



# Supporting Employees' Mental Health

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Here are some things employers can do to help employees manage stress and tend to their mental health.



**According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, more than half the people in the United States will be diagnosed with a mental illness at some point in their lives.**

Additionally, one in five Americans will experience a mental illness in a given year. It's, therefore, not surprising that mental health has a significant impact in the workplace.



In fact, according to the World Health Organization (WHO), mental health conditions like depression and anxiety cost the global economy a trillion dollars per year in lost productivity. The U.S. Surgeon General is currently prioritizing workplace mental health and well-being, listing staggering survey results that 76% of U.S. workers reported at least one symptom of a mental health condition, 84% said their workplace conditions contributed to at least one mental health challenge, and 81% will be looking for workplaces that support mental health.

Those who have never experienced a mental illness may have a hard time understanding the depth of the problem or the inability of a person to “snap out of it.” But be assured—the struggle is real.

For those living with mental illness, life at times can feel unbearable. Obstacles easily overcome one day can feel insurmountable the next. Minor worries can gnaw at the mind obsessively. Some people with mental disabilities aren't wired with the skills and abilities neurotypical people typically take for granted, making each day a battle to conform to ordinary social expectations. But those with mental illnesses almost always want to feel better and do better; this is where employers can play a role.

Helping employees manage their disabilities empowers them to do top-notch work and creates a diverse and inclusive culture.

**WHO also says that for every \$1 put into treatment for common mental illnesses, there is a return of \$4 in improved health and productivity.**

Clearly, there is an impressive return on investment. But employers may not be excited about involving themselves in this aspect of their employees' lives, and employees may be reluctant to speak openly about their struggles, especially if their condition is affecting their work performance or the stress of work is worsening their condition. There's also the risk that an employer might inadvertently say or do something that acts as a stressor or provokes a discrimination claim.

All of this can create a cycle of distrust and fear, where neither employers nor employees want to talk about mental health issues that affect the workplace and the people in it. When this happens, individuals don't get the help they need, and organizations are not as healthy as they could be.

So, what can employers do to promote mental health in the workplace without being overly invasive? Fortunately, a lot. This guide lists our specific recommendations.



### **When Possible, Give Employees a Little Extra Time to Slow Down and Rest**

Employees may need a moment to breathe or a day to regain their peace of mind, and they shouldn't be afraid to ask for time to take care of themselves. The ability to occasionally function at a medium (or even slow) pace should be built into performance expectations so that employees can avoid burnout or breakdown.

### **Offer Paid Time Off, Mental Health Benefits, and Flexible Schedules if Appropriate**

In some cases, employees can't afford to get the mental healthcare they need. Losing pay from a missed work shift might be too great a hardship and effective treatments might be financially out of reach. These financial hindrances can exacerbate conditions like anxiety and depression. In other cases, employees can afford the time off and the treatments but can't make regular appointments work with their schedules. If you offer paid time off, health insurance benefits, or flexible schedules, these can help employees get the care they need.

### **Offer an Employee Assistance Program**

An employee assistance program (EAP) gives employees access to expert, confidential assistance for substance abuse issues, relationship troubles, financial problems, and mental health conditions. These services are offered through an outside provider that connects employees with the appropriate resources and professionals. These programs enable you to provide professional assistance to employees while allowing them confidentiality at work. EAPs are also inexpensive for employers and free for employees.

### **Make Reasonable Accommodations When Possible**

If an employee informs you that they have anxiety, depression, or another mental health condition and requests an accommodation, you should begin the interactive process to determine what reasonable accommodation(s) you can provide under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). The ADA applies when an employer has 15 or more employees, but many states have similar laws that require employers to make accommodations at an even lower employee count.



### Create Digital Spaces for Friendships to Grow

Loneliness in the workplace can be a serious issue with significant negative effects on both employees and the workplace. The U.S. Surgeon General considers loneliness and isolation an epidemic and published a guide on the healing effects of social connection and community. In a remote environment, it can be challenging to spot signs of loneliness, but you can facilitate employee connections by setting up virtual chat programs and video conferencing apps.

Employees also need to be reassured that it's fine to take a little time during the workday to reach out to others about non-work matters and participate in virtual games and other fun group activities. Managers can set the tone by participating in fun chats and activities and encouraging employees to join in. Helping employees foster connections is not only the right thing to do, but it can also reduce turnover and increase engagement.

### Promote Good Mental (and Physical) Health in the Workplace

Healthy habits are important for everyone to practice. Consider setting time aside during the week or month for employees to participate in activities like yoga, meditation, and mindfulness that develop and strengthen these habits. If you aren't familiar with these practices, solicit the help of your employees. One or more of them may know a lot about these activities and be able to assist you in setting up a workplace program or modifying a program for employees currently working from home. Whether sponsoring a formal wellness program or facilitating optional activities designed to promote better health, you will improve employee morale.

Your employees, particularly your leaders, can also help you make mental health awareness a normal part of your workplace conversations. People should feel safe talking about mental health and seeking accommodations and assistance as needed. No one should have to worry about discrimination. Make sure that managers understand that if information about an employee's mental health is shared with them, it should be treated as confidential and only reshared on a need-to-know basis.





# Make Use of Additional Resources

The federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration provides a virtual recovery resources list. The U.S. Surgeon General has created a framework for workplace mental health and well-being. Check with your benefits provider and broker for other resources.

Ultimately, it's up to individuals to manage their mental health and get any care they need. Employers, however, can make it much easier and less stressful for their employees to attend to these matters by giving them the time, resources, and financial support to improve and sustain their mental health. That's good for their employees, their organization, and society in general.



Contact our team today to discuss customized solutions for your organization. Our experts are here to assist you in developing comprehensive mental health resources ensuring compliance, and supporting your employees through every step of the process.

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