



International Association for Suicide Prevention (IASP)

HELPING WORKPLACES & PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS THROUGH THE COVID-19 CRISIS

The COVID-19 pandemic is impacting workplaces and professional associations worldwide as they navigate new working structures and environments amongst financial uncertainty. The International Association for Suicide Prevention recognizes the implications this may have on the mental health and wellbeing of every workplace community. The following recommendations aim to provide some guidance to support workplaces as they navigate this new reality with reassurance, support and signposting.

To Workplace Leaders/Managers

Communicate regularly with your community and model self-care. Here are some suggested talking points:

- **Thank you:** Express gratitude for their service during unprecedented times and how their work is serving (or has served if they are furloughed) an important mission.
- **We see you & we want to hear from you:** Acknowledge they are facing unimaginable challenges right now (list examples specific to your community). and that many find their brain is not working the way you want it to due to intense anxiety or overwhelm. Then say, "I get it, me too." Create an open forum where workers can connect, check-in and support one another.
- **We Care About You:** Say. "While we had no choice rise to this challenge, we have choices about how we take care of each other. Your work matters because you matter to us. Your families matter to us. We don't want you to just survive the coming weeks, we want you to thrive because we need you and you are part of our community." And then offer a short list of resources and action steps you are taking to help them cope.
- **Belonging:** Work can be a person's primary place to connect with meaning and purpose, through shared goals. For those feeling isolated, reaffirming your shared values and goals can offer comfort that "I belong". Constructing online activities, working groups or meetings that are introduced with messaging around values, belonging and community.
- **Financial assistance:** Look to your Government for information on what kinds of financial support packages might be available and offer sessions on financial adjustments in addition to private financial counselling sessions (check with your Employee Assistance Provider if you have one). This is especially important if you make notifications that impact them. Create an easy to read guide for your workers to take home and discuss with their family that includes crisis support numbers.



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Give workers suggestions on coping and offer resources in small doses over time. Here are some suggestions:

- **Telehealth counseling:** <https://www.betterhelp.com/>
- **On-line 12-step groups for addiction recovery support:** <https://www.12step.org/social/online-meetings/>
- **Crisis resources:** https://www.iasp.info/resources/Crisis_Centres/
- **For more information on Employee Assistance Programs:** <https://www.eapassn.org/>
- **iFight Depression Tool: An online, guided self-management programme that aims to help individuals with mild to moderate depression to self-manage their symptoms:**
<https://ifightdepression.com/en/>

Where workers may have existing vulnerabilities or are currently struggling with thoughts of suicide:

- **Suspend judgement:** While the workplace is likely to still have deliverables, deadlines and high expectations, this is not the time to become more rigid and unyielding with yourself, or those around you. Suspend your judgement for when times are more certain and settled.
- **Set a positive challenge to yourself:** Dedicate time to find things you are grateful for and focus on gratitude to motivate love for things around you. Ask for (and accept!) support when you need it. These are challenging times and we all need some extra TLC. Compassion can help you through frustration, annoyance and anger – but you will have to be brave to feel self-compassion (and compassion for others). If you feel like you're entering a high-risk head space, actively seek help.
- **This too, will pass:** As tough as the current situation is, with time, the crisis will pass and we will find a new normal. If the news coverage or work conversations around Covid-19 and our futures are overwhelming, don't be afraid to turn the news off or ask for a 'Covid-19 free day'. Focus on positive relationships. Focus on what you can control. Be gentle with yourself.
- **Financial stressors:** The whole world is subject to financial uncertainty and you are not alone in navigating how you will re-establish your income. Talk with your employer about anything concerning you.



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Workplace Suicide Postvention During the COVID-19 Crisis

Should your workplace or professional association experience a suicide death or highly public attempt, it is important not to assume it was solely the direct result of the COVID-19 crisis. Suicide is a complex, public health issue that often represents a perfect storm of risk factors that converge in a particular time. Messaging should reflect the tragedy of the suicide but refrain from making any causal linkages.

Crisis interventions after a suicide death should follow similar protocols as other health and safety crises with additional attention toward safe messaging practices. Additionally, leaders should acknowledge the incredibly complicated grieving response that mourners now face given in-person grieving rituals are most likely postponed indefinitely.

For more guidance on how to manage communication and worker support after a suicide visit: <https://www.sprc.org/resources-programs/managers-guide-suicide-postvention-workplace-10-action-steps-dealing-aftermath>

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