

# Supporting Mental Health in the Workplace Checklist for Supervisors



There has been a reported [rise in the number of individuals experiencing symptoms of anxiety and depressive disorders in the United States](#). This checklist provides recommendations for supervisors to help support mental health and alleviate stressors for workers.

## Be a compassionate leader and establish a supportive tone.

- Raise awareness about stressors and reduce the stigma surrounding mental health issues and substance use by:
  - Talking about the types of specific stressors that relate to your particular workforce and sector, as well as their impact on mental health (e.g., high rates of depression and anxiety disorders, increased substance use).
  - Sharing [national statistics](#) so that workers know they are not alone if they are struggling with mental health or substance use issues.
  - Sharing a story about stress for you and what you are doing to address it to demonstrate empathy, show vulnerability, and communicate that the group is all in this together.
  - Telling workers that it's natural to feel stressed and encourage them to seek help if needed. **It is important to assure workers their jobs will not be negatively impacted if they seek help.**
- Implement an “open door” policy for workers to express their problems and concerns.
- Check in with workers periodically to ask them how they are doing and whether there is anything that management can do to support them.
- Hold frequent group meetings to promote connectedness and provide a forum for workers to voice concerns, ask questions, and receive information about ways to cope with stress, build resiliency, and seek outside support if necessary.
- Build connections and encourage coworkers to be supportive of one another by:
  - Creating peer support networks around common issues. These networks can be formal or informal. Each network might have a trusted employee to set up sessions (in-person or virtual) for their coworkers and lead conversations that give other staff a chance to talk about issues, tell their stories, and brainstorm potential solutions.
  - Encouraging coworkers to check in on each other and/or create a “buddy system,” as helping others improves an individual’s sense of control, belonging, and self-esteem. For example, advise coworkers to break into small teams and ask them to call or email each other weekly or biweekly to check in.
  - Planning optional in-person or virtual social activities using videoconferencing tools to promote camaraderie among staff (e.g., virtual coffee breaks, lunches, allotted time for story sharing, games, virtual book clubs).

Reducing workplace stress benefits **everyone** and can lead to improved morale, increased productivity, fewer sick days, better focus, fewer workplace injuries, an enhanced quality of life, and improved physical health (e.g., better sleep, lower blood pressure, stronger immune system).

- Be a good role model by:
  - Showing a more personal side, acknowledging that you also feel the stress.
  - Taking care of your own mental health by practicing self-care (e.g., getting enough sleep, exercising, taking breaks) and establishing work-life boundaries (e.g., setting a time by which you will be offline for the day, taking breaks during the day, scheduling a meeting-free day once a week).
  - Being honest with yourself: are you experiencing concerning signs and symptoms of distress? Do you need more support? If so, ask for it.

## Look for opportunities to alleviate stress at work.

- Look for ways to reassign work, prioritize tasks, and allow more time to complete tasks.
- Be realistic and fair about expectations, especially in situations where workers are being asked to take on additional job responsibilities.
- Determine if staff need new training, tools, or equipment to adapt to the changes introduced to their job tasks and work environment.
- Allow workers more flexibility in choosing their work hours to accommodate childcare or other caregiving needs.
- Encourage workers to set a time by which they will be offline for the day.

## Look for and address signs and symptoms of distress.

- Review or download and share the poster [“My Mental Health: Do I Need Help?”](#)
- Show compassion and offer additional support to workers who appear to be struggling.
- If you are worried that a worker is experiencing a more serious mental health or substance use issue, get help.
  - Tell someone in your human resources department and ask for guidance on how to support them or direct them to help.
  - Call a hotline if you are unsure of what to do, such as the [Disaster Distress Helpline](#), the [National Domestic Violence Hotline](#), or the [988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline](#).
- Be mindful of privacy concerns—do not try to force someone to disclose a medical or mental health condition.

Stress can look different in different people. Examples include:

- Irritation, anger, or denial
- Feeling nervous or anxious
- Lacking motivation
- Feeling tired, overwhelmed, or burned out
- Feeling sad or depressed
- Having trouble sleeping or focusing
- Getting into conflicts at work
- Having trouble completing tasks or meeting deadlines
- Submitting poor-quality work