

Managing in Uncertain Times

Things have changed and one thing is certain—we are living in uncertain times. With questions about what tomorrow will bring, more and more employees are showing signs of stress and distress. This can result in decreased productivity and increased disruptive behavior in the workplace.

Employee stress: some signs to watch for--

- ✓ Nervousness
- ✓ Agitation
- ✓ Irritability
- ✓ Excessive lateness or absences
- ✓ Aggressiveness
- ✓ Poorly prepared incomplete work
- ✓ Frequent physical complaints or illnesses
- ✓ Lethargy
- ✓ Marked changes in personal hygiene
- ✓ Withdrawal
- ✓ Fearfulness and dependency (e.g., hanging around you or making excessive requests to meet with you)
- ✓ The smell of alcohol and signs of potential drug use
- ✓ Indecisiveness
- ✓ Confusion or forgetfulness
- ✓ Bizarre, alarming or dangerous behavior
- ✓ Depression

Ten key ways to help your employees through difficult times

You can have a profound positive effect by acknowledging your awareness of signs of distress, and by showing concern for employees' well-being. An attitude of sincere interest and caring is most important, as is willingness to approach an employee if you suspect he or she needs assistance managing stress. Here are 10 key tips.

1. Communicate with employees often, both formally and informally. Keeping your distance may result in increased employee anxiety.
2. Model good coping skills—your employees will follow your lead.
3. Knowledge is power, so keep employees informed (as appropriate) about what is going on in the company, your region, your department, ect, to the greatest extent possible.
4. Be honest. Acknowledge when you do not have information.

5. Allow employees to discuss feelings and thoughts, as appropriate. Reassure but don't dismiss concerns by saying things like, "It will be okay."
6. Acknowledge employees' fears without supporting misconceptions.
7. Be compassionate but keep your focus on the big picture—the job still needs to be done.
8. Be candid about the limits of your ability to help. Refer the employee to the employee assistance program. (EAP) which is confidential, or ask if there is a friend, family member, clergy, community agency, or health care provider who might offer further help. Emphasize that seeking help doesn't mean that he or she has a serious problem.
9. Call the EAP for management—even a brief call can help. We have specialists who can provide support and suggest strategies.
10. Take care of yourself. Helping your employees through difficult times is demanding work. Utilize personal resources, supports or the EAP for yourself.

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