

Guide for Navigating Mental Health in the Workplace





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21% of adults
are experiencing at least one mental illness.



Introduction

Mental health has been a long-standing global issue and the COVID-19 pandemic only emphasized how much work still needs to be done, especially in the workplace. For example, a National Center for Health Statistics survey found that the number of Americans reporting symptoms of anxiety and depression nearly tripled from 2019 to 2020 alone. In a more recent study, more than 12 million adults have reported suicidal thoughts. Across the board, mental health issues are increasing, as well as the number of those not seeking help.

A Brief Overview of the Mental Health Crisis

Twenty-one percent of adults (roughly 50 million people) are experiencing at least one mental illness with 5.44% of adults experiencing severe mental illness. Yet, 55% of adults with a mental illness have not received any treatment.

By state, Kansas, Arizona, and Oregon report high percentages of adults with mental illness and thoughts of suicide.

Reasons for difficulty accessing care include:

- No affordable options (42%)
- Lack of awareness about where to go for services (27%)
- No time to seek treatment (19%)

These findings result in 14 million people who recognize their dire need for help, but cannot find it.

On top of issues with individuals seeking help is the coinciding problem of an insufficient healthcare workforce availability. Research has shown that areas with low healthcare provider availability produce higher numbers of mentally unhealthy individuals. Long-term repercussions of untreated mental illness include chronic illnesses and increased mortality.

However, great strides have been made, from normalizing therapy and mental health services to increasing access to care through expansion of health insurance coverage and telemedicine. And there are still opportunities for employers to alleviate the stigma associated with mental health, as well as improving access to affordable care.

Mental Health Trends for 2023



1. Four-Day Workweeks Are Emerging

Between remote and hybrid work arrangements, it should come as no surprise that a four-day workweek is surfacing as a potential new workplace trend. Four-day workweeks can provide mental health benefits, such as better work-life balance, increased focus, productivity, and job satisfaction, lower stress, and improved overall health.

While a four-day workweek is not suitable for all industries, business models, or individuals, it is a new flexible work option that can bring greater benefits to employees and employers alike.

2. Hybrid Work Is Here to Stay

As the labor market remains highly competitive, employers are looking to remain rigid in their recruiting and retention efforts. Hybrid work provides flexibility over schedules and locations, which can positively impact employee satisfaction and productivity. It also adds relief to balance work and family demands without increasing stress and burnout.

However, a few considerations to hybrid work may include employee isolation, difficulty disconnecting and feeling the need to be on-call at all times, and disparities among different demographics. Additionally, measuring employee engagement, productivity, and general well-being are all factors to consider in hybrid work models.

If a hybrid work arrangement is implemented, consistent communication, connection among employees, and setting boundaries are key components to succeeding.

3. Access to Care Is Priority

As rates of burnout, anxiety, depression, and other mental illnesses are at record highs, access to care is becoming an increasingly concerning challenge. As a result, many employees are leaning into their employers to provide better benefit offerings that align with mental health and wellness.

Health insurance companies have made strides to expand their mental health care coverage under medical plans, but finding quality care, covered service, and a mental health professional with an immediate opening are still preventing patients from finding help. Offering mental health services is no longer enough—employees need easy access and a better user experience to truly seek and obtain the help they need.

If you find yourself limited in budget or unable to enhance your benefit offerings on your own, it might be time to seek out alternative options. For example, providing a stipend for mental health or investing in a mental health subscription for all interested employees can help employees find interim care with licensed professionals.



4. Employee Resource Groups Are Converting to Standard Practice

With [diversity fatigue](#) challenging DEI initiatives across the globe, many organizations are leaning into employee resource groups (ERGs). Between the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and today's economic uncertainty, many people have been adversely affected, especially those of minority groups. That's why ERGs play an integral role in mitigating the work-life balance and addressing important topics that continue to impact specific communities.

ERGs create spaces where employees can connect with others who share similar interests or aspects of an identity, such as groups for parents and caregivers, LGBTQ+ employees, women, and people of color. ERGs offer a sense of belonging, cultivate authentic connections, and increase employee retention and satisfaction. ERGs provide [invaluable benefits](#) for both employees and employers. Here's your resource to learn [how to start an employee resource group](#).

