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Post-Traumatic Stress (PTSD) involves symptoms that interfere with trust, emotional closeness, communication, responsible assertiveness, and effective problem solving.

The person may seem:

- More critical or dissatisfied
- Like they're not listening or concentrating
- More forgetful
- Lacking focus
- That they're having trouble making cooperative decisions or working as a team
- More irritable
    - Sometimes others feeling like they're walking on eggshells
- More tense or demanding. Others may feel pressured, tense or bossed around by them.
- That they are having more interpersonal difficulties with coworkers or supervisors
    - Often others are then angry with them
- That they have lower energy and mood altogether
- Uninterested in social or usual activities (not going to trainings as much, etc.)
- Distant from and/or avoiding others
- You may notice they're not sleeping or having trouble sleeping
- In an attempt to cope, many increase their drinking

What you can do if someone you know has PTSD:

- Learn about the symptoms and that they're not the person's fault
- Not seeing or treating the person like they have a permanent disability
- Not being overly sympathetic
- Not feeling responsible for the problem or them getting better

What Leaders/Officers need to know about PTSD:

Often PTSD rears its ugly head the form of interpersonal difficulties with supervisor and anger outbursts on the job. Compared to workers without the disorder, those with PTSD have greater rates of work absenteeism, a higher number of medical visits, an increased likelihood of unemployment or underemployment, lower hourly pay, and increased difficulty meeting work-related demands (Belleville et al., 2012; Clarner et al., 2015; Adler et al., 2011; Ramchaud et al., 2015; Zivin et al., 2011).

Ways to help workers with PTSD include the following:

Workplace accommodations can help people with PTSD better manage any physical, cognitive, or emotional limitations they may be experiencing. Examples of low-burden, easy-to-implement accommodations include:

- Providing instructions or job-related responsibilities in writing to aid with memory difficulties.
- Allowing workers to maintain more flexible schedules to take time off for treatment appointments.
- Permitting extra time to complete non-urgent tasks.
- Increasing the amount of light in the working environment to help maintain alertness and improve concentration.

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- Allowing an employee to rearrange his or her office furniture so that the doorway, and therefore any approaching individual, is clearly visible.

Referral to an employee assistance program (EAP) can provide workers with access to a mental health professional for accurate diagnosis and timely treatment. EAPs and other mental health providers also can aid with stress management and coping skills in general. If you don't have access to an EAP, find a provider that specializes in treating persons with PTSD.

For Department Leadership

The Scoop on Debriefings:
Research findings on the use of debriefing—where individuals exposed to trauma share their emotional reactions and discuss the event and its impact—are mixed. Although it is still often used, scientific evidence indicates that debriefing does not prevent or reduce the severity of PTSD, and in fact in several studies, debriefing has been shown to be harmful by increasing PTSD symptoms (Gartlehner et al., 2013). Because of this, debriefing should not be routinely used as a workplace intervention in response to trauma or critical incidents (Joyce et al., 2016).

The National Center for PTSD notes that if debriefing is used, it should only be conducted under the guidance of an experienced and appropriately trained mental health professional, and that attendance to debriefing sessions should be *optional* (National Center for PTSD, 2016). In general, organizations should resist the urge to strongly encourage or require employees to formally discuss recent traumas by participating in workplace support groups. Instead, dissemination of EAP referral information and other mental health resources is preferable and gives workers the necessary information for accessing help without making them feel obligated to participate in an activity that could be potentially detrimental to their well-being.

Understand that many people with PTSD may not ask for help, but there is much an organization can do to set the tone that asking for assistance is okay. Awareness training for all members and leaders creates a culture of understanding and awareness. Providing separate rooms or group relaxation activities (e.g., meditation, gentle yoga, stretching) conveys the message that an organization values the emotional as well as physical health of its employees.

For privacy reasons, do not ask employees if they have PTSD; and legally, you cannot ask applicants whether they have PTSD or any other medical condition. But if a worker has volunteered this information and you are unsure how to help, ask them. Specifically, talking with them about their individual triggers can help ensure effective accommodations are in place. Nobody likes to be patronized, but asking someone in a respectful and direct manner what can be done to make their work life more productive and comfortable is likely be met with appreciation. Demonstrating compassion can go a long way in helping members feel safe to pursue treatment, if needed.

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Accommodation ideas from the Job Accommodations Network include:

- For those with concentration issues, reduce distractions with white noise or environmental sound devices, noise cancelling headsets, modifications in lighting, allow for a flexible work environment or schedule.
- For those with memory issues, provide written as well as verbal instructions, checklists, wall calendars, electronic organizers or apps, additional training time or refreshers.
- For those with organization issues, provide daily, weekly and monthly tasks lists, assign a mentor or coach, use of electronic organizers or apps.
- For those with time management issues, daily To Do lists and check items completed, electronic assists previously noted, regular meetings with supervisors or mentors to determine if goals are being met.
- For those with stress or emotional issues, emphasize stress management techniques, use of a mentor/peer to alert the employee if behavior is becoming unprofessional, EAP assistance and/or allow a flexible work environment.
- For those with coworker interaction issues, encourage the member to walk away from frustrating situations and confrontations, allow part time work from home if applicable, allow for greater privacy while at work, and provide disability awareness training to supervisors and coworkers.

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