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Coping With a Traumatic Event

When major catastrophes happen they can overwhelm all of us, even if we aren’t directly affected.

Whenever there is a major disaster, it’s important to be sensitive to how other people are feeling as we all

react in different ways. For some people, even though not directly affected by what has happened, the

event can trigger a grieving process related to something that happened in their past.

Resist the temptation to want employees to “get on with it” quickly. Grieving is normal, and you can’t

speed up the process. If you show signs of exasperation, this can make the grieving period longer and

more difficult.

If employees have extended family or friends in the disaster area whom they are unable to reach, it can be

highly stressful. As appropriate, explain to other employees why this individual may be upset or anxious,

and keep everyone apprised of the situation as best you can.

Helping a fr iend or co-worker dealing with loss

Talk about the loss and offer condolences, rather than avoiding the subject. Even if you feel

awkward, show you care.

Be a good listener. Let them know they are safe talking to you about what they are

experiencing and feeling. Refrain from giving unsolicited advice.

Understand what grief is. After a significant loss, people experience all kinds of dif ficult

emotions such as shock, anger, and guilt. There is no ‘normal’ timetable for grieving. Grief

can feel like an emotional roller-coaster ride with the intensity likely to ebb and flow.

Offer assistance with practical things like cooking or looking after the children. Ask if there

are other ways you might be of assistance.

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