

EAO News for Managers

November 2020

Responding to Another's Hardship and Loss, Part 2 of 2

Handling the reactions of others. When basic needs like food, shelter, safety, or social support are not met, a person's stress response can turn on and behaviors may change. For example, people may change the volume, tone, or speed of their voice, alter their body posture, or choose words that may feel dismissive or unkind without realizing it or intending harm. While these behaviors may serve a purpose, experiencing stress does not take away the need for a safe and appropriate conversation.

Tip: Notice what reactions are coming up in you. Are you uncomfortable with what is being shared? Do you feel a reaction to escape, fix, or confront it? Remind yourself that you are having a response to someone else's hardship, and you do not need to take away their emotion.

Tip: Do not ignore or excuse behavioral concerns. Calmly and nonjudgmentally explain why a problematic behavior is impeding work or making it difficult for you to assist them.

Tip: Sometimes it can be helpful to let a person vent about their stress, and sometimes it is okay to pause the conversation to support or clarify a boundary. "(Name), if I can just jump in for a moment. I can tell this is really important to you, I'm sorry for this frustration. I want to help you and in order to do that..." and redirect to the more appropriate time, place, or service.

What to say when faced with hardship.

Many people naturally want to take away another's pain or confusion. Pain often does not go away with kind words. Feeling heard and accepted can be helpful and build trust. *What to say to them:*

- I am so sorry this is happening to you right now.
- I don't have that answer for you, and I want you to know you are not alone.
- I don't know what to say, just know you can talk to me and I will listen.
- Just because we are all impacted by COVID-19 does not mean our experiences are the same.
- Let me know what you need, and I will try to help you the best I can.
- Even though you can't see the way forward right now does not mean there isn't one, take things one step at a time and talk to people. I'm here for you.
- It takes time to adjust to this. I've seen your resilience and believe you will find your footing.

It is equally important to take care of yourself, as exposure to other people's struggles may lead you to feel helpless, want to please, or feel others' pain. *What to say to yourself:*

- I am nervous because I feel like I don't know what I'm doing; that is common and okay.
- I did the best I could given the circumstances, and I cannot control other people's experiences.
- I have overcome hardship in the past, and I can do so again this time.
- That person is strong, and I trust that they will get through this.
- I may not know what to do about this now, but I trust I will know what to do when it comes.
- This person may die/lose their loved one/lose their job, and I cannot control that.
- There have been times I didn't know what to do and I got through it.

It is okay to ask for clarification. When people become upset or frustrated, they may be less clear in their communication. Even if their tone or facial expression show this emotion or anger, you can show care by asking for more information or clarifying the conversation. *Try these prompts:*

- It seems like you are frustrated right now. May I ask if you are frustrated with me, or if it is the situation you are in?
- There is a lot going on right now, and I want to make sure I understood what you said correctly so I am going to repeat it back. Let me know if I'm on track.
- I can tell this is really important to you. I'm sorry for this frustration. I want to see what I can do to help, and it's difficult when I hear loud/fast voices (instead of "when you yell").
- I think I may have said something earlier that upset you. I'm sorry. Can we talk this through so we can be on the same page before we go forward?
- Everyone responds to grief differently. Would you like to talk about it, or would you rather let me know if you want to talk later? I can also connect you to EAO to talk with someone else.

When a supportive person who knows their own strengths, weaknesses, and boundaries is there for a person who is struggling, it can be a tremendous help. No one is expected to have all the answers. If you find yourself feeling like you are not doing "enough" or are frequently frustrated and overwhelmed, check in with yourself and/or a trusted person to review your expectations compared to what you have to offer in that moment. Trust that what you have to offer is enough. Model self-care. Reach out to others for consultation and support.

If you would like to access the full two page document, reach out to EAO at eao@mailplus.wisc.edu

November is Alzheimer's Disease Awareness Month

November is National Alzheimer's Disease Awareness Month. Over 5 million Americans live with Alzheimer's disease or other forms of dementia, and over 8,000 live in Dane County. Many organizations have found benefit in training their employees to notice the signs

of dementia and learn ways to approach and respond to them. The Dementia Friendly Workplace Training is a brief training developed by the [Dane County Aging and Disability Resource Center](#) to provide relevant information on dementia for the workplaces, and can be presented by EAO virtually. Employees may encounter dementia in their colleagues and coworkers, consumers of services, members of the public who enter the workplace (intentionally or by mistake), or employees' family members. The purpose of this training is to create a more dementia friendly workplace. Employees may also benefit in their personal and family lives. With a certain percentage of employees trained in the basics, organizations can be considered as "dementia friendly." If you would like to learn more about the dementia friendly workplace training, please contact the EAO. You can also learn more about Alzheimer's disease and related dementias by contacting one of the following local resources:

Aging & Disability Resource Center of Dane County, Dementia Care Specialist, 608-240-7400, www.daneadrc.org

Your Local Senior Center

Alzheimer's Association, 608-203-8500, www.alz.org

Alzheimers & Dementia Alliance, 608-232-3400, www.alzwisc.org

NEW— Responding to Stress Webinar

Stress is a regular part of life. It can be beneficial and motivating and it can also be difficult and debilitating. Your experience of stress may be amplified at this time by the pandemic, remote work, socio-political unrest, discrimination, family responsibilities, or natural disasters that impact you or your loved ones. This three-session online webinar will help you attune to stress in your life, better understand how it functions, and to gain skills to more effectively manage it.

To access the webinar: <https://hr.wisc.edu/employee-assistance-office/responding-to-stress/>

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