



CREATING SPACE: DISCUSSING THE KILLING OF TYRE NICHOLS

When you create a safe, supportive space where staff can constructively share their thoughts and feelings about sensitive issues and events, you can foster a stronger sense of support, belonging, and community among your staff in the process.

Background on Today's Critical Conversation

Tyre Nichols, a 29-year-old Black man, was killed by police in Memphis, Tennessee, in early January 2023. **According to NPR:**

Nichols, a father of a 4-year-old son, was known to his family and friends as an avid skateboarder and nature photographer from Sacramento, Calif., according to The Associated Press. He arrived in Memphis just before the pandemic and started working with FedEx, a major employer. The New York Times reported that Nichols had been with the company for about nine months before his death.

For additional information, please consider these articles:

- [The Associated Press: Tyre Nichols Remembered as Beautiful Soul with Creative Eye](#)
- [NPR: What We Know About the Killing of Tyre Nichols](#)
- [The New York Times: 71 Commands in 13 Minutes](#)

Leading the Conversation

Regardless of whether or not someone watched the police camera footage of the murder, this type of event can trigger people to feel pain they've felt before. Those triggers can produce more anxiety, more worry, more concern, more sadness, and more depression, and that all impacts people's work. It affects how people show up with their coworkers, friends, and family.

Acknowledging all those feelings is the first important step in healthy coping. Acknowledging as a staff that there is something to talk about in conversations, particularly conversations like these, can let people know that it is OK to have these conversations in these settings.

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Before you open up the topic, establish or review the guidelines for the discussion. While all staff are likely to be upset, it's important to note that People of Color are carrying an extra emotional burden. Some guidelines could include the following:

- It's okay to pass if you need more time to think or would rather not respond.
- Speak from your own point of view. Avoid sharing experiences other than your own.
- Be your own barometer - share as much as you feel comfortable sharing.
- Confidentiality is important. We need to agree that what we share among ourselves will stay private.

Next, provide an introduction to the issue. Say a little about the killing of Tyre Nichols. Share that many of us have strong feelings about what has happened.

PROMPTS TO GUIDE THE CONVERSATION

Invite each person, in turn, to share what they are thinking and feeling. Give each person a few minutes to say whatever they want - or to pass. When one person is speaking, the others in the group should pay close attention but not comment.

Possible prompts may be:

- What thoughts might you want to share with Tyre Nichols' friends and family?
- What thoughts and feelings have you had about the police violence against Tyre Nichols?
- What is one thing we could do - individually, as a group, a team, or as a society - to show support for one another in the wake of these events?
- What do you want to say about what is happening at this moment? What's on your mind?
- What would you like to do for our community or the world to address this issue?
- What resources do you need as staff to help you feel supported as you work through this time?

CLOSING

It's important to thank everyone for participating in the conversation, whether through active talking or listening. Remind the group that this isn't an isolated incident but a continuation of the longstanding practice of police killings of unarmed Black Americans. Encourage the group to continue to reflect and take time for themselves, using resources your organization has available.

Directing Employees to Resources

This is also a necessary time to remind staff what resources they have available to them. Some examples of company policies and programs you may have in place include:

- **Employee Resource Groups (ERGs)**

Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) are voluntary, employee-led groups aiming to foster a diverse, inclusive workplace aligned with the organizations they serve. They are usually led and participated in by employees who share a characteristic, whether it's gender, ethnicity, religious affiliation, interest, or other diversity dimensions. The groups exist to support and help in personal or career development and create a safe space where employees can bring their whole selves to the table.

- **Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs)**

An Employee Assistance Program (EAP) is a voluntary, work-based program that offers free and confidential assessments, short-term counseling, referrals, and follow-up services to employees who have personal and/or work-related problems. EAPs address a broad and complex body of issues affecting mental and emotional well-being.

- **Time Off (Personal, Sick, etc.)**

When dealing with a personal health issue, sometimes going to work, and caring for yourself can be too much to handle. It's important employees know the options their employer offers to make their health a top priority. There are a few different ways employees can take time away from work. These options range from a leave of absence, a sabbatical, or personal time off. Depending on specific state regulations, there might also be a requirement to offer sick leave to employees. It is important to know the difference between all the options and what is required versus what is voluntary to offer employees.

- **Digital Mental Health Benefits**

Digital solutions can offer therapeutic approaches or support positive behavioral change on a large scale. They are accessible at any time and from anywhere, providing help on demand without the long waits often needed for in-person therapy. They are also convenient, easy to use, and anonymous. These benefits can be categorized as wearables and digital biomarker apps, prevention and treatment solutions, or analytic tools.

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- **Telehealth Counseling**

Telehealth Counseling is an app-accessible benefit, allowing participants to interact with counselors online, including by texting. Telehealth counseling can remove barriers by providing them with help at their fingertips.

- **Mental Health Coverage**

Mental health coverage for employees is a way to provide better support to those experiencing mental health challenges. This type of coverage can also include educational/informational sessions, assessments, and more.