

How to Help Your Employees During times of Civil Unrest

The most important first step a company can take is to recognize that work life does not go on as normal for a period of time after heightened civil unrest, especially if things turn violent. The experience deserves special consideration and an involved response by management.



The personality and life experience of each employee within the work group influences his/her response to events surrounding such events. Try to avoid projecting your own interpretation of how someone “should” respond. You do not know all the factors that are influencing an employee’s response.

Preoccupation, disorganization, and even episodes of emotional distress may occur. Each employee will go through his/her own response process and recover from the experiences at his/her own rate. Address issues in a timely fashion and allow for the recovery process to be more challenging for some than others.

Let your employees know you care about them and will help them deal with the experience. Avoid telling them “war stories” about other incidents. Also, avoid telling them the event is over or “move on” and to stop thinking about it. These types of comments make some employees think they are not valued and their feelings are not understood.

Anxiety, anger, guilt and/or blaming are common reactions to events surrounding a protest or riot situation. Typically, it is human nature to look for something or someone to blame for adversity. Employees may place blame, not only on the protestors, but also on themselves, the government, or the reoccurring situations prompting the protest.

Employees may respond with frustration or anger if they do not feel the support of management. They may also direct their anger at other employees. Denying the impact on employees generally increases their defensiveness. Try to be understanding and supportive and defuse these emotions. Sympathy conveys agreement with the employee and empathy conveys understanding but not necessarily agreement.

Employees may turn inward, isolate themselves and refuse to talk about the events occurring in their communities. Remind employees that painful or confusing emotions are normal and encourage them to process these feelings with someone they trust. **Arrange an onsite debriefing or a processing group from Best Care EAP for any impacted employees. Consider one of Best Care EAP’s training programs related to workplace respect and communication to foster a more inclusive culture.**

Supervisors can be at behavioral or emotional risk because of the pressure to appear in control of the situation. Remember you also need to take care of yourself. **Seek out management, HR or EAP support** for assistance with managing these circumstances and your own emotions. Let employees know they are valued and they will be supported by the organization with their recovery from the event. To arrange for a Best Care EAP counselor to be onsite or refer employees who need specialized assistance, call the **Best Care EAP Emotional Support Help Line 800-801-4182** or send an email to EAP@BestCareEAP.org

