

# MANAGER GUIDE

## TIPS ON HOW TO START CONVERSATIONS ABOUT BEHAVIORAL HEALTH

Workers are struggling with more mental health and substance use issues than ever before, and managers are in a unique position to help connect them with helpful resources. Consider these approaches to express your support for the mental wellness of your employees, reduce stigma associated with behavioral health issues, and increase utilization of available resources.



### MANAGER TIP

### CONSIDERATIONS

### SAMPLE APPROACHES & CONVERSATION STARTERS

#### TIP #1

#### Be Alert for Signs that Someone Is Struggling

- Behavioral health problems often lead to a change in a person's appearance, behavior, and/or performance.
- Don't immediately assume a person is struggling with a behavioral health issue, but don't ignore the possibility.
- If an employee discloses a behavioral health issue in a public forum, follow up to schedule a private conversation with the employee and notify your HR department.

- Acknowledge workplace and personal challenges openly: *"We're under more stress than ever, and I know a lot of people are struggling."*
- Use specific terms associated with behavioral health conditions: *"More people than ever are dealing with anxiety, depression, suicidal thoughts, alcoholism, and addiction."*
- If you notice a change in an employee's behavior, schedule a time to talk in private and prepare in advance for the meeting so that you know what you're going to say.

#### TIP #2

#### Start the Conversation

- Workers want their employers to support their mental wellness.
- Younger workers expect their employers to be open about behavioral health issues. However, they may wait for their managers to raise the topic.

- Be specific and objective when sharing your observations privately: *"I noticed you've been late to work three times this week. What can I do to help?"*
- Listen empathetically to the response, especially if the employee discloses a behavioral health condition. Notify your HR department about the conversation so that they can take the necessary next steps.

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### TIP #3

## Minimize the Stigma

- Stigma is still a major reason workers hide their mental health issues.
- Explicitly state that people with behavioral health diagnoses have protections under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and other laws.

- Be clear that employees struggling with mental health issues or addictions will not be fired for their disclosure: *"It's hard enough dealing with these issues without worrying about how they will affect your job. Please remember that we don't discriminate on the basis of any medical condition, including mental health or substance use conditions."*
- Be careful to avoid stigmatizing language and ask others to stop if you hear them using it: *"Suicide is a serious subject, and I don't think it's appropriate to joke about killing yourself."*
- If people express stigmatizing myths about behavioral health, be prepared to address misinformation and share facts: *"People who are depressed aren't 'crazy.' They have a medical condition that can be treated."*
- Reassure employees who disclose behavioral health conditions: *"I'm glad you feel safe sharing this information with me, and I want you to know that I won't treat you any differently because of it. Along with resources that the company offers, you have specific protections under federal law. You can follow up with the HR department directly for more information, or I'd be happy to contact them with you if you prefer."*

### TIP #4

## Know Your Resources

- Workers are not sure who to talk with about their concerns, and they might not know what resources are available to them.
- If you have an employee assistance program (EAP), remember to share information about it with employees on a regular basis.
- If a person is in crisis, you might offer to contact the EAP or insurance company with the employee.

- Remind employees where to find available resources and how to access benefits: *"Remember that we provide benefits to help employees with these types of issues, and we want employees to use them."*
- If an employee is in crisis, it's best to help develop a specific plan for next steps if the employee is comfortable with you doing so: *"The EAP is a good place to start, or you can also contact our health insurance company for referrals to an appropriate professional. If you'd like, I'd be happy to reach out to the EAP with you or call the health insurance provider to request a referral."*
- If the employee doesn't disclose a behavioral health condition, you can still mention resources that might be helpful: *"I'd be happy to review the information on our EAP and health insurance benefits with you or help you contact the HR department to discuss your benefits."*

### TIP #5

## Follow Up

- If you met with someone individually, check in after a few days to see how the employee is doing.

- Be clear you are checking in because you care, and that the employee doesn't have to disclose any behavioral health information: *"I've been thinking about you since we talked the other day, and I wanted to check in to see if there's anything else I can do to help."*