Building a Mentally Healthy Workplace:
Supporting Staff in OST Programs

JENNIFER MICHELS PHD, ABPP

BOARD CERTIFIED CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGIST | CONSULTANT

ROCK POINT CONSULTING LLC

WWW.ROCKPOINTCONSULTING.COM

Mental Health & Work: Details and Statistics

- World Health Organization (WHO) September 2024 report:
  - 15% of working age adults estimated to have a mental health disorder in 2019.
  - Globally, an estimated 12 billion working days are lost annually to depression and anxiety.
  - US cost of $1 trillion/year in lost productivity
- On average, 1 in 5 US adults will experience mental illness in their lifetime
- 1 in 10 full-time workers will be affected by substance abuse
- Suicide is the 2nd leading cause of death among those ages 10 – 24
- 57% of U.S. workers report burnout
- There are things you can do to promote mental health at work and support workers with mental health conditions
  - Decent work is good for mental health

Mental Health & Work: Details and Statistics

Headspace's 2024 Workplace State of Mind study:

77% of employees report that work stress has negatively impacted their physical health

71% report that work stress negatively impacted relationships outside of work

Gallop 2022 analysis found that just 1 in 4 employees felt their organization cared about their well-being

This is half the number who said the same before the pandemic

APA 2022 Work and Well-Being Survey

81% of workers report they will be looking for employers that support their mental health in the future.

Psychosocial Work Risks

Under-use of skills or being under-skilled for work;

Excessive workloads or work pace, understaffing;

Long, unsocial or inflexible hours;

Lack of control over job design or workload;

Unsafe or poor physical working conditions;

Organizational culture that enables negative behaviors;

Limited support from colleagues or authoritarian supervision;

Violence, harassment or bullying;

Discrimination and exclusion;

Unclear job roles;

Under- or over-promotion;

Job insecurity, inadequate pay, or poor investment in career development;

Conflicting home/work demands.
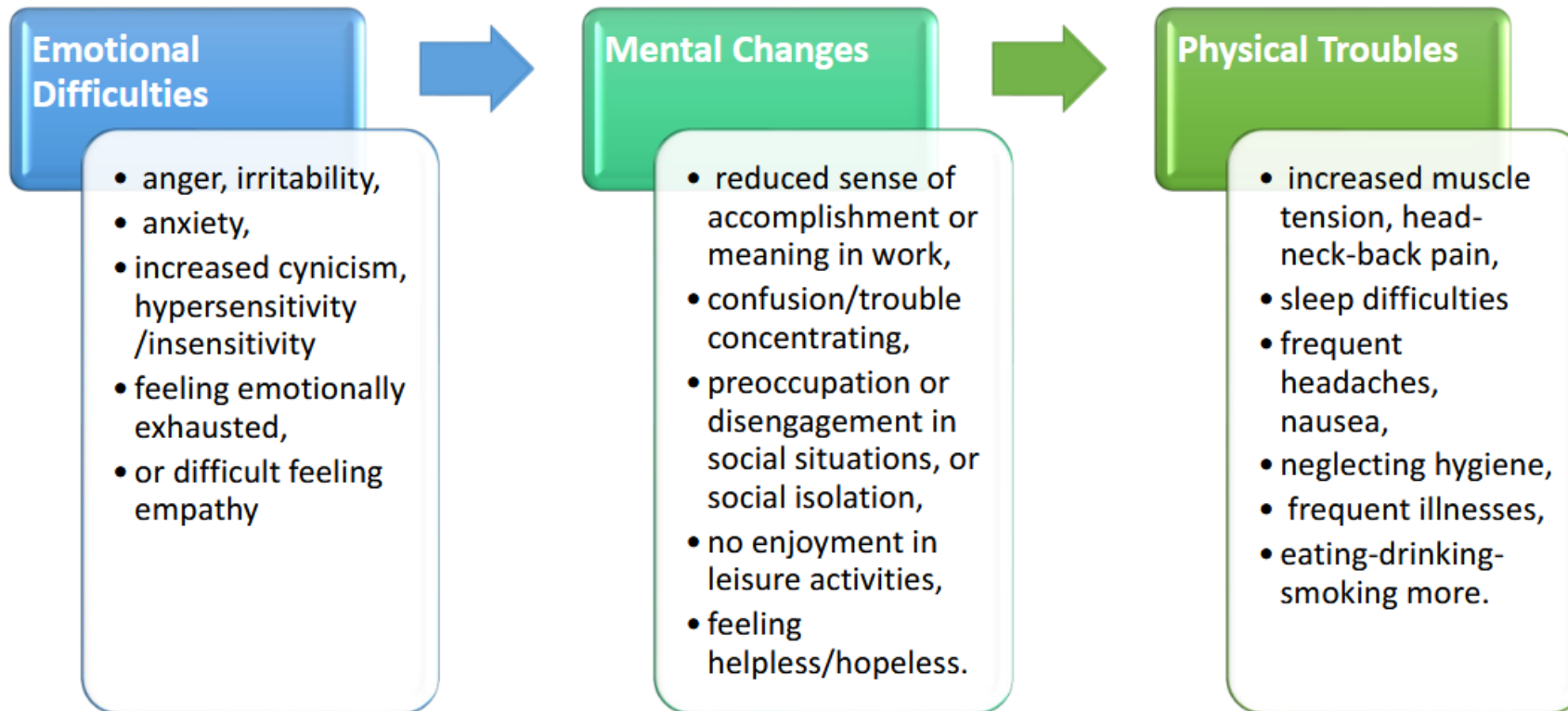
Signs & Symptoms Of Mental Health Concerns At Work

