



Human Resources

4 Ways HR Can Support Employee Mental Health

BY GREG CALLAHAN

An employee's mental health includes how they think, feel and act, as well as their emotional and social wellbeing. While mental health includes mental illness, the two aren't interchangeable. An employee can go through a period of poor mental health but not necessarily have a clear, diagnosable mental illness. Additionally, an employee's mental health can change over time, depending on factors such as their workload, stress and work-life balance.

While 1 in 5 U.S. adults experiences mental illness annually, a recent study by Deloitte revealed that less than half receive treatment. A study from the Mental Health in the Workplace Summit found that mental illness is the leading cause of disability for U.S. adults aged 15 to 44, and that more workdays are lost to mental health-related absenteeism than any other injury or illness.

Given its prevalence, you can expect that employees at your organization are experiencing mental health challenges or mental illness. That's why it's so important for your organization to create a culture that supports mental health. Here are four simple ways your company can support employees' mental health.

1. Promote Mental Health Awareness in the Office

The first step is promoting awareness and destigmatizing mental health and illness. Provide resources to help employees learn more about mental health and illnesses and, more importantly, provide information as to how employees who are struggling can get help.

You can also support mental health in the workplace by:

- Encouraging social support among employees, such as an organized support group that meets regularly
- Setting up an anonymous portal through which employees can let HR or managers know that they're struggling with high stress and need help
- Providing training on problem solving, [effective communication](#) and conflict resolution
- Promoting your employee assistance program (EAP), if you offer one

2. Offer Flexible Scheduling

Work-life balance, or a lack thereof, can affect mental health. To help employees better balance their work and personal lives, employers are embracing workplace flexibility. While this looks different at every company, workplace flexibility can

include flextime, telecommuting and unlimited paid time off (PTO) policies. Flexible schedules provide employees with job satisfaction, better health, increased work-life balance and less stress.

3. Address Workplace Stress

Nearly 80% of Americans consider their jobs stressful. Chronic workplace stress can contribute to increased employee fatigue, irritability and health problems. Additionally, workplace stress costs U.S. employers approximately \$300 billion in lost productivity annually.

Common job stressors include a heavy workload, intense pressure to perform at high levels, job insecurity, long work hours, excessive travel, office politics and conflicts with coworkers. While it may not be possible to eliminate job stress altogether, you can help employees learn how to manage it effectively.

Consider these strategies to help reduce employee stress, which can in turn improve health, morale and productivity:

- Make sure workloads are appropriate.
- Have managers meet regularly with employees to facilitate communication.
- Address negative and illegal actions in the workplace immediately.
- Do not tolerate bullying, discrimination or any similar behaviors.
- Recognize and celebrate employee success. This improves morale and decreases stress levels.

4. Evaluate Your Benefits Offerings

Review the benefits you offer to ensure they support mental wellbeing. Evaluate your current health plan designs; do they cover mental health services?

In similar fashion, look to see what [voluntary benefits](#) you can offer to support mental [wellbeing](#). Consider offering simple perks like financial planning assistance (as financial stress often contributes to poor mental health), employee discount programs (where employees can receive gym memberships, stress-reducing massages or acupuncture at a lower cost) and EAPs.



GREG CALLAHAN
[CBIZ Benefits & Insurance Services, Inc.](#)
gcallahan@cbiz.com | 816.945.5198