

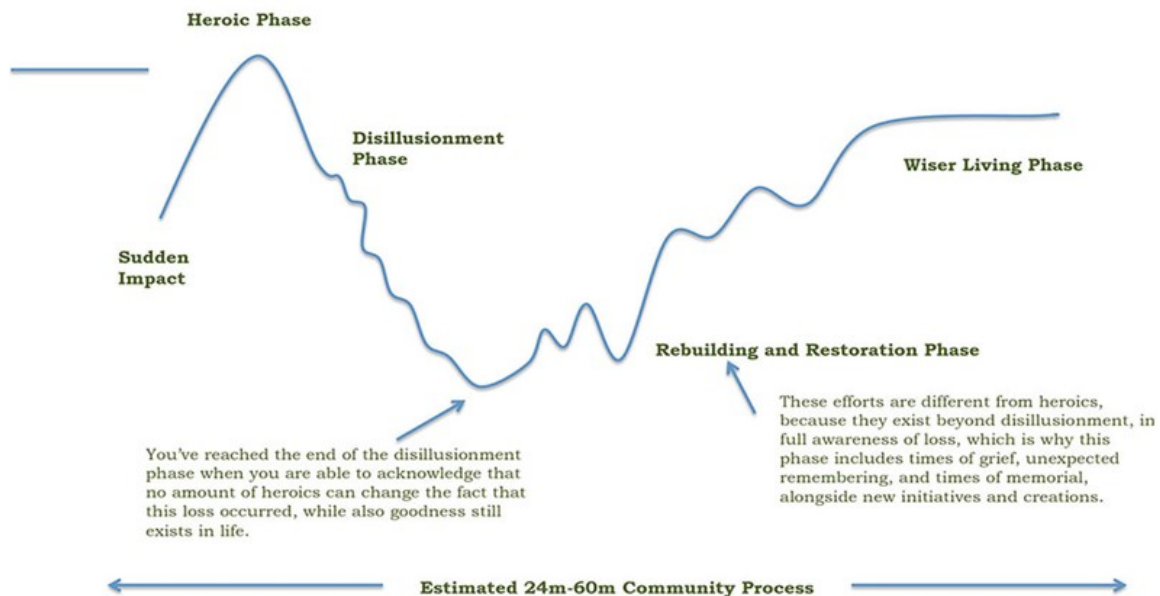
Employee Psychological Recovery, Response, Expectations, and Resources related to COVID-19

Employers are actively assessing current conditions to assist in determining what the psychological needs of their employees will be as we transition through the phases of re-entry and recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. While the exact timeframes for these phases may be unknown, there will likely be a predictable pattern of trauma recovery that employers will share. This briefing serves to assist you in understanding the employee psychological recovery process as you consider your organization's responses.

One of the challenges to recovering from the pandemic is that we are experiencing the various stages of trauma response at different times both domestically and globally. While Americans have watched as China, Italy, and countries around the world were being struck by the pandemic and subsequently began their recovery process, Americans were just starting to feel the impact. As New York and other American hotspots are starting to come down the other side of their peak, some parts of the country are just now climbing the curve, while others still have not really begun.

The Institute for Collective Trauma and Growth created the following graphic as an educational aid for understanding the collective trauma response. It can help leaders to understand that employees will recover from trauma at different paces. It is estimated to take from 24 to 60 months for a community to transition through the four phases of the trauma response curve.

Phases of Collective Trauma Response



While employee health is at the front of everyone's mind, many employers are challenged with plans for reopening workplaces and recovering productivity. When this pandemic was identified, we watched communities show goodwill through charitable acts of donating time and money to food banks, teenagers delivering essentials to elderly neighbors and a host of other efforts. Though this continues with acts of kindness all over the world, there is a growing amount of frustration, agitation, and blame occurring. As people become weary of the lockdowns and fear over health and safety increases, there is a disillusionment phase occurring with regard to the systems in place. Long-term worry, weeks of high stress and poor sleep begin to have a negative impact on the mood and frustration tolerance of employees. You can sense grief over so many losses in almost every conversation.

Employees and employers are ready to take this energy and move on, to find a new sense of "business as usual" in the rebuilding and restoration phase. There are a wide variety of estimates of when the return to normal might begin, amplifying the related restlessness. This is a challenging time for leaders. We will all need to try to innovate and brainstorm how our organization might better respond to employee well-being, while at the same time promoting organizational well-being, as your team is an asset of high priority.

As we begin the re-entry phase, it is crucial that your team members feel that their health and emotional well-being are highly valued to your organization. Important strategies include:

- Communicate clearly with your workforce as next steps are determined. Keeping employees advised of what they may expect next will help ease anxiety. Timely information promotes a sense of control to employees who have been feeling so much uncertainty.
- Remind your employees of all the resources you are providing for their well-being, both physical and emotional. Employees will want to know, "How will you keep me safe?" and "What can I do if I feel anxious and scared about returning to work?"
- Encourage feedback from your teams about how they are feeling about their return and urge them to support each other. Use the "We are all in this together" motto of support. You may want to consider that employees have a buddy, or small group, within their departments to check-in. The buddy is responsible to ask how you are doing, what you need, and to make suggestions to problem solve. This system is designed to prevent employees from feeling isolated or alone in their concerns. If an employee is concerned about a coworker's mental health, he or she can be encouraged to call Carebridge and/or talk with a supervisor.
- Recommend that your employees participate in self-care. Encourage them to take advantage of benefits that focus on healthy lifestyles such as eating well and exercising regularly. As tempting as it may be for some employees to work longer hours to catch up on missed work or to plan future endeavors, it is critical that they use their off hours to relax. Psychological healing and recovery require rest.
- Be aware that your employees will experience ups and downs as they adjust to the new normal. With time and tolerance, these reactions will be experienced by most employees as temporary setbacks. Consider providing a comfort area in a break room or conference room. Stock the room with water and tissues as well as articles on resilience, grieving, and stress-reduction exercises. It may help to have soft lighting and soothing music playing if possible. Invite employees to use the space if they feel overwhelmed, sad, or anxious. Having the Carebridge toll-free phone number readily available in this space would also be beneficial.
- Provide opportunities for your employees to develop resilience by creating meaning through their individual and collective experiences. Share testimonials that reinforce the values of the individual, your employees, your customers, and the organization. Engage employees in providing feedback about the efficacy of your contingency responses, thus improving preparation for future crises.

Contact Carebridge at **800.437.0911** or visit **www.myliferesource.com** for more information!



Carebridge has created several new support options to respond to these challenges. We are currently offering live, virtual support meetings on topics such as stress, parenting, and grief at various times every week. We are also offering timely, webinars on important topics to help meet the demands of your employee concerns. A wealth of materials for coping with the pandemic have also been developed and are available in a special section of our member website, www.myliferesource.com. Our counselors are available for leadership consultations to help you face the newest concerns as they occur within your organization. We are available immediately, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week to provide emotional support and guidance. Our Work-Life Specialists are available for consultations on topics including how to care for a loved one while social distancing, tips for balancing parenting with working from home, as well as, budgeting and financial issues and concerns.

This is the time to learn from, grow with, and support each other.

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