Can manifest in a variety of ways in the workplace, including:

- Calling in sick often/Absenteeism, Presenteeism

- Withdrawal/isolation

- Personality changes

- Difficulty focusing and remembering details

- Appearing more unkept then usual

- Difficulty organizing thoughts and tasks

- No longer enjoying work, hobbies, activities

- Sadness/ Worry/ Increasing self-blame & self-criticism

- Hopelessness/Helplessness/Feeling trapped

NATIONAL COUNCIL
FOR BEHAVIORAL HEALTH

Support / Compassion Fatigue

Compassion fatigue occurs when a person is physically, emotionally, and spiritually exhausted from caring for others. It is often cumulative.

Emotional Difficulties

- anger, irritability,
- anxiety,
- increased cynicism, hypersensitivity /insensitivity
- feeling emotionally exhausted,
- or difficult feeling empathy

Mental Changes

- reduced sense of accomplishment or meaning in work,
- confusion/trouble concentrating,
- preoccupation or disengagement in social situations, or social isolation,
- no enjoyment in leisure activities,
- feeling helpless/hopeless.

Physical Troubles

- increased muscle tension, head-neck-back pain,
- sleep difficulties
- frequent headaches, nausea,
- neglecting hygiene,
- frequent illnesses,
- eating-drinking-smoking more.

Resilience Challenges in the Workforce

- Employees are less adept at identifying and implementing tools for rejuvenation and resilience building.
  - Focused attention
  - Play
  - Creativity
  - Rest
- At the same time, work stress has increased.
- Time and effort for building connections (a key feature of resilience) at home and work has decreased.

4 Ways to Improve Mental Health in the Workplace

Create a foundation of trust and collaboration.

Reduce the stigma.

Make wellness a priority.

Train your staff in Mental Health First Aid

Creating a resilient workforce:

1. **Have honest conversations** with your employees to understand their challenges and needs.
2. **Develop a Health and Wellness Committee** that can focus on bringing wellness resources into the workplace.
3. **Review your organization's mental health resources** for psychological safety practices, resources and tools to share with employees.
4. **Bring mental health experts into the workplace** to host seminars on stress management, emotional intelligence, effective communication, and conflict resolution.
5. **Empower and encourage your employees** to support one another in times of stress and otherwise.
6. **Be a vocal and visible leader** who makes the health and well-being of all employees a priority.
7. **Provide management training** to all supervisors so they can balance emotional support to employees with demanding work pressures.
8. **Review your organization's progress with employee wellness** at least annually. Identify both successes and areas for continued improvement. Make this a line item on your annual report.
9. **Seeking training in Mental Health First Aid at Work** so your employees can recognize the signs and symptoms of a mental illness or substance use among colleagues and respond appropriately.

Two Big Factors for Workplace Well-being

Psychological Safety

Belongingness

How to Create Psychological Safety

Psychological safety develops over time.

