

Tip Sheet:

Supporting your Employees after floods

Floods can have the ability to destroy lives and damage homes. They can also have a profound impact on mental health, even when people aren't directly affected by them.

These feelings don't disappear when people are in the workplace. In fact, they can often become worse as the daily stressors of everyday workplace challenges pile on top of an already weary mind.

Interestingly, during these moments, research suggests that it's usually the manager closest to the affected employee that is most trusted and the most effective at providing reassurance and initial support following and during dramatic events like floods.

As a manager, it's important to know how to respond to potentially impacted employees and how to identify them.

FIRST, INFORMATION TO ALL STAFF SHOULD BE PROVIDED

Before finding out whether employees are struggling mentally as a result of a flood event, it's paramount that information is distributed to all members of staff during and immediately after major flood emergencies. These include:

Organisational: Employees need to know all the practical information that is related to their employment such as relevant policies and procedures, formal support or leave entitlements.

Health-related: Provide staff with information relating to the typical reactions involved in experiencing traumatic events. This may include tip sheets on topics like self-care or looking after their work colleagues.

HOW TO IDENTIFY EMPLOYEES WHO MAY BE AFFECTED BY FLOODS

Sometimes, it will be obvious to work out which employees could be affected by flooding. However, sometimes it can be harder to know. For example, some people may want their private lives to remain private, or some might be anxious even when they've not been directly affected.

Here are some helpful tips to uncover who may be struggling mentally after floods.

- Use your knowledge and networks to identify those employees who have been impacted by the floods — both directly and indirectly. This involves active listening and perhaps asking certain employees you trust if they have any concerns about other people in the office.

- Actively check in with your team to learn how they're feeling about the recent floods.
- Pay attention to those employees that are working from home more than usual, taking more last-minute annual leave, or not at work (or online) when they were meant to be.
- Be careful not to immediately make judgements or assumptions about who will and won't be affected by floods.
- Listen to the needs being expressed by staff and use their views as a guide to what you can do to assist employees in a practical way at this time. Understand that these needs may change over time.

PROVIDE PRACTICAL AND EMOTIONAL SUPPORT

As a manager, it can sometimes be hard to know when to step in and emotionally support an employee.

However, you are often the person who can help the most and you may even be the first person to recognise changes in an impacted person's wellbeing.



Contact:

0508 664 981

assistance@vitae.co.nz

www.vitae.co.nz

As a result, you should be prepared to provide practical and/or emotional support to those affected. Here are a few actions that can help:

- Take away some of the ambiguity by asking the employee what type of support would be most helpful.
- Some people may be more worried about how the external issues are affecting their work performance, and how this might jeopardise their role or even their job. This is where reassurance is required.
- Others may require carer's leave to look after displaced, ill or aged family members who have been impacted by the floods. It's important you confer with your HR department as to what the terms of this leave would be for the employee.
- Seek out further support and/or guidance from your HR/People and Culture team as they may have additional resources and suggestions for how support can be provided.
- Whether the employee requires organisational or health related support, you need to be able to supply them with the resources and information they need.
- While company protocols are important, not every answer can be found in a company handbook. Be prepared to be flexible and respond in a bespoke way that fits the individual you're helping.

BEHAVIOURS TO DEMONSTRATE

Be visible – where appropriate. Let your presence be known and seen. Talk with staff.

Check in - ask people how they're doing. Listen to their response and acknowledge the possible impact of events on them and the team (without necessarily trying to 'fix' it).

Be tolerant of a wide range of individual reactions – some may not be obvious. This includes changes in usual behaviour over time – usually sociable people who withdraw, usually detail-focused people who start to make mistakes, usually motivated people who seem not to care...

Send clear messages that it's OK to seek help and support – remind people about the resources and support available.

Let your impacted staff know that you know their work may be affected temporarily. Ask what they need. Some may not need more than that.

Be flexible and prepared to adapt some of the usual workplace practices and routines for a while – but keep enough structure to feel familiar and predictable.

ASSISTING THOSE WHO ARE DEALING WITH GRIEF

Unfortunately, some employees may be grieving the loss of a friend or loved one as a result of flooding.

They may also be grieving the loss of their livelihood, home, or neighbourhood if they are directly affected. In these situations, it's important to follow some basic guidelines:

- Listen to the person (allow the person to express their feelings without interruption and speak in a calm and measured voice).
- Acknowledge the person's problem or situation (be empathic, acknowledge emotions and the impact that is being expressed. Acknowledge points of view without necessarily agreeing with them).
- Advise and explain the options available to them. Ensure you know what these are and don't overpromise in the moment.
- Try to involve the other person in deciding what options to take. Often asking what they feel is best for them can be helpful.
- Confirm what actions have been agreed, or what actions will be taken.
- Follow up in 1-2 days and check-in with how they're faring (repeat steps 1-5 if necessary).

Need some advice on how to support and assist those who are dealing with the emotional impact of the floods? Vitae is here to help with our Manager Assist by phoning 0508 664 981 and asking to speak with a manager.