

Winter 2022

EAP Update

A Newsletter for Employers and Managers



Transforming Your Company's Response to Mental Health

For decades, organizations have recognized the benefits of providing employees access to emotional support. Beyond duty-to-care, these companies understand that when employees struggle with mental health issues like anxiety, burnout, or depression, there are ripple effects that impact overall organizational health. For example, depression, which is the leading cause of disability worldwide, costs U.S. employers approximately 35 billion a year in reduced performance at work. Now more than ever, with mental health problems increasing in our country, addressing mental health issues head-on is so important.

While unmanaged mental health issues can be a detriment to organizations, research shows that when an employee partners with a professional counselor, even on a short-term basis, the impact can be transformative. The 2020 Workplace Outcomes study found that short-term counseling delivered by employee assistance programs resulted in improvements in presenteeism, absenteeism, workplace distress, and life satisfaction. With the current shortage of available mental health therapists during a time of increased demand for such help, the EAP and our professional staff counselors are an important asset to your organization.

Unfortunately, lack of awareness or reluctance to access support often prevents employees from receiving the help they need. To reap the full benefits of an employee assistance program, organizations should be intentional about demonstrating both the availability and value of emotional wellbeing. It is also critical to address mental health stigma head-on. Here are ways to elevate employee wellbeing in your workplace:



Engage leaders and influencers. Company leaders ultimately set the tone of an organization when it comes to emotional wellbeing. Is the organization silent or dismissive when it comes to mental health or proactive and outspoken? When leaders make emotional health a priority, it is much easier to convince employees that they will not face repercussions for reaching out for support. And by highlighting their own experience with stress, anxiety, depression, burnout, etc., employees will recognize they are not alone, better understand how available resources can help, be inspired to ask for help, and not feel stigmatized.

Educate your managers. As the eyes and ears of the organization, line managers are in the best position to recognize if an employee is struggling emotionally and point them to available resources. However, since not all managers are familiar with the symptoms of emotional distress or comfortable discussing emotional wellbeing, organizations need to train managers in this important role. The EAP can help with this.

Communicate year-round. Many organizations mention their employee assistance program as part of the employee onboarding process or annual benefits update, but then never discuss it again. Throughout the year it is important to remind employees about the availability of these confidential resources and how to access them. In addition to sharing this messaging via email and the employee intranet, be sure and share our payroll stuffers and newsletters, put up our posters and have our brochures and wallet cards available to hand out when an employee would like more information about the EAP.

The EAP is available to consult with you and your managers on how best to support the mental health of your workforce. Give us a call at 425-454-3003 to talk with one of our professional counselors and visit us online at www.fee-eap.com for a wide range of information for managers and supervisors.

Source: [Workplace Options](#)

Fostering a LGBTQ+ Inclusive Workplace

The Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Questioning, Plus (LGBTQ+) community represents a diverse range of identities and expressions of gender and sexual orientation. Unfortunately, at home, school, work and in the community, LGBTQ+ people are still confronted with mistreatment and discrimination. This can come in many forms – from seemingly benign jokes to verbal insults, lack of respect and value judgements, exclusion, harassment, and in the most extreme cases, physical violence. As a manager, there are steps you can take to nurture a workplace free of harassment, discrimination, and other abusive conduct for your LGBTQ+ workers. Following are suggestions to help you establish an inclusive environment.

Have anti-discrimination policies in place. Does your organization have policies regarding anti-discrimination, respect, diversity, and inclusion? If you don't, consider creating them with help from an attorney. The U.S. Supreme Court ruled in 2020 that LGBTQ workers are protected by federal employment anti-discrimination law. More information on this ruling can be found from the [Society for Human Resource Management](#).

Insist on respectful behavior in your workplace. Do not tolerate gossip, mean-spirited jokes, disrespectful language, or bullying toward employees. Employers should address and deal with this hurtful behavior quickly and discipline employees who fail to treat any coworker with mutual respect.