When it exists, members of a team can be themselves, and they share the belief they can take appropriate risks (and they can and should):

| admit and discuss mistakes, | openly address problems and tough issues, | seek help and feedback, | trust that no one on the team is out to get them, | trust that they are a valued member of the team. |

How to Create Psychological Safety

▶ You can measure where your team stands by asking the following questions in an anonymous survey:

- If you make a mistake on this team, will it be held against you?

- Are the members of this team able to bring up problems and tough issues?

- Do members on this team sometimes reject other members for being different?

- Is it safe to take a risk on this team?

- Is it difficult to ask other members of this team for help?

- Would anyone on the team deliberately act in a way that undermines efforts?

- Working with members of this team, are unique skills and talents valued and utilized?

Source: APA – What is psychological safety at work?

https://www.apa.org/topics/healthy-workplaces/psychological-safety

Workplace Practices with Higher PS

▶ Consider workplace practices associated with higher psychological safety:

- opportunities to give and receive feedback

- employing well-trained managers

- appropriately involving employees in decision-making and goal-setting

- respect for time off

- emphasizing skills over degrees

- work flexibility

- meeting-free days

- mental health days as part of PTO

How to Create Workplace Belongingness

Create

Create intentional opportunities for connection
- Build small, ongoing opportunities for connection in your team and organizational culture

Flip

Flip the script on uncertainty and failure
- Normalize failure and frame uncertainty as common and temporary
- Implement mentoring to support transition points for employees

Show

Show humility by not assuming others' experiences
- As a leader, don't assume you have the answers – start by listening, remaining present in the moment, withholding judgment, and speaking less to hear more.

Active Listening Skills

- Practice active listening - engaging with the person you are talking to and showing that you hear and understand his/her/their message.
  - Make sure your body language is open and inviting
  - Avoid thinking about what you will say next
  - Show that you understand what someone is telling you by paraphrasing what you heard
  - Ask questions to clarify points
  - Don't interrupt
  - Respond in a respectful manner without being judgmental or defensive.
  - Acknowledge workers' feelings.
  - Offer help or resources if available and warranted.

What to do

As a leader, you set the tone for attention to and response to workplace stress.

Showing calm, connection, and confidence as a leader has a strong ripple effect

Engage your employees regularly

Set the stage for discussions in a healthy way

What to say…ask open-ended questions

- How are you feeling?
- How are you keeping in touch with your support sources?
- Are you struggling with any job-related challenges?
- If so, what do you think would help?
- How can I help?

Mental Health First Aid:

- What it is NOT:
  - Doesn't teach people to make a diagnosis.
  - Doesn't encourage helper to disclose their own mental illnesses or struggles
  - Doesn't take a position about medical leave or workplace accommodations
- What it IS:
  - Helps reduce supervisor/employee fear and hesitation about initiating conversations about mental health and/or substance abuse
  - Teaches employees how to recognize the signs of a mental health problem or high distress and gives them tools and vocabulary to help.
- Follows the acronym: ALGEE

Mental Health First Aid:

Offering reassurance & support to a colleague

- **Be respectful.**
- **Show that you are listening.**
- **Use positive, hopeful language.**
- **Use person-first language.**
- **Avoid giving advice.**
- **Be a caring colleague.**

Source: National Council for Mental Wellbeing: https://www.mentalhealthfirstaid.org/2020/10/six-ways-to-reassure-a-colleague/

Know How to Access Crisis Resources:

- ▶ 988 Lifeline
  - ▶ Call, text, chat, and access for deaf/HoH

- ▶ Wisconsin County Crisis Line Phone Numbers
  - ▶ Prevent Suicide Wisconsin
  - ▶ Wisconsin DHS Helpline Resources

- ▶ Trevor Project – LGBTQ crisis resource

- ▶ SAMSHA "Find Support" webpage

Action #1: Prevent work-related mental health conditions:

Survey or assess for psychosocial risks in the workplace

Cultivate psychological safety and belongingness in the organizational culture

Create regular opportunities for connection

Mitigate or eliminate risks that are identified

Action #2: Protect and promote mental health at work

▶ Strengthen skills to recognize and respond effectively to mental conditions at work – particularly among employees in a supervisory or manager role.

