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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?

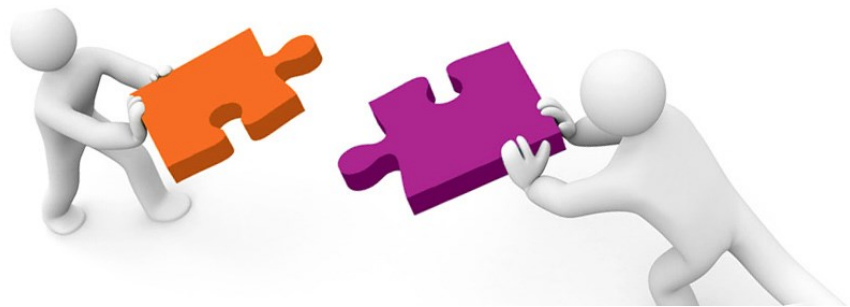
Supporting Employees with Mental Health Conditions

Short Case Scenario: Facilitating Peer Connection

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 "Jane."

Jane manages a team of five workers in an insurance office. Of the five, four are sales representatives and one is an assistant. Jane knows that one of the sales representatives, Doug, as well as the assistant, Jim, are individuals with lived experience. She knows this because both Doug and Jim have confided in Jane individually. Jane is wondering how she might be able to assist Doug and Jim, and she believes that they might be good supports for one another. There are many challenges to accomplishing this, from privacy and disclosure guidelines to relationship-building and human dynamics. What are the key questions and issues to consider for a manager like Jane that sees a chance to facilitate support but worries about overstepping?



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.

How might Jane explore the concept of bringing Doug and Jim together without violating their confidentiality?

One thing Jane could do is post information on a bulletin board that invites workers to be aware of mental health challenges, and to encourage them to seek support from teammates. The topic would go beyond the individuals in the office to include their family members (“Your daughter and my daughter are on a similar journey, so maybe we could



talk about it.”) In doing this, Jane would create a supportive environment to discuss mental health challenges. At the bottom of the post Jane could post something like, “Please feel confident and empowered to talk with me about whether or not you might consider being connected with fellow workers regarding this topic.” This approach allows Jane to put the invitation out there without directly needing to broach the topic with Doug or Jim. Perhaps both of them will mention to Jane that they would really like to be part of a small, informal group.

How should Jane navigate the human resource issues and potential liabilities? Jane should definitely speak with the HR manager at the corporate level. If she is also the HR person, then she needs to contact her insurance company and perhaps an attorney just to make sure that she is not going to violate any laws or personal rights in whatever approach she takes.

What if Jane decides to speak with Doug and Jim individually? Jane might be able to speak in a hypothetical way to Doug and Jim individually. For example she could say, “Thanks for sharing your journey with me, and if there’s anything I can do to accommodate your needs let me know. Along those lines, hypothetically, if anyone else ever shares something similar would you want me to share with them that you’re on a similar journey without disclosing your specifics, and maybe arrange for that person to reach out to you? Or would you prefer that I always keep it confidential?”

What if Doug and Jim are interested and want Jane to help with the introduction? If Jane feels comfortable, she can arrange a meeting with the two of them. Should it be at work during work hours? Probably not. Maybe arrange for coffee on a Saturday morning. Jane would need to declare that she is not a counselor or therapist, and that all she is hoping to do is introduce the topic and let them know that she hopes that they might be a good support for one another, and that they are always welcome to reach out to her. She has no responsibility to facilitate. If Jane does not want to be involved due to her own reasons, she can simply let them know, “This is a personal and non-work related topic, and I am confident that the two of you could go out for coffee and start to see how you might benefit, or not, from getting to one another from this perspective. If there’s anything I can do to help in the work place, let me know.”

Supporting Mental Health

No matter what Jane does, it's important that she create the opportunity for her team to share experiences and support each other, without making anyone feel pressured or as if they must share. Every individual should have the power to *disclose* as much or as little about their own circumstances as they are comfortable with.



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.

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