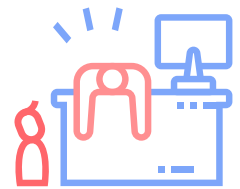


5. Working Parents Need More Help

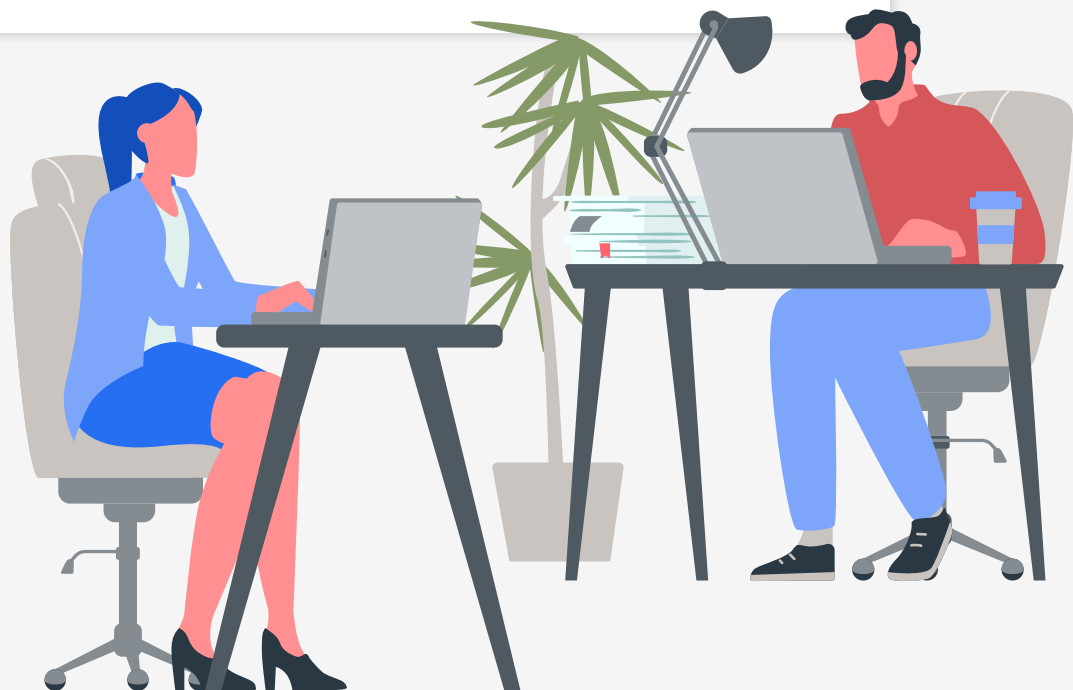
Did you know that 60% of [working parents do not have any help caring for or educating their children](#)? Not to mention workplace interruptions, coordinating drop-offs and pick-ups from school and childcare, and unexpected events (i.e. illness, school closures), working parents need more help.

Research has shown that many working parents' feelings aren't validated and employers aren't doing enough to help them balance work and parental duties. Above all, employers need to help [reframe the stories parents tell themselves](#)—parental burnout is real.

Parent-focused benefits like flexible scheduling, childcare stipends, and paid parental leave are just a few ways employers can support working parents. Here are some additional [ways to create a supportive workplace for new parents](#).



From policies to action, here are some additional [HR strategies for supporting women in business](#).





Putting the Fire Out Before Burnout

While burnout is not new to the workplace, it is catching fire and employers need to not only contain it, but also proactively prevent it. Burnout often begins as a small flame, and as time goes on, repeated or more significant stressors can fan the flame.

Here is a four-step process to understanding, identifying, diffusing, and preventing burnout in the workplace.

1. Understanding Types of Burnout

There are varying types and degrees of burnout. Understanding which ones you might be more susceptible to or have previously experienced can be great baseline experiences for developing preventive measures before it sets in.

Role-based burnout can come in different forms. There's overload burnout, which often occurs when workers sacrifice a work-life balance and work too much or too hard at an unsustainable level. **Overload burnout** is one of the most common types of burnout in the workplace. Another type is **neglect burnout**, which stems from a lack of structure, direction, or support, which can lead to unrealistic expectations. Lastly, there's under-challenged burnout, which occurs when employees do not have enough work or work that challenges them to grow or thrive.