Use inclusive language. Examples include using the words spouse or significant other instead of wife or husband, and instead of maternity and paternity leave, use the words parental leave or parental time off. Ask about and honor the pronouns your employees use, such as he/him, she/her, and the gender neutral they/them. Benefits materials, workplace policies, as well as all other written and verbal communications, should use LGBTQ+ inclusive language and up-to-date terminology for all employees. Offer training and education on inclusive language and behavior for your workers, particularly your managers.

Expand paid leave policies to include chosen family. Ensure your paid leave policies for caregiving, medical, and parental leave are LGBTQ+ inclusive. Parental leave policies should not only cover people who give birth, but those who become parents through adoption, surrogacy, and fostering. Specify in your policies how leave applies to same-sex couples, domestic partners of any sexual orientation who are unmarried, and to people who adopt.

Offer inclusive health benefits. Studies have found that LGBTQ+ people experience worse physical health compared with their heterosexual and cisgender colleagues, and nearly half of transgender individuals have postponed or avoided care because of cost. Also, consider providing access to gender neutral bathrooms, which can help ensure transgender and non-binary individuals feel safe at work. And bisexual adults are less likely than heterosexual, lesbian or gay people to have health insurance in the first place.

While working toward a LGBTQ+ inclusive workplace you might make some good faith mistakes along the way, however, keep making the effort! Remember to use the EAP as a resource for help and support. Call us at 425-454-3003.

Sources: Queen City Certified, Academy to Innovate HR, NAMI, 3BLMedia/Aflac



What is Toxic Positivity

Toxic positivity is extreme positive thinking that leads to the masking of real life problems. It's a belief that despite a person's difficult circumstances, they should focus on staying positive and avoid negative thinking or expressing negative emotions. Being a positive person is a good thing but dismissing all negativity in your life is not healthy. People experience a wide range of emotions such as joy and happiness, as well as sadness, anger and grief. When positivity is used as a way to cover up or silence difficult feelings, it can have a negative impact on physical and mental health.

Some examples of toxic positivity include:

- saying after something bad has happened that “everything happens for a reason” or “think happy thoughts”
- after being told about a difficult situation, saying “it will all work out”
- telling someone to get over their grief or suffering and focus on the good things in their life
- labeling people who always appear positive as being stronger or more likable than others, and saying “don't be negative”
- brushing off someone's concerns by saying, “it could be worse”

In the workplace, showing negative emotions is often considered a bad trait for an employee to have. There can be the perception that expressing or bringing to work feelings other than happiness is inappropriate. As a result, people tend to put on a happy face even when times are tough.

If a manager pushes their positive mindset on others, it may make employees feel uncomfortable sharing problems that need to be addressed. Too much positivity can make your employees feel unseen and unheard and can disregard an individual's emotions.

Those who perpetrate toxic positivity often don't realize they're even doing it. To help avoid it, promote honesty and open communication. Take time to identify, discuss, and solve issues that have been pointed out and avoid trying to have a positive response to everything a person says. Empathize and listen to your employees, and take care not to tell them *how* they should feel. Actively listening can help to validate employees' feelings and encourages them to express their feelings more openly. Employees should be allowed to feel the way they feel and not be shamed for their emotions. If a worker is sad or frustrated, it is important to allow them to feel that way and not offer unsolicited advice, as this can be unhelpful.

Instead of solely promoting positive vibes, meet negative emotions with positive validation. Positive validation accepts a person's feelings and lets them express their emotions to get to a better place. This can include such statements as:

- “It's normal and alright to feel the way you do. What can I do to help support you through this?”
- “That must be really hard.”
- “I would be (upset, nervous, sad, scared, frightened) too.”
- “Tell me more.”
- “Do you want to find a solution together that could help you?”
- “Here's what I'm hearing you say.” (Summarize to show you're really listening and understanding their feelings.)

It is not bad or unusual to respond to hardship and uncertainty by trying to promote positivity. However, be careful not to overdo it, and not use positivity to negate the experiences of others, or to avoid dealing with very real problems and issues facing your employees. Try to find the balance between healthy optimism and allowing people space to experience difficult emotions.

Sources: Career Contessa, Forbes, AccessHR, Medical News Today

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