

Crisis Communications Toolkit



Introduction



In today's contentious political climate, it's more important than ever to be intentional about strengthening your workplace culture leading up to volatile or tumultuous events.

This toolkit provides DEI-informed guidance on how organizations can communicate with employees about critical, traumatic, or upsetting events that can arise during particularly contentious times. These events, whether local, national, or global, can disproportionately affect employees from marginalized communities. Communication during these times should build trust, be timely, minimize confusion and missteps, and acknowledge diverse experiences.



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1. Core Principles of Trauma-Informed, DEI-Centered Communication

KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE

National or local events like violence, political unrest, or environmental disasters can affect communities differently based on identity factors such as race, ethnicity, gender, religion, or ability.

Acknowledge the event and how it may disproportionately impact individuals from marginalized backgrounds. Be clear that the organization is aware of these differential effects.

CENTER EMPATHY & PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY

Recognize that employees may be experiencing stress, anxiety, grief, or trauma due to the incident.

Use language that prioritizes psychological safety, offering compassion, understanding, and support to all employees.

OFFER TAILORED, INCLUSIVE SUPPORT

Provide resources that are sensitive to the needs of marginalized groups. For example, mental health support tailored for BIPOC, LGBTQ+, and other specific communities.

WHAT DOES TRAUMA-INFORMED MEAN?

Trauma-informed care shifts the focus from “What’s wrong with you?” to “What happened to you?” A trauma-informed approach to care is based on an understanding of the experience and implications of trauma for individuals, families, and communities. (The Connecticut Women’s Consortium)

2. Communication Strategy for Critical or Traumatic Incidents



DECIDING IF AND WHEN TO ISSUE A RESPONSE

Every situation is unique and should be evaluated independently to consider its relevance to your organization's mission and work, urgency, internal capacity to issue a response, and so on. Here are some factors to consider when evaluating whether to issue an internal response:

- Does the event directly relate to your organization's mission?
- Does this event directly affect your staff or board members?
- Has this event been covered broadly by media or news outlets?
Are people familiar with the news and would they expect to hear from you?
- Is this a local or national news story? (Depending on your organization, local or regional events may take precedent, unless the story is large-scale and of national interest.)

2. Communication Strategy for Critical or Traumatic Incidents, cont.



IMMEDIATE RESPONSE (WITHIN 24 HOURS)

1. Acknowledge the Situation Promptly

- a. Send an organization-wide message to acknowledge the event and express concern for employees who may be affected, while recognizing the varied experiences of different communities.

2. Provide Immediate Resources

- a. Share resources such as Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs), crisis hotlines, or mental health services, ensuring these resources are trauma-informed and inclusive of marginalized groups.



ONGOING COMMUNICATION AND SUPPORT (FOLLOWING DAYS OR WEEKS)

1. Hold regular check-ins with employees

- a. Encourage managers to check in with their teams, particularly with those who may be disproportionately impacted. Provide managers with guidance on how to approach these conversations sensitively.
- b. **Manager Guidance:** Managers should acknowledge the event, show empathy, and provide space for employees to express their needs. Consider that some employees may prefer not to discuss the incident openly, so offer private avenues of support.

2. Reinforce Supportive Culture and Resources

- a. Reiterate the organization's commitment to DEI and a supportive work culture in follow-up messages, ensuring that employees know how to access available resources.
- b. Follow communication with active listening and responsive actions, ensuring that every conversation strengthens the collective sense of belonging and engagement.

2. Communication Strategy for Critical or Traumatic Incidents, cont.



LONG-TERM FOLLOW-UP

1. Survey Employee Needs

- a. Consider conducting a formal or informal survey to understand how employees are feeling post-crisis and what additional support they may need, with a focus on marginalized employees who may have been more affected by the event.

2. Review and Adjust DEI Policies

- a. Use the opportunity to review current DEI and wellness policies to ensure they are robust enough to address future incidents. Engage employee resource groups (ERGs) to gather insights on how policies can better support employees.

3. Messaging Guidance for Critical or Traumatic Incidents

Every organization is unique, so it is important to approach your crisis communications with authenticity and empathy for the different ways employees are impacted by the crisis or event. There is no one-size-fits-all template, and employees can usually spot canned messaging. This can be detrimental to internal trust and psychological safety.



