Recognizing Mental Health Issues in the Workplace

Mental Health America of Ohio
Maggie Hallett, EdS, LPC
Senior Director of Workplace Health and Education
What is a mental health disorder?

A **mental health disorder** is a diagnosable illness that:

- Affects a person’s thinking, emotional state, and behavior
- Can disrupt the person’s ability to:
  - Work
  - Carry out daily activities
  - Engage in healthy relationships
Mental health barriers in the workplace

• Symptoms are often behavioral – impacting employees’ productivity and relationships at work

• Stigma is associated with mental health problems – most people hide their conditions at work

• Most people do not seek treatment
Depression

General symptoms
- Persistent “empty” mood
- Guilt, hopelessness, worthlessness
- Appetite disturbances
- Sleep disturbances
- Intense sadness, despair
- Irritability, frustration, anger
- Loss of interest or pleasure
- Fatigue, loss of energy
- Persistent physical symptoms
- Difficulty concentrating, remembering, making decisions

What it may look like at work
- Absenteeism
- A change in mood/demeanor
- Lack of motivation; inability to care about tasks
- Difficulty concentrating
- Isolation from colleagues
- Productivity suffers
Anxiety

General symptoms
- Snowballing worries
- Restlessness, irritability, on edge
- Difficulty concentrating
- Insomnia
- Shortness of breath, numbness, chest tightness
- Avoiding situations
- Repetitive, persistent or intrusive thoughts or images
- Compulsive behavior

What it may look like at work
- Need for extra reassurance from boss or co-workers
- Snapping at or being short with colleagues
- Inability to focus on the task at-hand; easily distractible; productivity suffers
- Impostor Syndrome
- Overperforming; burning out
Never in the history of calming down has anyone ever calmed down by being told to calm down.
Hallmarks of a panic attack

- Palpitations, pounding heart or rapid heart rate
- Sweating
- Trembling and shaking
- Shortness of breath, sensations of choking
- Chest pain or discomfort
- Abdominal distress or nausea
- Dizziness, light-headedness, feeling faint, unsteady
- Feelings of being detached from oneself (unreality)
- Fear of losing control or “going crazy”
- Fear of dying
- Numbness or tingling
- Chills or hot flashes
How to help someone during a panic attack

• **ASSESS** for risk of harm
• **NAME** it. Say “this is a panic attack and it will pass.”
• **LISTEN** non-judgmentally; try to stay calm yourself
• **GIVE** reassurance, information and space
• **5, 4, 3, 2, 1** Grounding Exercise
Bipolar Disorder
Principal Features – Mania & Hypomania

**General symptoms**
- High energy levels
- Sleep disturbance
- Euphoric mood
- Irritability
- Inappropriate behavior
- Creativity
- Grandiosity

**What it may look like at work**
- Talking more than usual, interrupting
- Ideas and emails coming at all hours, day and night
- Overzealousness (outside of typical behavior); BIG ideas that may not make sense
- Aggressive irritability
- Making others uncomfortable; discussing non-work appropriate topics
“If it’s mentionable, it’s manageable.”

- Fred Rogers
Considerations for managers

- Employees bring their whole selves to work
- Covid has created and/or triggered mental health issues in many employees
- It is not your job to diagnose mental health issues, but it IS your job to address issues appropriately and compassionately
- You have the ability to impact someone’s mental health in a positive manner
How managers can help

• Model healthy behaviors
• Check-in regularly, and especially when working remotely, overcommunicate
• Be willing to have difficult conversations
• Accountability: Understanding vs. Enabling
• Be flexible
• Work with your HR partner—they have navigated this before
How to have difficult conversations about mental health

• **Listen to understand.** Understand the employee’s perspective before discussing solutions.

• **Be honest and clear.** If there are specific areas of concern, like high absenteeism or impaired performance, it’s important to address these at an early stage.

• **Ensure confidentiality.** It’s sensitive information and should be shared with as few people as possible.

• **Focus on collaboration and commitment.** Help employees to develop their own solutions so that when challenges arise, they are more committed to overcoming the obstacles.

• **Know yourself.** Understand your own comfort level and triggers when it comes to these conversations.
Supportive conversation starters

If someone shares that they are struggling, try saying:

• “What would be most helpful to you right now?”
• “What can I take off your plate?”
• “How can I support you without overstepping?”
• “Let’s discuss the resources we have available here, and what else you might need.”
• “I’ve been through something similar. And while I don’t want to make this about me, I’m open to sharing my experience with you if and when it would be helpful.”
Questions?

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Maggie Hallett, EdS, LPC
mhallett@mhaohio.org
mhaohio.org