

# Empathetic Rounding for Leadership

**Empathetic Rounding** is an approach management can use when interacting with employees who are faced with an overly challenging event, in which they connect with their employees, show genuine care, compassion and understanding, demonstrate interest and build trust. After a traumatic event, managers should assess for emotional needs, observe competency and safety issues, and assure employees support is available. The goal of Empathetic Rounding is to empower managers to become engaged in the process of fostering resilience among employees and to decrease behavioral risk through psychological first-aid practices.

## Empathy vs. Sympathy

Managers are encouraged to display *empathy* for employees, rather than *sympathy*. Expressions of sympathy, such as, “I feel bad for you.” “I don’t know what we will do.” or “You poor dear.” are disempowering. In contrast, expressions of empathy are more empowering—for example, “I can see you are upset—how can I best support you?” Or, “You sound sad...that is normal for what you heard today. Are there things we can do as an organization to support you?”

Displaying empathy helps to normalize emotions, empower management and employees, reinforce resilience and identify high-risk situations in which the employee needs to be referred to appropriate professionals. For example, it may be appropriate to recommend the EAP to employees who are in need of professional support.

## Key Rounding Questions (pulse checking)

Following are examples of questions managers may ask employees when doing Empathetic Rounding:

- How are you doing today? I know we have a lot going on...how are your colleagues doing?
- Do you feel you can be productive today? If not, what can I do to help you?
- That was upsetting news we heard today; how can I best support you to be able to continue in your role? What can we do as an organization that would be helpful?
- If we had a counselor come onsite to support us in our grief and trauma, do you think you or others would take advantage of that service?

## What is resilience?

Resilience is the process of adapting well in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats, or even significant sources of stress—such as family and relationship problems, serious health problems, or workplace and financial stressors. It means "bouncing back" from difficult

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experiences. Research has shown that resilience is ordinary, not extraordinary. People commonly demonstrate resilience. This being said, it's important for managers to watch for employees who might be more susceptible to emotional challenges, impacting their ability to "bounce back." Employees in the following situations may be particularly vulnerable:

- New employees who have just started the job
- New employees who have recently moved to a new community (haven't developed support systems or are far away from family)
- Employees going through stressful life events (e.g. divorce, bankruptcy, death of a loved one)
- Employees with performance problems who are facing disciplinary action.

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