



For U.S. health care providers

How to Acknowledge Hate Crimes With Your Team

A tool for managers and team leaders

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GOAL

Prepare a message to acknowledge a hate crime or identity-related violence, clarify your organization’s values, and provide options for support to your team.

INTENDED USER

Manager, team lead

TIME REQUIRED

30 minutes to prepare, 5 minutes to deliver message to team

HOW TO USE THIS TOOL

Use this tool after a hate crime or identity-related violence has occurred in the workplace or your broader community. Follow the prompts in this tool to decide whether to acknowledge this event with your team, decide on the right time and place, draft your message, and follow up with individual team members. This tool will help you thoughtfully acknowledge events with your team but is not designed to help you facilitate an in-depth discussion.

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Why it's important to acknowledge hate crimes with your team

In the past, leaders have tended to try to keep current events outside of the workplace—but leaders increasingly recognize it's impossible to separate one's work life from their personal life.

Major current events, especially those tied to identity, inevitably impact employees' mental health, well-being, and productivity. This is especially true of hate crimes or identity-related violence. Your employees are certainly impacted by these events and are likely already talking about them among themselves, so it's important they understand your organization's values as they relate to these events.

Employees also increasingly expect leaders to speak up. According to research from the Edelman Trust Barometer, 54% of employees globally believe that CEOs should speak publicly on controversial political and social issues.

As a manager, your job first and foremost is to take care of your team. This means acknowledging identity-related violence, condemning inequity and intolerance, and offering your team members support.

Step 1: Decide whether to acknowledge an event with your team

Consider how you would describe the issue or event in clear, specific terms. If you answer yes to any of these questions, you may want to acknowledge it with your team:

- Is this event affecting any of my team members' real or perceived safety or well-being?
- Does this event tie back to our organization's core mission or values?
- Does this event underscore a form of inequity or discrimination that impacts our staff or patients?
- Is this a story that many people are hearing conflicting messages on?

Tips:

- **Do** know your goal. Acknowledge hate crimes both to support staff who are directly impacted *and* to help employees understand how these events relate to your organization's values and mission. The goal is not to "other" the victims but rather to ensure every single team member knows they have a role to play in preventing identity-based inequities.
- **Do** regularly celebrate and honor non-dominant cultures to strike a balance. You may inadvertently reinforce stereotypes if you only talk about certain groups of people with your team after a traumatic event.
- **Do not** ignore major events. While it's impossible to discuss every hate crime that occurs, you should acknowledge significant public traumas. Examples may include police killings of Black men; the January 6, 2021, insurrection at the Capitol; and mass shootings targeting specific identity groups.

Step 2: Decide on the right time and place

Complete these four preparation steps before you acknowledge the event with your team.

Steps to prepare	Tips
<p>Understand your organization’s position. Reach out to HR to ask if there are any existing talking points to communicate your organization’s position on this event.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do still acknowledge the event, even if no talking points exist. Just be mindful of any HR guidelines on discussing current events.
<p>Identify the right channel. Options include a team meeting, one-on-one check-ins, an email, or a message on your internal messaging system.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do deliver the message live (virtually or in person) rather than in writing when possible. This allows for the most meaningful interaction and minimizes the risk of your message being shared externally out of context. • Do acknowledge the event in writing if your organization has already responded and has some scripting you can use (so you’re not starting from scratch) or you anticipate vocal pushback from team members (this may create a traumatic experience for other employees). • Do consider a combination of communication methods—for example, making a statement during a team meeting and checking in individually with directly impacted employees. • Do contact your HR Business Partner or a colleague you trust to practice your message, especially if you’re nervous or new to talking about identity-related violence.
<p>Set a time. It’s best to acknowledge the event soon after it happens—otherwise, employees may assume they’re expected to operate as if it’s “business as usual.”</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do consider opening your next team meeting by making a statement. • Do not wait if you don’t have an upcoming team meeting. Send an email/message to acknowledge the event and highlight support options.
<p>Check in with staff who are impacted. If you decide to make a statement live in a meeting, check in with team members who may be more directly affected. See page 10 for more guidance.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do recognize that each team member will need to process the event in their own way. It may be distressing or painful for some employees to continue to have to relive the event. • Do give your team members a heads up and allow them to opt out of the meeting where you plan to acknowledge the event.