Organizational burnout is when a company culture becomes toxic, hostile, or any combination thereof. This can stem from a number of factors, such as economic ebbs and flows, industries, and type of role.

Personal burnout can come in the form of work-life imbalance, personal hardships, and even being a working parent. Parental burnout is a term that is becoming the norm in workplace culture as more parents are facing childcare challenges.

2. Identifying the Warning Signs

Though there are many types of burnout, most have similar signs, which include:

- Decreased productivity
- Dissatisfactory performance
- Detachment
- Lower morale
- Absenteeism
- Difficulty concentrating
- Shift in mood

Though burnout and depression share many of the same symptoms, they are not the same. The main difference is burnout is caused by external stressors, whereas depression stems from internal experiences and sometimes without cause. However, burnout can lead to a depressive episode and people who experience burnout are more prone to symptoms of depression.

3. Diffusing Burnout

The best way to diffuse burnout is learning how to cope with it before it happens. This can be done through developing a self-care routine, i.e. setting boundaries at work, seeking professional support, and communicating when you need help. [Practicing mindfulness](#) and even [building strong workplace friendships](#) can help cultivate a more positive environment.

4. Preventing Burnout

As common as burnout is, it is critical for employers to strategize ways to help prevent it. Whether it is through strengthening leadership and encouraging stronger manager-employee relationships, or revamping your benefit offerings, employers need to stay proactive.

Employees are leaning more and more on employers to help fight burnout. If you're looking for [innovative ways to combat](#) it in the workplace, be sure to explore your network, engage your employees to discover what they need to feel supported, and strategize with your executive team to make it happen.



4 Tips for Managing Stress and Anxiety

Stress and anxiety are some of the most common mental health issues in the workplace. Here are some of our top tips for managing them.



1. Take breaks.

Whether it's something short like eating lunch, refilling a water bottle, or going for a walk in the parking lot, taking regular breaks can help you disconnect from work stressors. Doing so allows you to mentally reset, focus on something that rejuvenates you, and nourish yourself.



2. Prioritize self-care.

Self-care can look different for everyone. Whether you enjoy daily affirmations, eating healthy, or investing time into things that are important to you, do it. Need a break? Take a mental health day. Some organizations already offer mental health days, others offer [unlimited PTO](#). Whatever helps you care for you, make sure you prioritize it, even if that means creating a calendar reminder for yourself.



3. Connect with your community.

From coworkers to friends and family, it's important to foster authentic connections with people you trust and who support you. You can confide in their perspectives and suggestions, lean on them for support, and trust them to provide you with the resources and validation you need.



4. Seek professional help.

It's okay to ask for help. It doesn't make you weak or a burden for others. It simply showcases that you're human and self-aware of your needs. After all, as the old adage goes, "insanity is doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results." Sometimes you need to shake it up. Mental health professionals can help you identify triggers for your stress and anxiety and offer you tips for coping with them. Whether you need meditation or medication, seeking professional support might be exactly what you need to manage your mental health issues successfully.

Whatever your employees need, the core solution for managing stress and anxiety is creating a better work-life balance for your employees.

Best Practice for Navigating Workplace Politics

Despite the positive or negative effects of office politics, they often cause tension and division in the workplace. When they lean negative—backstabbing a coworker, gossiping, sabotaging a project—office politics cause disruptive, hostile work environments. Prolonged negative workplace politics can lead to decreased performance, productivity, and morale, which can result in longer-term, higher impact such as damage to your brand and increased employee turnover. Worst-case scenario includes legal and financial consequences for the company.

Positive workplace politics—volunteering, recognition, collaboration—can elicit more favorable outcomes, like fostering interpersonal relationships, higher efficiency and employee conduct, and effectuating change.

Though workplace politics can be caused by diverse backgrounds, skill sets, and professional experiences, [overcoming challenges](#) and fostering a positive workplace can help mitigate the impact politics have on your workforce.

