

WAR IN UKRAINE

How Business Leaders Can Support Employees Affected by the Crisis

You can help employees feel safe and supported by offering opportunities for discussion, reminding people of available support services, and leading at a difficult time with compassion and empathy.

The war in Ukraine has many people on edge. Some of your employees are likely feeling saddened, shocked, and powerless to help. Images of war may be triggering personal trauma. These circumstances create the potential for high rates of stress, impacting how your employees show up at work.

People with family and friends in Ukraine and Russia may feel an even greater degree of grief and despair. Other workforce groups – including veterans, immigrants and refugees – may experience post-traumatic distress. Some workers may be angry that this war is being treated differently than earlier global conflicts that affected them personally. The source and severity of reactions will differ, but as an employer, this provides the opportunity to show care and concern for workers.





Five steps to support employee mental health and well-being

1. Normalize that workers may be experiencing real challenges, and commit to compassion.

Whether in a message from your CEO or senior leadership, or through an all-staff town hall or other discussion forum, let employees know you're offering support. Acknowledge the conflict, commit to a company culture of compassion, and emphasize the importance of an inclusive, supportive workplace.

Consider backing up your commitment with a contribution to a [humanitarian](#) organization. You can solicit feedback from employees who are familiar with the region to help guide your donation. A company-matching pledge can unite employees for a common cause, bridge workplace divisions, create belonging at work, and combat a sense of hopelessness through action.

Make sure to communicate to all employees—including any based overseas, particularly in Europe—about the support you're providing. Connect your actions to your company values, especially if you have a history of standing up for human rights or democracy.

2. Create a psychologically safe environment for employees to discuss what they're experiencing.

Encouraging workplace conversations about real-world issues affecting employees can strengthen your company's culture and help workers feel supported. Begin by setting clear ground rules for [civil discourse](#) at work.

- Remind employees about your organization's anti-discrimination policies. Say it plainly that discriminatory or dehumanizing language about either Russian or Ukrainian people will not be tolerated.
- Require mutual respect. Those most affected may feel strongly that there is a right and wrong aspect to the conflict, but employees who take opposing views should not be labeled or treated as wrong.
- Encourage employees to listen to and reflect understanding for each other's positions before jumping in with their perspective.
- Establish common values, and guide conversations to reach back to these values to help identify areas of agreement.

Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) and other affinity networks groups may be well positioned to lead employee conversations about the conflict and make recommendations to leadership about workplace support needs. These groups may also be able to mine the unique perspectives from diverse communities of employees and the unseen implications that the war in Ukraine has on them.



3. Educate your workforce to recognize signs of distress in colleagues.

Possible signs of distress include noticing changes that are not typical for a person in appearance, behavior, mood, and related issues. This might show up at work as a drop in performance, being late for meetings and/or work, social withdrawal, irritability, excessive vigilance, a heightened startle response, and difficulty concentrating or sleeping. If you notice these signs, check-in to let the person know that you care, and ask for permission to connect them with internal resources or professional support.

4. Provide support to managers and give space for flexibility.

Remind managers to “check-in” with their teams and to be aware that the overseas conflict may be impacting employees. If they are aware of employees who are experiencing distress, remind managers of the importance of being flexible with workloads, deadlines, and to ask a team member about any additional support needs. Especially for employees with friends or family in the affected area, recognize their need to put personal or family needs first, and provide them with the support to do so.

Managers should be encouraged to listen and empathize with team members directly impacted by the conflict and to be aware of company and community resources that are available for supportive referrals. Check in with managers on how you can support them while they are supporting their teams during difficult times.

5. Remind employees of the resources available to them.

Use check-ins and conversations that may arise about the conflict as opportunities to share your company’s mental health benefits and Employee Assistance Program (EAP) offerings. Ask your EAP

providers if they are offering special tools or resources for affected populations to share through company emails or other distribution methods. You can also refer employees to [self-care tips](#) for coping with stressful news and [guidance for parents](#) on how to talk to children about the war.

CRISIS RESOURCES

Employees in crisis can find immediate support here:

- The **National Suicide Prevention Lifeline** offers 24-hour, toll-free, confidential support for people in distress.
1-800-273-TALK (8255)
TTY: 1-800-799-4889
[Suicidepreventionlifeline.org](https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org)
- The **Disaster Distress Helpline** provides 24-hour, toll-free crisis counseling and support to people experiencing emotional distress related to natural or human-caused disasters.
1-800-985-5990
samhsa.gov/find-help/disaster-distress-helpline
- The **Veterans Crisis Line**: Reach caring, qualified responders with the Department of Veterans Affairs. Many of them are Veterans themselves.
1-800-273-TALK (8255)
TTY: 1-800-799-4889
Text: 838255
veteranscrisisline.net