Step 3: Draft your message

An effective message should include the five components outlined below. Review these components and the completed example on page 8. Then, use the space on page 9 to draft your own message that includes these five components.

Component	Tips
<p>01 Acknowledge the event. Use clear, specific language to demonstrate you are taking the event seriously.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do refer to language your organization used if they made a statement. • Do be clear. Specify what happened, who was involved, and what the public response has been. • Do use active (rather than passive) phrasing and identify the responsible actor (for example, do NOT say, “a woman was attacked”—this removes the actor from the picture. Instead, say, “a man attacked a woman.”) • Do make it clear you’re not opening the floor to comments (as this can be traumatic for people who were impacted by the event). However, if your team has had similar conversations in the past, you may consider opening the floor to ask how team members are feeling. • Do prepare for pushback if you expect detractors. Maintain a respectful but firm tone—acknowledge that differences of opinion are okay, but your organization cannot support attacks on human rights. • Do not use graphic language. Again, this can be traumatic for people. • Do not avoid mentioning the event for fear of saying the wrong thing. You probably won’t find the perfect words, but it’s better to acknowledge the event than to remain silent.
<p>02 Tie your statement back to organization’s mission and values Make it clear why you are talking about the event at work and why it’s important for your team to care.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do remind team members how the work they do can directly reduce existing inequities. • Do reference language from your organization’s mission statement or values (for example, inclusivity, compassion, or equity). • Do not tie the event to politics—instead, focus on why you’re talking about this event in the first place. (For example, you can say, “This is not about politics, this is about human rights.”)
<p>03 Share your reaction without putting the burden on others. Use “I” statements to communicate your feelings about the event.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do speak up, even if you’re not “directly affected” by the issue. Use this opportunity to be open with your team and act as an advocate. • Do not make assumptions/generalizations about how others feel. (For example, do not say, “I’m sure all Latinx people feel angry today.”) • Do not require anyone to speak or represent the perspective of an entire identity group. (For example, do not say, “Sarah, you’re a woman of color—how do you feel about this event?”)

Source: Goldin K, “[How to Talk About Current Events as a Company Leader](#),” Medium, January 16, 2020; Washington EF et al., “[How to Talk with Your Team About the Violence at the U.S. Capitol](#),” HBR, January 7, 2021; Loosvelt D, “[How to Talk About George Floyd and Racism with Your Team](#),” Vault, June 3, 2020; Wink C, “[To white organizational leaders, silence is violence. Here’s what you should do now](#),” Generosity, June 1, 2020; “[How to Talk About Race, Gender and Social Issues at Work](#),” Indeed, March 29, 2021; Green A, “[I’m the only black person on my team and it seems to be “business as usual” this week](#),” Ask a Manager, June 4, 2020; Advisory Board interviews and analysis.



STEP 3: DRAFT YOUR MESSAGE (CONT.)

