

ROADMAP TO ADDRESSING MENTAL HEALTH IN THE WORKPLACE

- FOR MANAGERS

**THE MENTAL
HEALTH
COALITION**

THE CASE FOR ADDRESSING MENTAL HEALTH AT WORK

Although it can be difficult to address mental health in the workplace, doing so benefits everyone. While not everyone deals with a clinical mental health condition, everyone has mental health and experiences things like stress, burnout, workplace social anxiety, and performance anxiety. When these are addressed, **employees are happier, productivity improves, team collaboration improves, and the workplace becomes a healthier environment.** And finally, for every \$1 invested in treatment for mental health conditions of employees, there is a return of US \$4 in improved health and productivity.

More information from: [One Mind](#), [NAMI](#), [MHA](#), [APA Foundation](#), [WHO](#)

HOW TO IDENTIFY AND REMOVE ROADBLOCKS TO ADDRESSING MENTAL HEALTH IN THE WORKPLACE

These are some common roadblocks that pop up when beginning to address mental health at work. Take a moment to consider which most apply to you or if there are any others that get in your way.

ROADBLOCK	HOW TO SIDESTEP IT
Not fully understanding mental health	Get up to speed on the fundamentals of mental health with MHC's Roadmap to Mental Health .
Worry about making others uncomfortable	Don't force employees to engage, but reflect on how starting the conversation may help some feel seen.
Fear that you'll be misunderstood or say the wrong thing	Be authentic and empathetic. While it's ok that you are not an expert at discussing mental health topics, you can still provide support simply by starting a conversation.
Discomfort discussing employees' mental health concerns	Remember, you don't have to be a therapist to your employees, but you can offer them support in seeking mental health services.
Fear of seeming insincere	Try talking about mental health topics that are relatable (e.g., burn out or work related stress). This will allow you to connect with your employees through a shared experience.

More info: [National Council for Mental Wellbeing](#), [Vibrant](#)



ACTION STEPS TO ADDRESSING MENTAL HEALTH AT WORK

1. Learn

Take some time to get up to speed on what mental health is and topics relevant to your team members. Seek out online resources like those available through The Mental Health Coalition's [Resource Library](#).

2. Unlearn

Set aside an hour to sit down and brainstorm what preconceptions you have or used to have about mental health. Consider what stigmatizing beliefs you might have and how you can challenge them.

3. Empathize

Think about a time when you went through something difficult. Chances are your mental health took a toll, whether you realized it at the time or not. Alternatively, think of a loved one who has had difficulties with their mental health. Then use these to build empathy towards employees who could use some support.

4. Apply that knowledge and empathy

Consider where on a scale from 1-10 your organization is in supporting mental health, and set a goal for a number you would like to reach by the end of the year. Then write out at least three action steps you can take in the workplace to apply this knowledge and empathy.

Begin seeing yourself as a mental health advocate and others will as well.



HOW TO CHANGE YOUR WORKPLACE'S CULTURE AROUND MENTAL HEALTH

Lead by example:

Talk the talk: get comfortable talking about your own health and the ways you take care of yourself.

Walk the walk: demonstrate a healthy work/life balance; practice self-care so that your teammates feel comfortable following your example.

Own up to past missteps:

If you haven't helped create space for mental health in the workplace before, address that. If you've ever made an employee uncomfortable because of their mental health struggles, name that. And if you've dropped the ball on offering benefits that support mental wellbeing, state that. Most importantly, if you can be open about why these things happened, you can start to build trust with your teammates that you'll be putting real effort into supporting them moving forward.

Don't require or push:

Provide a safe environment in which your team members can feel comfortable both sharing and asking for what they need.

Refrain from making it mandatory for employees to talk about their mental health (this would just defeat the purpose).

Clarify things:

A shift in company culture around mental health can be surprising. Remedy this by making it clear why this is happening (to support them and foster a healthy workforce). Also emphasize that sharing about mental health won't result in punitive action but rather supportive services if wanted.

Acknowledge difficulties of both remote and in-person work:

This can be a stepping stone to addressing mental health, since both remote and in-person work can take a toll for different reasons.



HOW TO CHANGE YOUR WORKPLACE'S CULTURE AROUND MENTAL HEALTH

Encourage company-wide change:

While your individual actions are extremely important in supporting wellbeing at work, a culture-wide shift will require a wider-angle lens. Look for ways that you can encourage change throughout your organization. If you can find others who have a similar mission, collaborate. If you can get leadership on your side, even better. The more people you have actively working to support mental health at work, the better chance you have for a broad culture shift.

Do some research:

If you're uncertain about how to talk about this with your team, the [MHC Language Guide](#) is a great place to start. Be sure to make an effort to learn about cultural differences when addressing mental health. The below organizations also have resources that can be helpful:

[NAMI](#)

[Mental Health America](#)

[The Action Alliance](#)

[National Council for Mental Wellbeing](#)

SOME NOTES:

While you should not require employees to disclose their clinical mental health history or status, plan to initiate conversations that contribute to a work environment that is supportive of holistic wellbeing, which includes mental health.

Be clear about how you support employees who have clinical mental health conditions (e.g., paid time off, counseling services, stress relief tools or spaces, etc.). Provide this information to every employee and with an inviting tone that suggests that there will not be judgment if these benefits are utilized. This way employees don't need to "out" themselves or worry about backlash when asking about accommodations.



HOW TO TALK ABOUT MENTAL HEALTH WITH YOUR TEAM

While there are many ways to address mental health at work, here are some clear examples that can be adapted to your specific situation.

Broaching mental health in performance reviews...

“I want to take some time to touch base about **how you’re doing**. I’ve noticed that you don’t seem exactly like yourself. Is there anything you’re concerned about? How could we help you feel **more at ease and supported** at work?”

Supporting an employee who’s just shared a mental health concern...

“**Thank you** for telling me this, I know it can feel nerve-racking and vulnerable to bring this up to a manager. Please know that this won’t jeopardize your position and that I want to support you as best I can. How would you feel about **[specific accommodations]**?”

Sharing a personal experience with mental health...

“The telltale **signs of burnout for me** are when I start to procrastinate or I feel cranky or cynical more days than not. It’s okay if you notice this too, and you can always let me know. We’ll find a way to **make things more manageable**.”

Modeling holistic wellbeing and fostering mental health day to day...

“Even though I’m often tempted to work 24/7, I’ve started making an effort to **take better care of myself**. I went for a hike this weekend to boost my mood, and I’m going to stop replying to emails over the weekend. I hope you and our team know that I’d **love to see you doing the same**.”



THIS IS THE START OF SOMETHING GREAT.

Change like this requires bold, thoughtful leaders. If addressing mental health with your team feels strange, though, don't worry — that's normal. Know that if addressing mental health with your team feels strange to begin with, don't worry — that's normal. Know that the discomfort will be worth it.

If you would like more information on mental health, mental wellness, and/or offering support, see the Mental Health Coalition's [Resource Library](#).