

WORKPLACE TRAUMA - ON-SITE EAP RESPONSE

Workplace trauma is the physical or psychological response of employees to a crisis or critical incident, a response that can interfere with normal functioning. Situations which may precipitate trauma include being involved in or witnessing accidents, fires, violent acts, sudden deaths, suicides or any other situation in which security or life are threatened. It is very common, in fact quite normal, for people to experience emotional or even physical aftershocks when they have passed through a traumatic event. Fatigue, headaches, chest pains, confusion, panic attacks, sleep disturbances, emotional outbursts, fear of returning to the worksite, and difficulties with concentration are just a few of the ways people can react immediately, or days and weeks after the incident.

MIIA Employee Assistance Program provides assistance with traumatic events at the workplace.

1. If indicated, a debriefing to address the crisis will be scheduled, usually to occur 24 to 72 hours after the incident. Debriefings are structured group meetings that provide a forum for participants to process thoughts, reactions, and feelings resulting from the incident. Some goals of the debriefing are to:
 - a. Provide an opportunity for education, ventilation and support.
 - b. Prepare participants about the symptoms that they might experience resulting from the incident.
 - c. Provide ready access to EAP services for employees who may need it.
 - d. Screen employees who are experiencing more severe forms of a post-traumatic stress reaction and refer them to appropriate resources.

Debriefings usually last one to two hours and are best conducted with 3 to 30 participants. All employees affected by the incident should be encouraged to attend, and should be relieved of duty during the debriefing. Attendance and participation should be voluntary. The debriefing will be facilitated by the EAP counselor. Written information about post-traumatic stress is provided to each participant. After the debriefing, the EAP counselor is available to meet individually with employees.

Debriefing rules include an expectation of confidentiality, and no notes, media, or recordings. Family members of the victim should not be included because their presence can make it harder for observers in the incident to talk freely. When it is not possible to create a group, it is recommended that the EAP counselor meet individually with affected employees. Separate meetings with family members can also be arranged.

The EAP counselor will consult with management about on-going needs. Occasionally, follow-up meetings are useful to provide additional assistance to employees still affected by the incident. If symptoms persist, employees and family members are also encouraged to seek individual counseling from the EAP.