

# WORKING THROUGH COVID-19



## Article 3

### Dealing with Work-Related Issues

November 24, 2021

COVID-19 has had a strong impact on the work of all of us. Employees have worked tirelessly for over a year and a half under diverse conditions, while also balancing family, homeschool, health, and personal issues in their lives. Anxiety in the workplace is near-universal right now. Employees might have angst or trepidation about being in the workplace while facing new realities of working during the pandemic and trying to cope with the changes as they develop.

## Dealing with Work-Related Issues

The workplace has undergone a dramatic shift which fundamentally altered how employees worked, where they worked, and how we collaborated with each other to accomplish organizational goals. As individuals adapt to their present work environment, they may observe the following situations in themselves or their co-workers:

- Feeling uncertain, overwhelmed, or a loss of personal safety – it's normal to feel these trauma-related emotions due to COVID-19 which may linger.
- Increased, intensified feelings of grief, rage, fear, or helplessness – the end of the pandemic is uncertain so the nervous system may stay reactive as the situation evolves.
- Tensions between groups of employees who worked through the stay-at-home order and those who did not – essential employees were required to report to the workplace to maintain the organization's business continuity plans in serving the public.
- Differences with the challenges of returning to work – loss of flexibility in schedules, more demanding workloads, and readjusting to busy offices after working alone at home.
- Previous conflicts resurfacing between employees or employees and supervisors – physical distancing through remote work meant less contact with others temporarily eliminating sources of conflicts. Daily, in-person contact may mean a recurrence of those issues.



The impact of high anxiety, unresolved emotions, and disputes between employees can be extremely damaging. If relationships become fractured, stress levels may rise, and productivity can decrease. These situations will affect work, morale, and the expectations we have of each other.

Here are suggestions to avoid conflict, navigate through difficult times, help employees stay connected in a meaningful way, and create a positive work atmosphere.

### Talk to and Support Each Other – Employees and Supervisors

- It's important employees know they can talk about their emotions and feel listened to without judgment. Offer help to each other.

- Now is the time to be open and connect with each other. Sharing what we have experienced may help others cope with their own challenges realizing someone else has already faced and managed a similar situation. However, avoid offering advice.
- Remember to be kind to each other. Take a moment to express appreciation, give a compliment, or share feelings of gratitude.
- Don't be afraid to be vulnerable and express individual possibilities and limitations about work issues with a supervisor. They will be able to clarify things, recommend solutions, and address issues.



#### Leadership by Example - Supervisors

- Inquire about how employees are doing. Ask what challenges they are facing. This kind of transparency helps employees see they are not necessarily alone in the way they are feeling and encourages them to pull together and support one another.
- Don't pressure employees to take part in office activities they feel uncomfortable with and avoid making them feel they are letting down co-workers if they choose to distance themselves for personal reasons. Individuals may have been affected differently and need time to adjust at their own pace.
- Many employees performed their responsibilities above expectations despite the challenges faced during this difficult time. They demonstrated dependability and earned respect for their unfaltering efforts. Praise them for a job well done and let them know it's an honor to work with them.

#### Get Organized with Teamwork - Supervisors

- Establish clear, timely, and consistent communication about what needs to get done and how to make things happen. This will keep employees focused on priorities, help to reduce anxiety, lessen the likelihood of conflict arising, and ensure working relationships are maintained.
- Provide structure with regular team or individual meetings about work plans, deadlines, and expectations for each employee. Be sensitive to insecurities about work and flexible in developing solutions together. Having honest dialogue about the situation gives supervisors the opportunity to reassure employees, add a sense of perspective, and deal with issues early on.
- Plan scheduled communication, i.e., weekly emails or interoffice memorandums, updating employees about any changes in projects, assignments, or responsibilities. This needs to be clearly conveyed on a regular basis to prevent wrong expectations and miscommunications.

We've never dealt with this before, so we all need to keep an eye on things, listen to feedback, and adjust as needed. Now may be an excellent time to reflect on what did or didn't work during the stay-at-home order. What did we learn? What can be improved? What opportunities presented themselves because of the crisis? Think about new office strategies, revise standard operating procedures, improve outreach materials, and develop new digitalization approaches for the workplace.

The Office of Employee and Organization Development is the organization's internal Employee Assistance Program. We are available to help employees or supervisors find solutions for personal and work-related issues, offer management consultation and coaching, conduct critical incident stress management, provide conflict mediation, and arrange workplace team assessments.



## Office of Employee and Organization Development

✉ [oeod@njsp.org](mailto:oeod@njsp.org)



<https://www.state.nj.us/njsp/oeod>



800-367-6577