

MENTAL HEALTH INTERNATIONAL

‘Life Will Go On, But This Is Not Business As Usual’ **Employers Urged to Take Seven Specific Steps to Help Employees Contend With the “Emotional Aftermath” of France’s 9/11.**

LONDON, ENGLAND AND TORONTO, CANADA (Monday, November 16, 2015) - The chairman of a business-led workplace mental health campaign in Europe today counseled employers to be alert and responsive to the ‘emotional aftermath’ of the Paris attacks among their employees.

Bill Wilkerson, a Canadian who chairs the European Business Leadership Forum for Workplace Mental Health, and a European employer campaign called “TARGET Depression in the Workplace” this morning set out a seven-point guideline for employers in the wake of these traumatic events.

He said “life will go on but this is not business as usual, and employers must duly understand that, and at a time like this, the employer-employee relationship will be strengthened, affirmed or ruined.”

The campaign Wilkerson leads in Europe involves some of the biggest corporate names in Europe and the world, representing more than a million employees. He said “the workplace must be a venue of safety, security and open discourse on how people are contending with this tragedy, and what they need to contend with it especially respecting a ‘down deep’ worry for their children.”

Similar to guidelines he issued post - 9/11 in New York, and describing the Paris attack as “France’s 9/11 on an emotional scale,” Wilkerson says:

1. Employers should make arrangements at work to allow employees to discuss the Paris attacks in small groups or one-on-one with their managers and possibly professional counselors. In the week ahead, life goes on but this is not business as usual.
2. Working parents may feel the need to stay closer than usual to their children over the next week or so, and employers should respect and accommodate this, allowing their people to leave work earlier to pick up their children at school, or keeping their very young children at home with them instead of sending them to daycare.

3. Managers should be counseled as to how to handle the obvious and less obvious anxiety employees may demonstrate at work, from subtle things like being preoccupied or 'distant,' to more overt expressions of apprehension about weekend plans upcoming, overnight trips, vacation plans, should they cancel?
4. Employers should make available the information employees need to feel reassured that measures to protect their safety have been taken and if security measures are put into place at their place of work, these should be explained clearly and calmly to them. Working parents should also receive suggestions as to the message they can take to their children to provide the same level of assurance for the days ahead.
5. Working parents should also be allowed time off work, if need be, to consult teachers and schools their children attend: what are their kids being told there? What, if any, special security arrangements are being put in place and how are these being explained to the children? If a child becomes upset for seemingly no reason at school, what steps will the teacher take, will parents be contacted? These are things parents will ruminate over, and must know.
6. Employees who are off work due to illness or injury should be contacted by the appropriate manager to see how they are doing, do they need anything, if they are able, welcome them to come to work and be part of any conversations going on there. The key to mental comfort for these people is the connection they have to friends, co-workers and families.
7. And, similarly, employees with elderly or disabled parents should be encouraged – not merely allowed – to get in touch and visit with them, once again giving that person a connection through which to voice, think about and generally understand what their own worries are, and how those worries can be calmed.

“Terrorist events can leave blood on the sidewalk but they can also leave a wound on the brain of a child or adult who may not have been directly involved on the scene or at the time,” Wilkerson says, “Innate fear and worry about the safety of oneself and one’s children is traumatic in its own right.”

He said “the murderous rampage in a public place transformed a normal, natural setting into a fearsome zone of destruction and this imagery can feed into the perception of people as to the safety of other places they inhabit once deemed safe and normal.”

“For this reason, the Paris attacks are France’s 9/11 and the invasive imagery and fall-out from these events will last in the minds of the French population for time to come, and employers must be especially sensitive, wise and helpful to their people at such a turning-point,” Wilkerson said.

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