

Kaiser Permanente

Tips for Supporting Employee Well-Being in Times of Change

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Today's goals

- Share practical leadership strategies to support employees through periods of uncertainty and disruption
- Offer actionable strategies to strengthen mental well-being, reduce burnout, improve team cohesion, and maintain operational continuity during a wide range of disruptive events
- Highlight practical tools that leaders can apply immediately to help your workforce navigate stress, maintain focus, and feel supported

Why This Topic Matters

Municipal workforces continue to face:

- Organizational change
- Leadership transitions
- Natural disasters
- Public health emergencies
- Workforce shortages
- Community trauma

The way leaders respond during adversity directly impacts employee well-being, engagement, and organizational effectiveness.



Disruptive events come in many forms

Many disruptive events span multiple categories or trigger additional disruptions. Effective preparation requires understanding these interconnections and planning holistically.

Acute workplace disruption

- Workplace violence
- Employee death or serious injury
- Workplace accidents
- IT disruptions
- Operational incidents

Organizational crises

- Layoffs and reorganizations
- Leadership transitions
- Workplace accidents
- Financial crises
- Ethical breaches

Environmental and community events

- Natural disasters
- Public health emergencies
- Civil unrest
- Community tragedies
- Infrastructure failures

Crises, change, and workforce mental health

73%

Of U.S. workers say their organization has experienced some level of disruptive change in the past year.¹

44%

Most workers whose organization made changes in the past year report positive sentiments, however, **44%** said changes occurred with little or no warning, contributing to uncertainty.²

53%

Nine out of ten employees report suffering at least minor levels of mental health challenges in 2025. **53%** of these individuals said challenges persisted up to a year.³

What Employees Need During Change

Employees Need:

- ✓ Clarity: "What is happening"
- ✓ Stability: "Can I rely on leadership?"
- ✓ Empathy: "Will I have what I need?"
- ✓ Psychological Safety: "Can I speak up without fear?"

Ask Yourself: ***"Are we providing information, connection, and support consistently enough to help employees navigate uncertainty?"***



The CARE Framework

Building a Culture of Care

C — Communicate Consistently

A — Acknowledge Uncertainty

R — Respond with Resources

E — Empower Teams

Communicate Consistently: Share updates regularly, explain decisions, and eliminate information gaps

Acknowledge Uncertainty: Validate concerns, recognize stress, and demonstrate empathy

Remember: Silence increases anxiety.
Transparency builds trust.



The CARE Framework

Building a Culture of Care

C — Communicate Consistently

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R — Respond with Resources

E — Empower Teams

Respond with Resources: Employee Assistance Programs, wellness resources, peer support, and flexible work options

Empower Teams: Focus on controllable actions, clarify priorities, and encourage participation



What Leaders Say Matters

What Employees Need to Hear

- ✓ "Here's what we know."
- ✓ "Here's what we're still working through."
- ✓ "You're not in this alone."
- ✓ "Resources are available."

What Employees Don't Need

- ✗ Rumors
- ✗ Silence
- ✗ Toxic positivity
- ✗ Mixed messages



SUPPORTING MENTAL AND PHYSICAL HEALTH THROUGH CRISIS RESPONSE

EAP activation process	Document process for rapid EAP deployment Establish relationship with EAP provider contact Create onsite support mobilization plan	EAP provider details Contract information Implementation timeline	☐ Not started ☐ In progress ☐ Complete ☐ Regularly tested
Mental health manager training	Train HR and managers in basic mental health support Identify employees interested in peer support roles Schedule regular refresher training	Training and certification budget Time allocation Training materials	☐ Not started ☐ In progress ☐ Complete ☐ Regularly tested
Resource documentation	Create comprehensive resource guides Include mental health, financial, legal resources Ensure accessibility in multiple formats	Resource research Design/production Regular updates	☐ Not started ☐ In progress ☐ Complete ☐ Regularly tested
Emergency financial assistance	Establish employee hardship fund Document application and distribution process Identify funding sources	Financial resources Administration Policy documentation	☐ Not started ☐ In progress ☐ Complete ☐ Regularly tested
Family support resources	Compile childcare and eldercare resources Identify temporary housing options Establish family communication protocols	Community partnerships Resource guides Support service contracts	☐ Not started ☐ In progress ☐ Complete ☐ Regularly tested
Flexible work policies	Document crisis-specific flexibility options Train managers on implementation Establish approval processes	Policy documentation Manager training HR support	☐ Not started ☐ In progress ☐ Complete ☐ Regularly tested
Community resource partnerships	Identify and connect with local support organizations Establish mutual aid agreements where appropriate Document services available	Partnership development Agreement documentation Regular communication	☐ Not started ☐ In progress ☐ Complete ☐ Regularly tested
Healthcare provider relationships	Establish direct contacts with major health systems Document special access protocols during crises Maintain information on services available	Healthcare contacts Service documentation Communication protocols	☐ Not started ☐ In progress ☐ Complete ☐ Regularly tested

Self-care for leaders in crisis

Taking care of yourself isn't selfish — it's the key to leading with clarity, resilience, and compassion when your team needs you most.

- **Give yourself grace**
- **Model healthy behavior**
- **Set boundaries and take breaks**
- **Maintain healthy routines**
- **Seek support when needed**



What's next?

Recommended actions for your organization

1. Download the [Navigating Disruptive Events Playbook](#).
2. Assess where, as an organization, there are opportunities to include or expand strategies related to critical incidents.
3. Complete the mental health support checklist to create a roadmap for strengthening your response capabilities.
4. Share your plans with your organization.
5. Take care of yourself!



Questions

Appendix

Employees who believe in their employer's concern for their well-being are¹:

BETTER RETENTION

69%

less likely to job hunt

71%

Less likely to
experience burnout

BETTER TALENT ACQUISITION

5X

more likely to
promote their
company as a great
place to work

3X

to be engaged at work



Assessing the scale of disruption



FOR ORGANIZATION-WIDE CRISES

*Natural disasters, workplace incidents,
large-scale layoffs*

Immediate priority: Establish or convene
a centralized response team with clear roles
and communication channels.

Key leadership actions

- Communicate broadly with transparent,
consistent messaging across all levels
- Create structured support systems that
can scale to reach all affected employees
- Implement temporary policy adjustments
that recognize widespread impact
- Balance operational needs with collective
emotional processing time

Keep an eye out for: Information gaps across
departments, inconsistent resource access,
and leadership disconnection from frontline
experiences.



FOR TEAM-SPECIFIC CRISES

*Death of team member, major project or product
failure, localized incident*

Immediate priority: Maintain team cohesion
while addressing specific impact.

Key leadership actions

- Provide detailed information to the affected
team while maintaining appropriate privacy
- Facilitate team processing while respecting
individual differences in coping
- Adjust deliverables and workload
distribution temporarily
- Bridge connections between affected
team and broader organization

Keep an eye out for: Team isolation, premature
productivity pressure, and information gaps that
foster speculation or rumor.



FOR INDIVIDUAL CRISES

*Family loss, personal trauma, property loss, severe
health challenges*

Immediate priority: Provide personalized support
while respecting privacy.

Key leadership actions

- Let the employee dictate what's shared
with colleagues
- Create tailored accommodation plans based
on specific circumstances
- Maintain regular, private check-ins as long
as needed
- Prepare for smooth reintegration when the
employee returns to full capacity

Keep an eye out for: Assumption of needs
without consultation, privacy concerns, and
insufficient follow-through on support promises.

Recovery requires leadership

Research reveals that the most significant factor in whether employees develop prolonged stress isn't the severity of the incident itself — it's the quality of support they receive.