5 Tips for Fostering a Positive Workplace



1. Promote Communication and Transparency

If you are a small to mid-sized business experiencing growth, you're likely going to add space between employees and executive leadership. Establishing consistent and open communications between them is integral in mitigating workplace politics. Promoting communication and transparency can come in the form of lunch and learns, state of the company meetings, or regular department meetings where department leaders can help bridge the gap.

The key is to ensure all employees understand company objectives, including addressing the challenges the organization may be facing. While not all employees can be satisfied with all decision-making, it is important for leaders to not only trust their team, but to foster employees' trust and empower them to collaborate for a common goal.

2. Neutralize Negativity

The most proactive way to address workplace politics is to neutralize negativity in real time. When even a slight deviation from a positive, inclusive attitude or behavior surfaces, it should be stopped promptly.

To help deter negative attitudes and behaviors, companies should regularly review and revamp their employee handbooks and Code of Conduct to ensure the most up to date policies align with the overall organizational vision and goals. Additionally, companies should have policies in place for reporting such behaviors, as well as improvement plans for employees to have the opportunity to remedy their actions.

Neutralization can come in the form of encouraging employees to remain professional at all times, refrain from engaging in heated arguments or discussion, and proactively train on conflict resolution strategies.

3. Call for Accountability

Accountability should not only be associated with negative events—employees should understand their role and how it contributes to the success of the organization. When the organization reaches a milestone or obtains a great success, it should be celebrated both company-wide and at individual contributor level, not just at leadership level.

Accountability for mistakes should not be discarded, but it's important to ensure there is a balance between accomplishments and shortcomings. It's also an imperfect system—no workplace can be fully depoliticized. However, there are proactive actions and strategies that can be developed to significantly reduce the volume and impact it plays in a company's culture.

4. Analyze Your Organization

The best place to start is observing your workplace. Ask yourself important questions, such as “Who has the most influence on others?” “Who has authority but doesn't exercise it?” “Who is most respected?” These types of questions will likely lead you to map who has a stake in your company's political power and influence.

Once you find the source of impact, you can analyze interactions—who is friends with whom, what cliques are forming, what types of connections are being formed (i.e. friendships, professional, romantic, etc.).

From there, you can follow the transfer of power between parties and determine opportunities to resolve potential conflicts before they even happen.

5. Build Emotional Intelligence

Emotional intelligence—the ability to understand and manage your emotions, as well as recognize and influence emotions of others—is important to workplace politics because the stronger the emotional intelligence, the less likely you will experience workplace conflicts. This is because emotional intelligence comprises of self-awareness, empathy, motivation, self-regulation, and social skills, all of which influence the way a person thinks, speaks, acts, and engages with others.

While workplace politics can be difficult to confront and mitigate, there are many ways you can turn a seemingly negative situation, such as [an employee write-up](#), into a positive experience.



How to Address Tough Conversations in the Workplace

Between office politics and clashes of personalities, there are undoubtedly going to be tough conversations—from performance issues, negative feedback and conflict between coworkers to organizational changes (i.e. terminating a role, establishing boundaries) and reporting inappropriate behavior. Tough conversations can vary by topic, degree of formality, and impact to individuals and the organization alike. However, it is how each situation is handled and the preparation to address them as they arise that will make or break professional relationships.

Here are a few tips on how to address tough conversations in the workplace.

1. Address the Issue Promptly

Tough conversations can be uncomfortable to experience, especially if the other person is a manager. Forty percent of people delay a conversation for six months or more. But avoiding a conflict often exacerbates the issue. Learning how to navigate a tough conversation can not only help you effectively resolve conflicts, but also build confidence to address the issue sooner than later.

2. Identify and Understand Your Role in the Situation

The first step in addressing a tough conversation is identifying your role in the situation. For example, are you the mediator of the situation or are you the party seeking resolution? If you are the mediator, you might work on gathering as much information as you can regarding the conflict in question, as well as explore potential resolutions before meeting with the party(ies) involved.

Conversely, if you are the individual seeking resolution, you could examine theoretical counter statements or perspectives that might arise in the conversation. You could also ask hypothetical questions, determine what you hope the outcome to be, and any areas of the conflict you might be willing to compromise.

Once you understand your role, you will likely be able to empathize with the other person's perspective and build an empathetic approach. It can also help you determine your feelings about the situation so your reactions don't get the best of you.

