CAFÉ TA CENTER
A Program of The Family Café

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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: Creating a Culture of Understanding

Did 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 a manager we'll call "Steve," and his employee "Darcy," and their workplace team.

All managers try to create a work culture that is enjoyable, positive and supportive—or at least they should be trying to achieve this. In this scenario, Steve is the manager of a medium-sized team of 23 staff. Steve likes to foster camaraderie, solidarity, trust, and teamwork. He is pretty good at it, and it seems that most of the staff members are invested in the team and participate in the various opportunities that Steve creates to foster a positive culture. It has come to his attention, though, that one of the staff members, Darcy, was recently diagnosed with a mental health challenge—she shared this with him in confidence, because she trusts Steve and wanted him to be aware that she might need some accommodations here and there for her to be able to do her job. Steve appreciated Darcy's up-front disclosure and is now passionate about engaging the team culture to be supportive. However, Darcy prefers to keep her diagnosis confidential, and Steve has of course agreed to respect her control over what to disclose and abide by her request. The thing is, the occasional accommodation will probably draw attention from the rest of the staff since they're all so tight-knit, and Darcy understands this. How might Steve evolve the team's understanding of and appreciation for mental health challenges such that they can support Darcy and others on the team who may have a mental health challenge?

Find more resources to help employers understand mental health and support employee wellness at cafetacenter.net.

The topics of mental health and mental illness have not really come up among the staff. Steve hears a comment here and there about someone's relative, or perhaps a friend, maybe even a child—but **collectively the topic is not something the team has discussed. That's the need that Steve has chosen to address. Here's how he has decided to go about it.**

1. Steve is going to **meet with Darcy** and explain that mental health has not been a topic of discussion and awareness for the staff, and that it should have been a topic a long time ago. Her situation has brought that into focus, and he can address it with the team **without divulging anything about Darcy**.

2. His usual style is to form a Committee to create a program of content to deliver during bi-weekly meetings. Steve will **invite Darcy to be part of the planning and delivery of content if she is interested**, but won't require or pressure her to do so.

3. Steve will **introduce the topic at a high level** during a staff meeting, explaining that "Mental health is important to all of us, and many different types of challenges that can impact both the workplace and life at home arise at any given point in time so I thought we should make it a topic for our team and become more familiar with it. Who would like to be on a Committee to spearhead that?"

4. With volunteers having signed up, Steve will work with them to **introduce key questions, ideas about activities, and program concepts,** all of which will be delivered by the Committee over the course of several meetings. This will be a good first step towards infusing new information and a new awareness that should be helpful to both Darcy, as well as others who may be dealing with a mental health challenge.

5. As the programs unfold over several meetings, Steve will take an active role in heightening the awareness and appreciation of the complexities of mental health challenges, and insert questions that lead to the team discussing "*what if*" scenarios that might involve members of the team. It is at this point that **Steve will have fostered a new consciousness regarding mental health awareness, as well as the supportive attitude** that a team should show towards its own members.

The strategy behind this approach is to build **an office culture that accommodates the mental health needs of every employee, without calling out any individual as the reason for the issue arising**. That way, he can begin supporting his employee that has disclosed their mental health needs to him, Darcy, as well as any other employees that may have an undisclosed mental health need, without running afoul of anyone's right to privacy and control over their own decisions about disclosure.

Supporting Mental Health

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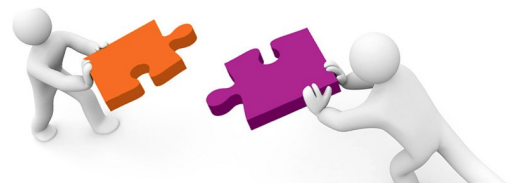
When mental health and wellness are part of the culture, employees will be more likely to disclose. Employees that can be open about their mental health and what they need to succeed will be happier and more productive, so it makes sense to **build a strong culture around mental health in the workplace**.

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.

More Employment Resources from CAFÉ TAC

Check out all of the **tip sheets, guides, and resources for workplace mental health** from CAFÉ TAC!

- Tips for Employers on Hiring Individuals with Mental Health Conditions
- Supporting Employees With Mental Health Conditions
- Scenario 1: First Seek to Understand
- Scenario 2: Dealing with Disclosure
- Scenario 3: Facilitating Peer Connection

5 WAYS TO CREATE A CULTURE OF OPENNESS AT WORK AROUND MENTAL HEALTH

1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
Awareness is the first step.	Demonstrate vulnerability to help create a culture of trust.	Be comfortable discussing mental health at work.	Don't make assumptions.	Provide reasonable job accommodations.