INTERNAL-FACING RESPONSE GUIDELINES:

1



Provide 1-2 sentences of summary of the occurrence, incident, or event in question. Link to news coverage that can provide even greater detail. Give a short message of support that helps to explain why you are commenting. Explain why it's relevant given your organization's mission or work.

2

Recognize the impact it has on employee wellbeing, mental health, personal life, feelings of safety, family, workflow, concentration, ability to complete work, etc. Acknowledge not just the workplace disruption but impact on employees as individuals.

3. Messaging Guidance for Critical or Traumatic Incidents, cont.

3

If it makes sense with the work you do, provide 3-4 sentences about the systemic issues, root causes, that led to this event, and what we must do about it.

4

If you are a leader, consider sharing your own experience and how you are caring for yourself at this time.

5

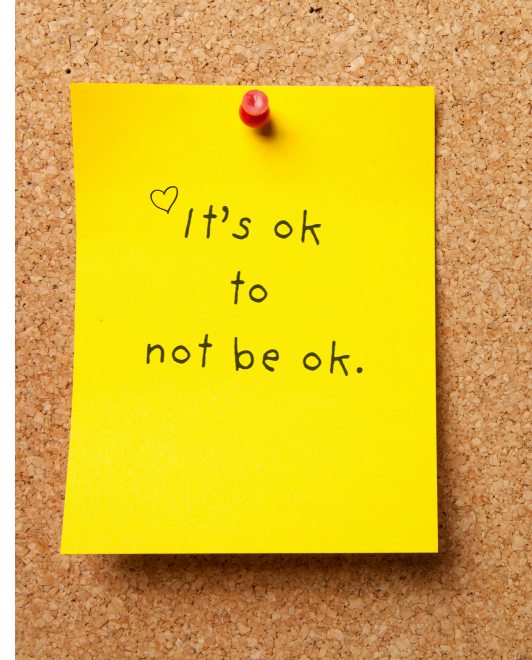
If your organization has issued an external statement, refer and link to the external statement. Include ways the organization is taking action or showing support, if applicable. Include ways for staff to show support.

6

Even if no new resources are made available in response to these breaking news or events, remind your staff of existing resources that are available to them such as personal days, time off, affinity spaces, mental health resources, etc.



4. DEI-Enhanced Support Resources



Culturally-Responsive Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs)

Partner with providers who offer counseling and crisis support with cultural competence in serving BIPOC, LGBTQ+, and other marginalized communities.

Brave Spaces and Affinity Groups

Encourage employees to join affinity/employee resource groups or brave spaces where they can share their experiences with others who may be similarly affected.

Identity-Specific Mental Health Resources

Provide a list of mental health professionals who specialize in trauma or crisis counseling for underrepresented groups.

5. Best Practices for Long-Term DEI-Infused Support



Be Consistent and Visible with DEI Values

Reinforce your organization's DEI values consistently, making sure that employees from all backgrounds feel seen, heard, and supported during traumatic events.



Provide Safe Channels for Feedback

Ensure that employees have accessible, safe, and anonymous ways to express their feelings and share feedback on how the organization can better support them during critical incidents.



Embed DEI in Crisis Protocols

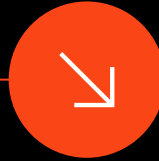
Incorporate DEI considerations into crisis management policies and procedures, ensuring the needs of marginalized communities are factored into the organization's response.



Foster an Ongoing Culture of Inclusivity

Build long-term strategies for addressing how external events might impact employees and maintain a workplace culture where DEI remains a priority even outside of crisis moments.

6. Sustaining inclusive communication



This toolkit provides a comprehensive approach to communicating with employees about critical incidents outside the workplace through a trauma-informed, DEI lens. By acknowledging the impact of these incidents on marginalized communities, offering inclusive support, and ensuring empathy in all communications, organizations can foster a compassionate, equitable workplace during challenging times.

The work doesn't stop here, though. The strategies outlined in this toolkit work best if they are sustained by ongoing diversity, equity, and inclusion work within your organization. **YW Boston can help you identify ways to strengthen your organization's communication strategies** to be more inclusive. Through tailor-made DEI discovery, action planning, and implementation support, we'll meet you where you are on your journey toward becoming a more inclusive workplace.



Let's build a more **inclusive** Boston together.

[Learn more here.](#)