    ▶ **Manager training**

        • Recognize and respond adaptively to employee distress

        • Train open communication and active listening skills

        • Increase insight on how job stressors impact mental health and tools to manage this

    ▶ **Worker training**

        • Mental health literacy and awareness training to reduce stigma

    ▶ **Individual interventions**

        • Stress management skills

        • Resilience building skills

        • Opportunities for breaks

        • Engagement in physical or social activity during the workday separate from work duties.

Action #3: Support employees with mental health conditions to thrive

- ► Create a culture where employees can disclose if they have a mental health condition

- ► Support reasonable work accommodations

- ► Adapt work environment to employee capacities and needs
  - Flexible working hours, extra time for task completion, modified assignments, time off for appointments, regular/supportive meetings with supervisors
  - Phased re-entry to work following absence for a mental health condition
  - Supported employment arrangements for those with more severe conditions (DVR)

Action #4: Create a supportive culture

Leadership engagement: Commitment by leaders evidenced by integrating the importance of mental health at work into policies

Investment: Establishing a dedicated budget for mental health education and support at work

Continuously engage and reimagine the "how, when, and where work is done" to employee perform and be at their best.

Tailor solutions to the specific problems employees are experiencing instead of blanket policies covering wide groups of employees.

Engage internal, well-respected resources/champions to lead discussions and share vulnerability

This is not quick or easy – it takes time, continued focus and dedication.

Healthy Boundaries

▶ Maintain healthy boundaries

- Understanding the limits of what you can do and offer as a leader

- Know when to refer to professionals

- Know the parameters for supporting employee work accommodations if needed.

Five Essentials for Workplace Mental Health & Well-Being

Centered on the worker voice and equity, these five Essentials support workplaces as engines of well-being. Each Essential is grounded in two human needs, shared across industries and roles.

Safety — **Protection from Harm** — Security

Learning — **Opportunity for Growth** — Accomplishment

Social Support — **Connection & Community** — Belonging

Centered on **Worker Voice and Equity**

Dignity — **Mattering at Work** — Meaning

Autonomy — **Work-Life Harmony** — Flexibility

Components

Creating a plan with all workers to enact these components can help reimagine workplaces as engines of well-being.

Protection from Harm
- Prioritize workplace physical and psychological safety
- Enable adequate rest
- Normalize and support mental health
- Operationalize DEIA* norms, policies, and programs

Connection & Community
- Create cultures of inclusion and belonging
- Cultivate trusted relationships
- Foster collaboration and teamwork

Work-Life Harmony
- Provide more autonomy over how work is done
- Make schedules as flexible and predictable as possible
- Increase access to paid leave
- Respect boundaries between work and non-work time

Mattering at Work
- Provide a living wage
- Engage workers in workplace decisions
- Build a culture of gratitude and recognition
- Connect individual work with organizational mission

Opportunity for Growth
- Offer quality training, education, and mentoring
- Foster clear, equitable pathways for career advancement
- Ensure relevant, reciprocal feedback

*Diversity, Equity, Inclusion & Accessibility

Office *of the* **U.S. Surgeon General**

Partnerships – You are not alone in this!

Training opportunities
- Mental Health First Aid
- Stress management/Resilience skills
- Communication skills for psychological safety
- Team building skills

Partnerships with mental health professionals
- Direct partnerships with mental health professionals for treatment access

Coaching
- Direct partnerships for leaders and managers

Resources:

- U.S. Department of Labor: Mental Health at Work
  - What do I have to do?

    https://www.dol.gov/general/mental-health-at-work#what-do-i-have-to-do
  - What can I do to help?

    https://www.dol.gov/general/mental-health-at-work#what-can-i-do-to-help
  - Resources to assist young employees

    https://www.dol.gov/general/mental-health-at-work#resources-for-young
  - Resources for workers

    https://www.dol.gov/general/mental-health-at-work#resources-for-workers

Resources:

- US Surgeon General Report: Workplace Mental Health and Well-Being
  - Essentials for Workplace Mental Health and Well-being Graphic
  - Workplace Mental Health and Well-Being Reflection Questions Deck

- American Psychological Association – 2024 Work in America Survey
  - Highlights: https://www.apa.org/pubs/reports/work-in-america/2024

- WHO: Guidelines for mental health at work

- US Department of Labor – Recovery-Ready Workplace Resource Hub

Questions and Discussion

Thank You!