



INSTITUTE FOR  
**COLLECTIVE TRAUMA**  
AND **GROWTH**

# A GUIDE FOR ORGANIZATIONAL RESPONSES TO TRAUMA

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An individual's response to traumatic event(s) can manifest across a variety of systems - physiological, psychological and emotional, spiritual, familial, communal, etc. Similarly, an organization's response to traumatic events has systemic implications. Members of organizations - regardless of role, title, or placement within the organization - can be sources of help or hindrance in the aftermath of trauma. Paying attention to the individual, team and overall organizational impact provides the most comprehensive assessment.





## WITHIN THE ORGANIZATION

Leaders and People Managers would be well served to personally connect with each staff member (and integral volunteers, where applicable) to ask:

### INDIVIDUALS

- How are you?
- What do you need right now?
- What professional responsibilities do you now have that need your attention?
- How can we be flexible to accommodate any personal responsibilities you might now have that need your attention?

**Some organizations will find this natural while others may find it awkward as such personal questions are typically not discussed within the workplace. Often it helps if the more senior party offers a personal example before asking this question, like, “My kids’ school is closed now so it would be ideal for me to leave now and work from home later. How can we be flexible to accommodate any personal responsibilities you might now have that need your attention?”**

### THE TEAM

- How are your team members? (Paying special attention to those who have been directly impacted by the event.)
- What does your team need right now?
- What business activities are on hold? Which will continue?
- **What else are you noticing? People at various levels of the organization will have a clearer line of sight to different areas. Asking everyone to keep their eyes and ears open for concerns or opportunities for action is critical to keeping a holistic pulse on your organization’s processing of the traumatic event.**

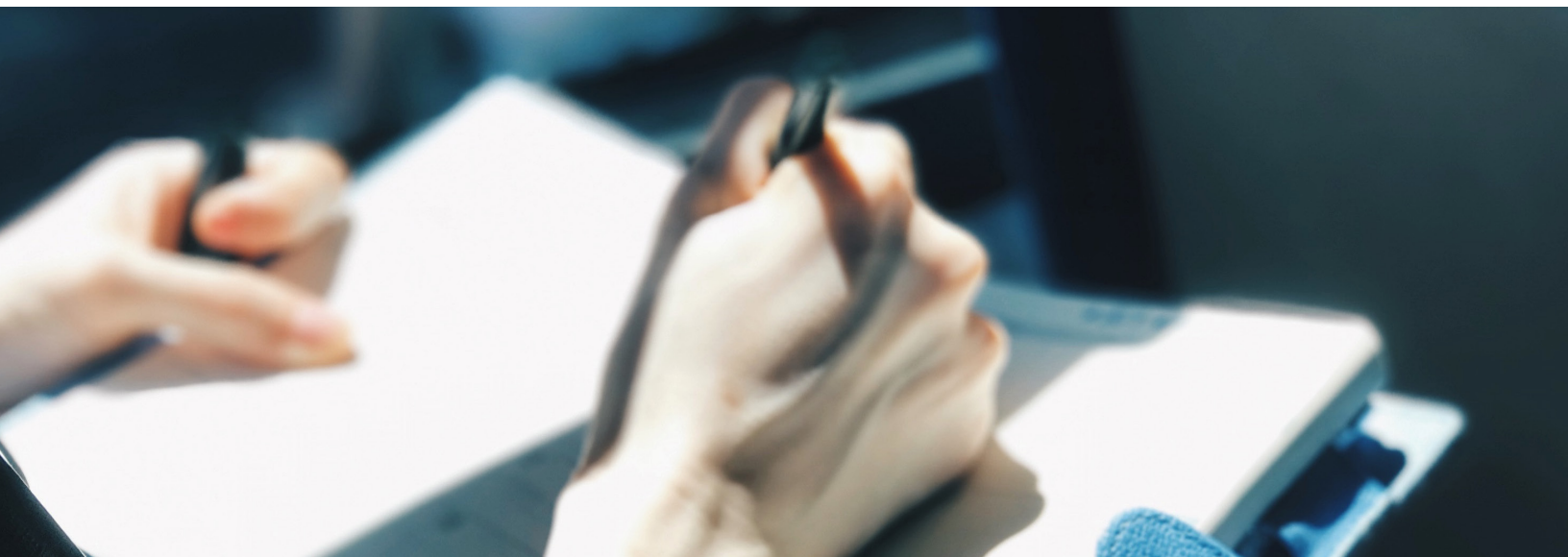


## PROVIDE CLEAR INSTRUCTIONS FOR NEXT STEPS

- Encourage all individuals to prioritize safety, and to refrain from situations that put people in potential danger.
- Once safe, establish communication expectations. Determine how, what, when and where information will be shared.
- Determine if the organization will experience a disruption of services or business activity. If disruption is likely, estimate duration and communicate clearly to internal and external stakeholders.
- Encourage individuals in their ongoing personal health and well-being and normalize common responses to trauma.

## INTERNAL COMMUNICATION

- If typical methods of communication are unavailable or unreliable, provide clear direction for communication through alternate channels. Be sure to communicate this internally and externally.
- If able to resume any level of work in person, encourage regular briefings (e. g., at the beginning and end of a day, at shift changes, lunch, etc.) even if briefly just a few minutes, to ensure warm and helpful handoffs.
- Maintain or increase the frequency of regular staff meetings to help individuals and teams feel connected and informed.





## OUTSIDE THE ORGANIZATION

The following will not be relevant to an identical degree for all organizations, but are helpful to consider in crafting communication after a traumatic event.

### POSSIBLE STAKEHOLDERS

- Clients/Customers
- Board of Directors
- Donors - Individuals, Foundations, Government, etc.
- Neighbors of Physical Property
- Vendors
- Partner organizations
- Media

### CHANNELS FOR COMMUNICATION

- Which communication channels are in working order?
- Which channels are best for reaching specific stakeholders?
- Who will field questions and/or initiate contact with the media?



### SAMPLE MESSAGES AND THEMES

- **Safety** - "We're safe and will communicate again in \_\_ days."
- **Status** - "We have suffered a \_(type)\_ of loss and are addressing that by taking the following actions:"
- **Community Service** - "We are mobilizing resources to meet the need for \_\_\_\_."
- **Donations** - "We are accepting donations in the form of \_\_\_\_\_, and ask that donations in other forms are directed elsewhere."
- **Communication** - "Our phone lines are currently unreliable. Please communicate with us via email until further notice."

## PROVIDING IMMEDIATE RESOURCES

Remind staff of resources available through Human Resources, benefits packages, as well as local sources. Encourage them to call on who they know and trust.

## KEEP IN MIND

It is common for people to keep their personal and professional lives separate. Trauma can make a person's ability to keep this boundary intact challenging. In addition to the impact of the traumatic event itself, feelings of intense vulnerability and fear stemming from one's personal life being more visible in the workplace, is common and needs to be respected. Some will enjoy opportunities to process together as a group, while others will prefer to navigate this new terrain with those outside the work group. Normalizing a variety of ways of processing is important. Encourage a variety of opportunities for individuals to work through this trauma within, and outside of the team.

**For more information, visit [www.ictg.org](http://www.ictg.org)**





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P. O. Box 3498 Santa Barbara, CA 93130 • [ictg.org](http://ictg.org)