

Helping frontline staff after a major event

Following a major event, impacted customers are often relying on the support provided by frontline staff across many organisations. These include those providing services in face-to-face environments, via telephone, online and in some cases, in home based settings. A wide range of industries such as banking, insurance, education, transportation, health, legal and local, state and federal government agencies will be involved.

Many of these customers will be experiencing a range of emotional responses to the personal impact recent events have had on them, their family members, their colleagues, their friends and their community. Some may have had no direct impact but are struggling to deal with the severity of the events and the way it has impacted those in the world around them.

During these interactions, frontline staff can expect that customers may express a range of emotions, even if they are trying hard not to. This may include:

- ◆ Grief and tearfulness
- ◆ Confusion and inability to retain information
- ◆ Inability to make decisions
- ◆ Anger and irritability over situations they can't influence
- ◆ A need to find a focus for angry feelings
- ◆ Emotional turbulence including fear, anxiety and sadness
- ◆ Reigniting memories or losses experienced at an earlier time

The following tips might help when interacting with customers in emotional crisis:

- ◆ **Communication should be predictable, familiar and respectful** – some people will want to tell you their story and others won't want to talk about it at all. There is no right or wrong way to feel.
- ◆ **Regaining a sense of control, normalcy and routine is an important factor in recovery** – helping your customers regain access and control over their circumstances can be of major benefit to them
- ◆ **Avoid asking for more detail about the experience of the customer unless they first disclose it** – pushing people to share their experiences can be harmful at this early stage
- ◆ **Focus on what you CAN DO to help the customer** – focus on their specific needs and provide reassurance on how you can assist them
- ◆ **Present information in a simple and straightforward way** – write down key details or numbers
- ◆ **Help them to avoid making major changes or decisions** – major life decisions made during this time may not be the best decision they could make
- ◆ **You don't need to share your story if you have been personally impacted** – thank the customer for their concern and focus on meeting their needs