3. Approach with a Neutral, Empathetic Perspective

Though you likely have appropriate emotions relating to your position in the situation, it is important to approach the conversation with a neutral, empathetic perspective. You will likely have an opportunity to address your feelings, your objectives of the conversation, and a mutually approved resolution.

To assist with developing a more neutral, empathetic approach, give yourself time to air out your feelings. Whether that be through venting to a loved one, journaling, or a preferred method for processing your thoughts and feelings.

Then, if you're open to it, you might want to consider getting a neutral party's perspective. Try to explain the situation in a neutral way so as not to create bias. From there, you can express what your feelings and thoughts are, and the neutral party might be able to provide a new perspective.

Though you may not fully understand the other person's perspective at the moment, try to see their point of view. If the conversation is not going the way you hoped, do not respond in the heat of the moment. Take a deep breath and focus on constructive ways to respond, such as "I did not see it that way."

4. Be Flexible, But Establish a Goal

While it is important to establish a goal for the conversation—essentially a resolution to a conflict—you also need to be flexible.

You might think your suggestion is a fix-all solution to the conflict with your colleague, but you also can't expect everything to go according to plan. They may suggest something that works better. Or your resolution might be perceived to only benefit you. Your resolution could also just be to professionally agree to disagree. Either way, it is important to come with an ideal resolution, but also remain open minded to other perspectives.

Active listening—the art of listening to understand the person speaking—allows you to focus on what is important to the other person rather than focusing your response to them. Active listening helps to remove one-sidedness or blindness to the underlying issue or message being shared and can guide you to common ground more efficiently and effectively.

5. Set Boundaries

Confronting tough conversations can be emotionally draining, so it's okay to set some boundaries. From taking a break—stepping outside to clear your mind, grabbing a drink of water—to expressing your thoughts and emotions (or lack thereof) in a respectful manner (i.e. "I need some time to process," "I understand, but I'm having trouble communicating what I think or feel," etc.) are all acceptable boundaries to set.

Take the time you need to reset and resolve the issue with a level head.

6. Take Time to Reflect

Regardless of the outcome of your difficult conversation, take some time to reflect. What went well? What could you have done differently?

Just because you addressed the issue at hand does not necessarily mean that it is resolved or that the agreed-upon resolution is instantaneous.

Whatever happened—if it worked in your favor, if it went poorly, or something unexpected happened—learn from it. Growth, especially in personal situations (that might happen in professional settings), comes through self-awareness, self-care, and self-reflection. It takes courage to conduct tough conversations, so keep practicing and learn from your experiences.

Communication doesn't come easy for everyone, especially in challenging situations. If you're looking to continue growing and practicing for these types of situations, here is [HR's Guide to Having Difficult Conversations](#).

***"What went well?
What could you have done
differently?"***

Resources to Support Mental Health in the Workplace

Whether you have established mental health resources and support for your employees or are looking to expand your reach, there are many ways to get started. Here are a few mental health apps for various mental health issues, as well as some additional resources to help guide you to find ways to support your employees' mental health in the workplace and build a stronger culture.

Mental Health Apps

Sleep

- [Calm](#)

Therapy

- [BetterHelp](#)
- [Talkspace](#)
- [Cerebral](#)

Mindfulness

- [Headspace](#)
- [Happify](#)
- [Bearable](#)

Stress and Anxiety

- [iBreathe](#)
- [Sanvello](#)
- [MindShift](#)

Substance Use

- [Reframe](#)
- [I Am Sober](#)

Mental Health Content

- [HR's Guide to Supporting Employee Mental Health](#)
- [How to Create a Positive Workplace Culture for Mental Health](#)
- [Breaking the Mental Health Stigma in the Workplace](#)
- [Parental Burnout: How Employers Can Combat It in the Workplace](#)

About Namely

Combining intuitive HR technology and best-in-class service, Namely empowers mid-size companies to build better workplaces. Simplifying the complexities of recruiting, onboarding, time and attendance, performance management, benefits administration, compliance, payroll, and HR analytics, Namely offers an integrated platform that saves companies time and improves their employees' experiences. Distinguished by a dedicated support model and enhanced service offerings, Namely delivers an all-in-one HR solution for today's people teams.

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