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### Ways to Support Wellness

- Paid Time Off/Sick Leave
- Scheduled meetings with agendas
- Note-taking during meetings for review afterwards
- No video option on virtual meetings
- Regular mental health check-ins
- Reasonable Accommodations
- Flexible scheduling
- Clear communication
- Medical and behavioral health benefits and Employee Assistance Programs (EAP)
- Clear boundaries between work and personal time
- A work culture that openly speaks about mental health
- Listening! Employees are experts on their mental health

# Supporting Employees with Mental Health Conditions

## Short Case Scenario: Dealing with Disclosure

**D**id you know that according to the CDC, **1 in 4 adults will experience a mental health condition in a given year**? That means that whether an employer knows it or not, their workplace likely includes someone dealing with a mental health challenge.

One way to think through issues related to mental health in the workplace is by imagining some case scenarios, and how an employer might deal with them. Here's one about an employee we'll call "Debra."

*Debra is full time employee who has worked in the organization for nearly five years. She is very talented and her performance reports have always been positive. About six months ago she was diagnosed with depression and anxiety but she did not share that with anyone at work. She sees a therapist and is currently taking medication for her mental health challenges. Today she will be stopping into the manager's office because she has chosen to disclose her mental health challenge and diagnosis to her manager. Even though she "hides it very well"—her words—she is having a difficult time keeping up with work and figuring out how to successfully navigate some of the challenges at work that cause her extra stress and anxiety. She is hoping that the manager will be understanding. She doesn't know what to expect, or how the manager will react, as the manager and other staff members have occasionally joked about mental illness. She is nervous about this meeting, but she recognizes that without discussing it with her manager, things will only get worse. It's a tough choice, and she has even thought about resigning due to the anxiety.*



CAFÉ TAC provides resources to help employers understand mental health and support employee wellness. Learn more and check out our previous guides at [cafetacenter.net](http://cafetacenter.net).

**Key Questions to Consider, Related Insights, and Helpful Tips:** As a manager you never know everything that is going on with the people you manage. Life throws a lot of curveballs at people, and many people can't hit that curve without some help. Given that the manager in the above scenario does not know about Debra's situation, the insights and tips herein are focused on **preparedness**. How do you as a manager respond appropriately to an employee who chooses to disclose to you that they have a mental health challenge and that they need help and/or support to continue being an effective employee?

**First, listen.** Then reaffirm. "Debra, I am so glad that you trusted me enough to share this very personal information with me. Let's talk and figure out what we can do to help you. You're a great employee, and I want you to know that I want you on this team."



Then take notes. Ask permission to **ask clarifying questions**, and if granted, ask questions but always with the caveat of "If you're not comfortable answering that, you don't need to." Depending on your organization's policies, you may need to share information with your boss, and/or your Human Resources representative. And, based on what Debra shares, you may need to share information with others. You will need to explain your obligations to Debra, as well as let her know that those who learn about it will hold it in confidence.

You've listened to and reaffirmed her, and you've let her know of any policy obligations you may have. The table is set for you to **problem solve**. Ask her to share what she thinks would be helpful. Make suggestions. Ask questions. **What accommodations does she need?** What ideas can you come up with together to help her stay well and thrive in the workplace? Don't judge, and don't jump to conclusions. Your role is to empower Debra to find her way to where she needs to be. If she leaves your office feeling like she was heard, validated, supported, and empowered to be successful as she navigates this new challenge in her life, then you've done a great job as a manager to keep the focus on her being an effective employee.

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## ***DID YOU KNOW?***

**93%** of Employees say an "open-door" policy that allows for face-to-face communication with leadership is important to addressing mental health

**Supporting Mental Health**

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## What are “Accommodations”?

As defined by the [US Department of Labor](#), an accommodation is “**a modification or adjustment to a job, the work environment, or the way things are usually done during the hiring process.**” These modifications enable an individual with a disability to have an equal opportunity not only to get a job, but successfully perform their job tasks to the same extent as people without disabilities.”

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) supports employers in providing reasonable accommodations for employees with mental health-related disabilities.

Employers may be required under the ADA to provide reasonable accommodations, when requested, to an employee with a disability as long as it does not cause undue hardship on the employer. Examples include telecommuting, scheduling flexibility, sick leave, breaks, and noise reduction.

For more about disability, mental health, and the ADA, see the fact sheet at [adata.org/factsheet/health](https://adata.org/factsheet/health).

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## What is “Disclosure”?

Disclosure is the process of **sharing one’s mental health history, diagnosis, or experience with other people.** Every individual with a mental health condition decides what to share with people in their lives about their experience, their day-to-day challenges, and their self-care and treatment practices.

When it comes to disclosure in the workplace, different people make different decisions about what and how much to disclose. Some may withhold information out of concern about being judged, treated differently, or experiencing social stigma. Others may choose to share information about themselves to find a specific accommodation, support their own wellness at work, or foster more openness in the workplace.

It’s essential for employers to remember that **the employee has control over what and how much to share.** It’s never appropriate to require employees to talk about their mental health against their will.

When mental health and wellness are part of the culture, employees will be more likely to disclose. Employees that can be open about their mental health and what they need to succeed will be happier and more productive, so it makes sense to **build a strong culture around mental health in the workplace.**

It’s also advisable to **think ahead.** What plans, policies, and resources are in place for when an employee chooses to disclose information about their mental health? If you’ve thought through the answers, you won’t be caught of guard when an employee makes a disclosure about their mental health.

