

# Supporting Mental Health in the Workplace

## Checklist for Senior Managers



There has been a reported [rise in the number of people experiencing symptoms of anxiety and depressive disorders](#). This checklist provides recommendations for senior managers to help support mental health and alleviate stressors for workers.

### Be a compassionate leader and establish a supportive tone.

- Tell staff you are committed to supporting their mental health and well-being. To reinforce your commitment, consider:
  - Issuing an organization-wide statement about the importance of addressing workplace stress and supporting worker mental health and well-being.
  - Identifying specific staff in your organization whom workers can contact with concerns about job-related stressors.
  - Promoting a judgement-free workplace by making it clear that workers can ask for help without facing negative consequences in the workplace.
- Raise awareness about workplace stressors and reduce the stigma surrounding mental health issues and substance use by:
  - Talking about the types of stress for the general population, specific stressors that relate to your workforce and sector, and mental health (e.g., high rates of depression and anxiety disorders, increased substance use).
  - Sharing [national statistics](#) so that workers know they are not alone if they are struggling with mental health or substance use issues.
  - Telling staff it's natural to feel stressed and encouraging them to seek help if needed.
- Be transparent. Ensure communication takes place regularly to help alleviate the stress of uncertainty and to defuse misinformation and rumors that might be circulating.
- Consider creating a mental health task force or committee that includes representatives from different levels of your organization (i.e., not only senior managers) to talk about existing and emerging workplace stressors and ways to reduce them.
- Build a culture of connection and encourage coworkers to be supportive of one another by:
  - Creating peer support networks around common issues such as hybrid or remote work. These networks can be formal or informal. Each network might have a trusted employee to set up sessions (in-person or virtual) for their coworkers and lead conversations that give other staff a chance to talk about issues, tell their stories, and brainstorm potential solutions.
  - Encouraging coworkers to check in on each other and/or create a “buddy system,” as helping others improves an individual’s sense of control, belonging, and self-esteem. For example, advise coworkers to break into small teams and ask them to call or email each other weekly or biweekly to check in.

Reducing workplace stress benefits **everyone** and can lead to improved morale, increased productivity, fewer sick days, better focus, fewer workplace injuries, an enhanced quality of life, and improved physical health (e.g., better sleep, lower blood pressure, stronger immune system). Moreover, the [World Health Organization](#) estimates that for every dollar U.S. employers spend treating common mental health issues, they receive \$4 back in improved health and productivity.

- Planning optional in-person or virtual social activities using videoconferencing tools to promote camaraderie among staff (e.g., virtual coffee breaks, lunches, allotted time for story sharing, games, virtual book clubs).

## Assess whether you can modify operations, assignments, schedules, policies, or expectations to alleviate or remove stressors.

- Examine workers' job tasks to determine if their workload has increased and if so:
  - Look for ways to reassign work and prioritize tasks.
  - Allow more time to complete tasks and reschedule deadlines.
  - Be realistic and fair about expectations, especially in situations where workers are being asked to absorb new tasks.
- Revisit organizational policies and, when possible, allow for more flexibility with leave policies, work schedules, and telework.
- Provide training, tools, and equipment to help workers adapt to their job tasks and work environment. For example:
  - Provide training to staff on how to complete new tasks. Training should be done at a time and location that is convenient to workers.
  - Make sure staff who are reporting to their worksites feel safe by:
    - Giving workers an opportunity to provide feedback and make suggestions on protective measures.
    - Encouraging workers to tell you if they have safety concerns or questions.
  - Assess whether staff working remotely need additional equipment or tools, such as computer monitors, headsets, and videoconferencing software, to effectively perform their work.
  - Consider purchasing ergonomic equipment for remote workers' in-home offices.
- Provide different methods for workers and supervisors to share ideas on how to reduce or remove workplace stressors without fear of scrutiny. Examples include:
  - Distribution of confidential questionnaires (online or paper form).
  - Group meetings and sessions where workers can share input.
  - Regular discussions between front-line supervisors and staff where workers are encouraged to provide feedback on how management can support them better.

## Prepare supervisors to be empathetic and supportive.

- Train front-line supervisors about stress and mental health topics so they have the skills and confidence to initiate discussions with workers and recognize the signs and symptoms of stress and mental health emergencies. For example, consider having supervisors take:
  - [Mental Health First Aid](#). This course, available through the National Council for Mental Wellbeing, teaches people how to identify, understand, and respond to signs of mental illness and substance use disorders.
  - [QPR Online Gatekeeper Training](#). This one-hour course, offered by QPR Institute, provides insight on how to question (Q), persuade (P), and refer (R) someone who may be suicidal.

### Potential Training Topics for Supervisors

- Active listening skills and effective communication styles
- Signs and symptoms of stress and impairment
- How to help workers cope with grief
- Types of resources to offer workers who need mental health support or are struggling with substance use

- Ensure that supervisors understand their role is to listen and validate workers' feelings, concerns, and experiences. It should also be understood that being dismissive of workers can be damaging.
- Advise supervisors they may need to alter their leadership style, including:
  - Focusing on being good role models by demonstrating self-care behaviors (e.g., getting enough sleep, exercising), taking time off, and defining and adhering to work schedule boundaries.
  - Being more positive than usual and taking every opportunity to highlight their staff's accomplishments and express appreciation for their efforts.
- Instruct front-line supervisors to be alert for declines in workers' performance, as this is a sign that stress may be reaching a problematic point.

## Provide or share information about coping, resiliency, and mental health resources.

- Provide self-care tools and stress management, mental health, and well-being resources:
  - Regularly review with workers what benefits are included in your employee assistance program (EAP), if you have one, and encourage workers to use them if needed.
  - If you have limited assistance resources, explore the feasibility of providing additional benefits, such as:
    - Investing in an EAP if you do not already have one.
    - Expanding the types of services offered by your EAP (e.g., well-being coaching sessions, online assessments).
    - Working to offer more wellness-related services at no cost to workers (e.g., company-wide virtual celebrations, access to well-being apps, mental health education sessions, weekly self-care videos, virtual fitness sessions such as company-organized yoga and meditation classes).
- Share resources and outreach materials developed by entities outside your organization (e.g., federal and state governments, local support organizations) that raise awareness about the signs and symptoms of distress. Examples include:
  - Outreach materials at OSHA's "[Workplace Stress and Mental Health](#)" website.
  - "[My Mental Health: Do I Need Help?](#)"
  - Information about the [warning signs for distress](#) and [suicide](#).
- Participate in existing promotional campaigns throughout the year on mental health. For resources, promotional materials, and ideas, visit:
  - [National Prevention Week](#)
  - [Mental Health Awareness Month](#)
  - [Suicide Prevention Month](#)
  - [List of Awareness Events](#)
  - [Mental Health Awareness Charity Walks and Runs](#)
- Consider implementing a well-being challenge that includes self-care activities for workers to participate in.
- Promote free or low-cost online tools/apps for stress reduction, mindfulness, and personal resilience (e.g., the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs' [Mindfulness Coach](#), the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration and American Psychiatric Association's [My Mental Health Crisis Plan](#)).

### Promotional Campaigns

#### January

Mental Wellness Month

#### May

National Prevention Week and Mental Health Awareness Month

#### July

Minority Mental Health Month

#### September

Suicide Prevention Awareness Month

#### October

Depression and Mental Health Screening Month and World Mental Health Day (October 10)