water.
- Limit unnecessary driving.
- Talk to your family and friends about what happened.
- Sleep and rest.
- Exercise can also help reduce distress.

**Days following the event:** If you are close to someone who has been killed or injured in the event, a hospital visit with

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family members may be helpful to you and the family. If a friend or loved one was killed or injured, or if you were directly exposed to the violence, you may experience strong emotions, difficulty concentrating, or hopeless thoughts. It is important to talk with a counselor or seek medical attention if these symptoms persist. If your workplace is closed due to damage or an ongoing investigation, your employer should provide instructions about alternative meeting places to discuss events and to keep work flowing. Returning to work is important to recovery, and work routines contribute to the sense of normalcy.

**When your work group meets again**, your supervisor will probably review what was known at the time, review security and safety procedures, and update you on new developments. Listen to others who were present during the incident to get a full perspective. Feel free to provide input and answer questions but do not be afraid to say “I don’t know.” If there are legal (privacy) issues, you should be informed about limits on what you can talk about.

Meetings should be short. If more discussion seems necessary, additional meeting times will be scheduled. Talk to your supervisor about attendance at funerals or memorial services. These may be difficult—but also helpful.

**Advice for workers who must continue to function following an incident:**

- Try to pace yourself and pace your decisions. Consider courses of action (i.e., avoid snap decisions that may have to be changed).
- Take breaks when possible and relax. Exercise helps.
- Identify a trusted co-worker to bounce ideas off and serve as a buddy (i.e., someone to look after you).
- If you must continue to work immediately after workplace violence, limiting alcohol and tobacco use, excessive “junk” food, and unnecessary driving are particularly important.
- Do not overwork. Trust others to help get the job done.



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