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Questions You Can Ask

- How are you feeling today, really? Physically and mentally.
- What's taking up most of your head space right now?
- Tell me about a recent "win," either at work or at home.
- How can I support you this week?
- What's something you can do today that would be good for you?
- What's something you're looking forward to in the next few days?
- What are some goals we can work on this week?
- Who can help us reach these goals?

Supporting Employees with Mental Health Conditions

Short Case Scenario: First Seek to Understand

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 an employee we'll call "Roy."

Roy is a full-time employee. He is in his late twenties and has been working for the organization for nearly two years. His role requires him to interface with other people and departments, but ultimately his tasks are his to manage and complete. In the past few months Roy has exhibited a lot of irritability, especially during team meetings. He has always been a reliable employee, but in addition to the irritability he has arrived to work late a handful of times with no explanation and has missed some minor deadlines. When asked about being late or missing deadlines, he scoffs and changes subject after providing a reply that doesn't really explain the cause. In general, he seems to be having some challenges that are resulting in a decline in performance as well as a negative dynamic with fellow employees. The other employees have noticed. No one has as of yet made an attempt to learn more. The manager is now to the point of needing to confront Roy.

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.



Key Questions to Consider, Related Insights, and Helpful Tips: All people, whether they have a mental health challenge or not, go through ups and downs and can exhibit different characteristics in the workplace. There is no telling what is going on with Roy, but it could be very possible that he does have a mental health challenge for which he might need support. When the manager meets with Roy to address the concerns, it is important that the manager keep in mind that accountability for actions is the easy topic to discuss, and therefore the manager can set that aside (not lead with it) and instead **approach Roy and the situation first seeking to understand.**

Does Roy have a mental health diagnosis that he has formally or informally mentioned, and/or is he currently taking any medication? Unless he has disclosed this, there's no way to know, but it is a consideration the manager might want to keep in mind. People don't need to have a diagnosed mental health challenge to have a bad day or week. And sometimes, a person may not even recognize that they are experiencing a mental health challenge for which they would be well-served to speak with someone. And sometimes life just happens, and people are affected by what is going on. Seeking to understand Roy's situation is a good starting point. But how can the manager explore this topic appropriately?

First, **it's important to create a space where Roy knows it's safe to be open.** The manager should attempt to allay any fear that Roy might have that being honest about what's going on will result in being punished or terminated. Instead, reassure Roy that his work is valued, and that the organization wants to be supportive of him to figure out what has been causing him challenges lately.

One effective approach is to **ask open-ended questions.** Although the manager cannot ask Roy if he has a mental health condition, the manager could ask, "Roy, is there something going on that you'd like to talk about and that I can help with?"

It's important for the manager to **truly listen.** Remember to focus on what Roy is saying, and not what you as the manager are going to say next, or thoughts, feelings, ideas, or concerns that come to mind while Roy is talking. It can also be helpful to **reflect what Roy is saying,** and create connection. Once Roy shares what he's dealing with, the manager might say "Roy, what I hear you saying is . . ." and then rephrase what they heard, to make sure everyone is on the same page.

The manager could also make "I" statements, such as, "You know, Roy, I have found that I get irritable when things seem out of sorts. I've even wondered if it would be helpful for me to see a professional about it." An "I" statement can lead to discussion in which Roy might disclose information that would assist the manager to understand and assist Roy.



Supporting Mental Health

Ten Tips for Workplace Wellness Conversations

1. Make sure you know where you can direct people to if they are struggling with their well-being.
2. Be aware of any stressors or pressures and how these may be influencing individuals.
3. Listen to what it is your team has to say. Regularly practice the skill of mindful listening.
4. Make sure you are regularly checking in with how you are feeling.
5. Get to know your team and understand how personal factors could be influencing their performance.
6. Be proactive with support and ask your team if there is anything you can do to guide or help them.
7. Praise, encourage and be proud of team members who speak openly about mental health.
8. If someone is struggling be kind and understanding as to what it is they are experiencing.
9. If someone is struggling, suggest some positive actions people can engage with to look after physical and mental health.
10. Encourage your team to talk openly about well-being and mental health.

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.