Component	Tips
<p>04 Offer support. Highlight options for support. Do your research ahead of time to make sure you know where to direct team members.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do highlight organizational resources, like your employee assistance program (EAP) or employee resource groups/affinity groups. • Do think about what you can offer as a leader, including extra flexibility with deadlines or the opportunity for dialogue. • Do note that different reactions and processing techniques are valid. Some people may need space. • Do recognize that this event may impact productivity. While it can be difficult as a manager to accept decreases in productivity, a short-term decline in productivity is better than losing employees because they don't feel supported at your organization. • Do not encourage employees to sweep emotions under the rug or "push through" to be productive. • Do not pressure team members to talk to you about the event. Be clear that every option outlined is just that—an option, not a requirement. • Do not feel like you must be the sole source of support for your team members. You can provide value simply by helping team members tap into other support resources.
<p>05 Suggest action items. No one impacted by the event should feel obligated to channel their sadness or anger into action, but people may want ideas of how to help.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do share how you will be responding to the event (learning, donating, volunteering, advocating, etc.) and invite your team members to join you. • Do tie action items to the work your team does. • Do consider making discussions about identity and equity a regular part of your team meetings so that the topics don't come up only in times of crisis. • Do not require any specific action immediately following the event. Your message should focus on acknowledging the event and providing support. • Do not claim to be an expert on identity-related violence or inequities. Encourage team members to share any ideas they have about how to create a more equitable and inclusive work environment.

Source: Goldin K, "How to Talk About Current Events as a Company Leader," Medium, January 16, 2020; Washington EF et al., "How to Talk with Your Team About the Violence at the U.S. Capitol," HBR, January 7, 2021; Loosvelt D, "How to Talk About George Floyd and Racism with Your Team," Vault, June 3, 2020; Wink C, "To white organizational leaders, silence is violence. Here's what you should do now," Generosity, June 1, 2020; "How to Talk About Race, Gender and Social Issues at Work," Indeed, March 29, 2021; Green A, "I'm the only black person on my team and it seems to be 'business as usual' this week," Ask a Manager, June 4, 2020; Advisory Board interviews and analysis.

Sample statement:

Good morning, team. I need to start today's meeting on a somber note. Yesterday, a man killed ten people in a mass shooting targeting the LGBTQIA+ community. I felt horrified when watching the news. Because this is such a raw topic, I'm not going to open this up for discussion, but it's important for me as a leader to articulate our values and share what support is available to you. If you have comments or questions, please bring them to me personally.

One of our values at this organization is that all people feel safe and welcome in our facilities. This hate crime makes it clear how important it is to create safe spaces for all community members, and particularly queer and transgender people who are too often marginalized and targeted in our society. We each play a direct role in making LGBTQ+ patients feel seen and welcome, and in calling out any disparities in treatment that we witness.

Our organization also wants every employee to feel safe bringing their full self to work, and that means not pushing emotions under the rug. I understand that you might be distracted today as you process this event. I expect I will be, too.

I've cleared my calendar the rest of this afternoon if anyone wants to talk more, although I fully understand if you don't want to. I also want to make sure you're aware that the LGBTQIA+ affinity group is hosting a support session tomorrow for LGBTQIA+ employees and allies. I've cancelled our overlapping team meeting so that you can attend if you want to.

If anyone is looking for action items to help in response to this tragedy, I will be donating to these trans-led organizations this week. They're leading work on the ground to respond to this event. I'll send out an email today with instructions on how to use our organization's donation-matching policy.

Our mission is to help all people live healthier lives, and we will continue to learn about how we can advance equity during our monthly meetings on identity and privilege.

Draft your statement:

Use the space below to draft a message about a real hate crime that has occurred, or practice using one of the hypothetical examples below.

- Two men were caught on camera harassing a woman in a hijab just a few blocks from your hospital.
- Members of a white supremacist organization painted racial slurs and violent threats on a community center in a predominately Black neighborhood nearby.

Step 4: Follow up with individual staff

After acknowledging the hate crime with your team, consider following up to provide offer targeted support for team members who may be struggling following the event. Refer to our conversation guide [How to check in with a staff member about their well-being](#) for more guidance.

Tips:

- **Do** offer concrete options for support so your team members don't have to guess at what's possible (for example, delaying deadlines or covering certain responsibilities or meetings for them).
- **Do** recognize that some team members may not feel comfortable discussing the event with you, and that's okay.
- **Do not** do this in front of the entire team. Find time to meet one-on-one with team members.

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