

## Supporting Staff After Community Trauma

*Supporting staff who are coping with the effects of traumatic events that occur within public or community spaces requires establishing a workplace culture and climate that include psychological safety, inclusion, and compassion from leadership.*

### What is a Mega-Threat?



Negative event targeting a specific group based on identity



Ongoing threatening atmosphere  
+ intense media coverage



Increased stress and fear among people with targeted identity

### Characteristics and Effects of Mega-Threats:

- A mega-threat is a negative event targeting a group of people or community based on their identity followed by intensive coverage by the media or on social media.
- The event and ongoing atmosphere of threat and danger cause harm to people due to their social identity including race, ethnicity, sexual identity or orientation, immigration status, gender, etc.<sup>1</sup>
- Mega-threats cause increased stress and fear of harm for people who share the same identity or who have relationships with people who share that identity.<sup>2</sup>

### Supporting Staff: Recommendations for Organizations:

- Cultivate an organizational climate of inclusion where all staff feel safe, respected, and connected. A key element of inclusion is the intentional hiring of staff from diverse communities who have a range of social identities.<sup>1</sup>
- Develop psychological safety within workplaces, which supports identity-based discussions on race and other stigmatized identities.
  - Psychological safety is “the extent to which an individual believes that they will not be punished for taking interpersonal risks within their team or organization.”<sup>2</sup>

- Facilitate discussion of difficult topics, including identity, which can encourage staff members to feel safe and comfortable engaging with others after a mega-threat occurs.<sup>3</sup>
- Create staff affinity groups for those with marginalized identities to provide support and identify how organizations can meet their individual needs.<sup>3</sup>
  - Affinity groups support positive processes such as emotional sharing and cognitive processing of mega-threats to understand the meaning and make sense of mega-threats.
  - This sharing and processing can develop a sense of cohesion with a group, which supports individual empowerment and authenticity in relationships.<sup>1</sup>
- Show compassion in leadership by paying attention to the emotional responses of staff members, empathizing, acting in a supportive and helpful manner, and creating an environment in which staff feel empowered to speak up for themselves and their peers.<sup>1</sup>
  - Develop policies and practices that recognize the trauma of mega-threats and allow staff members to take time for rest and recovery.<sup>3</sup>

### Resources to Support Trauma-Informed Organizations:

- NCDVTMH: [Tools for Transformation: Becoming Accessible, Culturally-Responsive, and Trauma Informed Organizations](#)
- NCDVTMH: [Tools for Transformation Guide 1: The Social, Emotional, and Relational Climate and Organizational Trauma](#)
- Handout: [Creating Psychological Safety in Teams](#)
- Toolkit: [Compassion at Work](#)

*After establishing an organizational climate and culture that support people with marginalized identities who may be affected by mega-threats, utilize resources for trauma and distress support.*

### Resources for Trauma and Distress Support:

- Articles: [Supporting Employees After Violence Against Their Community](#), [Managing Your Distress in the Aftermath of a Shooting](#)
- Guide: [Six Supportive Ways to Address Trauma that Shows up at Work](#)
- Toolkit: [From Healing to Action: A Toolkit for Gun Violence Survivors and Allies](#)
- SAMHSA's Disaster/Distress Hotline: call or text 1-800-985-5990 (for Spanish, press 2)
- The National Mass Violence and Victimization Resource Center: [Transcend App](#), [Self-Help Resources](#)
- The American Counseling Association: [Trauma and Disaster Mental Health Resources](#)

### References:

- <sup>1</sup> Leigh, A. and Melwani, S. *#BlackEmployeesMatter: Mega-Threats, Identity Fusion, and Enacting Positive Deviance in Organizations*. *Academy of Management Review* 44(3), 564-591, 2019.
- <sup>2</sup> Leigh, A. and Melwani, S. *Am I Next? The Spillover Effects of Mega-Threats on Avoidant Behaviors at Work*. *Academy of Management Journal* 65(3), 2022.
- <sup>3</sup> Leigh, A. and Melwani, S. *Supporting Staff Members After Violence in Their Communities*. *Harvard Business Review*. 2022.