

SUPPORTING & RECOGNIZING

employee mental health



By Nancy Boyle | The Village Business Institute

As an Employee Assistance Program Trainer, I get to provide The Village Business Institute's client companies with trainings on a variety of topics. Many companies ask for trainings related to stress management and work-life balance. As I discuss various causes of stress and coping techniques to combat stress, I ask the following question: "When feeling overwhelmed, burned out or stressed, do you feel you have a co-worker or supervisor whom you can talk to and ask for support?" It's amazing how many times the answer is no, or the response is laughter. I then ask, "When you hear the words mental health, what comes to mind?" Answers range from "crazy," "emotional," and "unstable" to "someone who is unable to function without medication."

We live in a society where even the words "mental health" carries a stigma of something that is undesirable or less than, something that is judged or shunned. In reality, mental health is a part of each and every one of us, and workplaces should strive to both recognize it as integral to each employee's well-being and create a supportive culture.

Stigma around mental health is a major contributing factor as to why people do not seek help. Studies have found that stigmatizing beliefs are held by many people within society, regardless of age, whether they know someone with mental illness, or what knowledge they have of mental health problems.

WHAT DOES STIGMA LOOK LIKE?

- Thoughts or statements such as "It's a sign of weakness," "It's embarrassing," or "No one would believe me anyways."
- The viewpoint that mental illness is not a disease, like cancer or diabetes, but a choice.
- Fear of being labeled or judged.

According to the World Health Organization mental health is "a state of well-being in which the individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life,

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MENTAL HEALTH CONTINUUM

MENTAL HEALTH

- Mental health is a spectrum of emotions, thoughts and feelings, which can be good or bad
- Levels of happiness, fulfillment and joy
- How we feel about ourselves and manage problems

MENTAL ILLNESS

- Mental illness refers to a recognized, diagnosed disorder
- Defined as a clinically significant disturbance in an individual's cognition, emotion regulation, or behavior

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can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community.”

“People in good mental health are often sad, unwell, angry or unhappy, and this is part of a fully lived life for a human being,” shares a writer in the *World Psychiatry Journal*. “Despite this, mental health has been often conceptualized as a purely positive affect, marked by feelings of happiness and sense of mastery over the environment.”

Just as your daily experiences can change so, too, can your mental fitness.

While gaining a better understanding of what mental health and mental illness are and are not, we are able to destigmatize the false beliefs we have held. Additional ways of combating mental health stigma and creating a culture of support include:

1. **Learn the differences** between truths and misconceptions around mental health.
2. **Be aware** of your own biases and attitudes. Be careful of the words you say.
3. **Educate others** about mental health.
4. **Talk openly** about mental health. It is not a secret or something to be ashamed of!
5. **Show compassion** for those who are struggling with mental health or mental illness.

'People who need help sometimes look a lot like people who don't need help.'

GLENNON MELTON



Nancy Boyle joined The Village Business Institute in February 2018 as an Employee Assistance Program Trainer. She is passionate about connecting and equipping businesses and individuals to reach their full potential.

Nancy has a bachelor's degree in Business Administration and Human Resource Management with an emphasis in the Human Services from Valley City State University, and brings 15 years of public speaking and facilitation experience to The Village with a background in program management, training coordination, and volunteer management.

Her certifications include: MN Coalition Against Sexual Assault, Credentialed Advocate (Advanced Level) with designation of Comprehensive Victim Intervention Specialist; Volunteer Impact Leadership – MN Association of Volunteer Administrators; and Technology of Participation Facilitation Methods – The Institute of Cultural Affairs.

Create a Culture

In an article for the Society of Human Resource Management (SHRM), Lisa Nagele-Piazza shares five steps for creating a mental health-friendly work culture:

AWARENESS. One in 5 adults in the U.S. experiences a mental health condition each year, according to the National Alliance on Mental Illness, and work is a crucial element of recovery for these people. The Employer Assistance and Resource Network on Disability Inclusion encourages teaching managers to recognize the signs of mental health issues and to create supportive, inclusive environments.

ACCOMMODATION. Reasonable accommodations can help workers with mental health conditions perform their jobs more efficiently. Examples may include flexible scheduling, softer or brighter lighting, relocation of the employee's workstation and time off for the employee to adjust to medication.

ASSISTANCE. Certified peer-support specialists are trained to help employees access the services they need and take the steps needed to be successful at work.

ACCESS. Employers can help workers access the tools they need to improve their mental health through The Village Employee Assistance Program (EAP). The Village EAP provides options no matter the employee's situation. Supervisors are encouraged to have open discussions with their employees when encouraging them to contact The Village.

ACCEPTANCE. Employees who are dealing with long-term mental health conditions should accept that it's real and part of their story. And employers must accept that some of their high performers have experience with mental illness. When people are open about their own experiences, it helps to remove the stigma and show that it's possible to manage and live a full life.

Source: *SHRM.org*



RESOURCES

The Village Employee Assistance Program
1-800-627-8220
www.VillageEAP.com
(Username: VillageEAP)

SAMHSA's National Helpline
1-800-662-HELP (4357)
SAMHSA's National Helpline is a free, confidential, 24/7, 365-day-a-year treatment referral and information service (in English and Spanish) for individuals and families facing mental and/or substance use disorders.

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline
1-800-273-TALK (8255)
The Lifeline provides 24/7, free and confidential support for people in distress, prevention and crisis resources for you or your loved ones, and best practices for professionals.

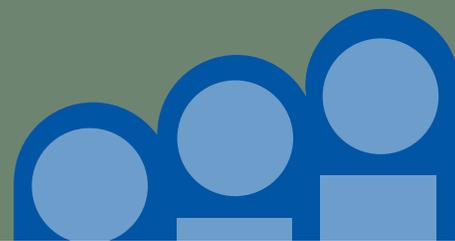
FirstLink 211 Helpline
(serving North Dakota and parts of Minnesota)
Dial 2-1-1 or 701-235-SEEK (7335) if you are wondering about local community resources or if you would like listening and support. Available 24 hours a day.

National Institute of Mental Health
www.nimh.nih.gov



CREATING A *Stigma-Free* WORKPLACE

A GUIDE FOR SUPERVISORS



Supervisors play a critical role in helping support employee mental health. They can directly support their employees by noticing when someone's behavior has changed, reaching out to them in a caring and supportive way and connecting them with resources.

The benefits of prioritizing mental health on your team include increased productivity, decreased disability cost, and increased retention and engagement of valued employees.

PREVENTATIVE MEASURES THAT LOWER STRESS

- Emphasize social connectedness
- Provide mentors for new hires or new roles
- Enhance team communication through ongoing supervisory training and continued performance support for employees
- Offer flexible work practices (flex hours, work-from-home days, etc.)

INFORMATION AND SUPPORT FOR EMPLOYEES

- Foster a culture where getting help for a mental health challenge is as routine as getting help for any other challenge
- Help employees understand what resources the organization offers for mental health, including your Village EAP

NON-STIGMATIZING CONVERSATION AND BEHAVIORS

- Create a culture of trust and communication to support an emotionally healthy environment
- Communicate organizational values that include respect, civility and a general culture of wellbeing to encourage empathetic behaviors by employees
- Promote the use of non-stigmatizing language when talking about mental health

These practices support a workplace where employees feel committed, supported and valued. This increases employee connection to the organization and to each other.

Learn more about being StigmaFree at home and in the workplace at www.NAMI.org/StigmaFree.