

# WHAT CAN I DO?

## Supporting Employees: Coronavirus Fears & Concerns

When a situation like the emergence of a disease occurs, people are affected differently. As a manager, it will be important for you to offer support to those who are struggling with their reactions. You may not be sure what you should say and not say. Here are some suggestions to help guide you.

- › Notice if employees are having difficulties or displaying anxiety. They may not come to you themselves out of embarrassment or feeling it is inappropriate or unprofessional.
- › Address specific fears with a rational approach. Validate their fear, while also bringing the conversation back to what we do know
- › Encourage concrete moves to help reduce anxiety, such as preparing for quarantine, coordinating child care, or organizing a home office.
- › Respect their privacy. Leave it up to the person to decide how much they want to talk about their reactions and what they want to share. Avoid asking intrusive questions.
- › Acknowledge the distressing nature of the situation and how they are reacting to it. Normalize their feelings by saying, "I understand how upsetting this is."
- › Let your genuine concern and care show. Ask what they need. Offer practical help as appropriate, such as shifting workloads or work processes to accommodate higher absenteeism (if possible).
- › If an employee wants to talk about their experience, be ready to listen.
- › Some common reactions during these situations include: reduced concentration, withdrawal, crying and anger. Be patient with them, and don't take reactions personally. Lower your expectations for a while.
- › Provide regular updates from your company leadership and ensure employees know where to find them.
- › Remember that you can't take away others' feelings, but you empathize. News of a serious disease can spark fears over health, loved ones, and even our livelihoods that we all share.
- › Keep offering your support, even if it's declined at first.
- › Recognize your own reactions and take care of yourself.
- › Support the use of professional help if needed. Tell them about the EAP and give them the phone number.

### Try to avoid...

- › Staying away from the subject because you are uncomfortable.
- › Pretending nothing is happening.
- › Using clichés such as "I know just how you feel," "It will all work out."
- › Minimizing the situation – "It could be a lot worse."
- › Trying to "fix it" or offering information you don't have.
- › Giving unsolicited advice. Compassion is more valuable than advice.

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