

# Providing Support Following a Natural Disaster: A guide for people leaders

In the aftermath of a recent natural disaster, your employees will likely experience a range of impact. Certainly, for those who have been directly impacted, they may be displaced from their residences, dealing with the loss of other resources and possessions, and facing uncertainties regarding restoration. Whether they are awaiting review and response from the American Red Cross, their insurance companies, or other resources, this quite likely is the most significant life stressor they have faced.

Even for those who were not directly impacted, they may be concerned about the impact on family or friends or anxious and distracted, especially if subsequent events are forecasted—for example, additional storms, aftershocks following an earthquake, flooding from rising water levels, or neighboring firestorms, etc.

## Typical stress reactions

- difficulty concentrating or attending to tasks
- easily distracted
- uncharacteristic decline in performance
- irritability or agitation
- emotional withdrawal
- anxiety
- sleep and appetite changes
- somatic complaints (e.g., stomach distress, muscle tension, etc.)
- preoccupation with media reports

## How people leaders can be supportive

- Acknowledge employees' concerns.
- Be a visible presence.
- Urge employees to take advantage of their support systems.
- Communicate contingency plans if staffing shortages will impact workloads and/or timelines.
- Provide employees with resources. Your HR representative or your organization's assistance program can assist in compiling a guide.

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