

# 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](mailto:mhallett@mhaohio.org)

[mhaohio.org](http://mhaohio.org)

