



12.6 Selfcare and the Workplace



The Benefits of Talking about Mental Health in the Workplace

Talking about mental health and wellbeing in the workplace on a regular basis has important benefits:

- It sends a message to your employees that their wellbeing matters and that you care about them as people, not just as employees.
- It promotes healthy behaviors and habits.
- It helps to mitigate the risk that employees will experience work-related mental health issues related to stress and burnout.
- It makes it easier to speak to an employee who is going through a mental health challenge.

How to Create an Environment Where the Topic of Mental Health Is Normalized

Normalizing the topic of mental health in the workplace doesn't need to be difficult but it can be hard to know where to begin. Here are some ideas to help you get started:

- Add a standing agenda item to your team meetings for mental health check-ins or wellness tips.
- Create wellness challenges and connect them to mental wellbeing.
- Provide regular reminders of the benefits available to employees through your benefits provider.
- Invite a subject matter expert from the mental health community to speak at a lunch and learn; create a mental health lunch and learn series.
- Encourage employees to take their breaks and vacation time to prioritize wellbeing.
- Check in with employees one to one and talk just about things other than work.

5 Ways Leaders Can Model Selfcare and Mentally Healthy Behaviours

Once you have started talking about mental health, it's time to start modeling the behaviors that you are encouraging in your employees.

1. Take your breaks and don't eat lunch at your desk.
2. Use your vacation time.
3. Don't send emails to your employees outside of work hours.
4. Organize and participate in wellness activities.
5. Use inclusive, people-first language (ie: a person with depression instead of a depressed person).
6. Be authentic and vulnerable; share with your team when you are experiencing mental health challenges.

Activities That Support Wellbeing and Increase Resiliency

By maintaining habits for good mental health, we increase our resilience and are better able to respond to life's ups and down. These include:

1. Mindfulness helps us to focus on the present and can reduce anxiety.
2. Maintaining healthy routines supports mental and physical health. Predictability can create a sense of safety and helps us to establish healthy habits.
3. Gratitude is powerful; studies have shown that those who have a daily gratitude practice live, on average, seven years longer than those who don't.
4. Take notice of what makes you feel good – hobbies, exercise, time with friends and family -and make time for it.
5. Reduce sugar and alcohol consumption. Sugar is inflammatory and has been linked to mental illnesses. Alcohol is a depressant and can make you feel worse if you are already experiencing depression.
6. Talk about mental health challenges and reach out for help if you need it.

How to Provide Benefits If You Don't Have a Benefits Plan

Many small employers don't have an EFAP (employee and family assistance plan). That doesn't have to mean that you can't provide mental health and wellness supports to your employees. Here are some suggestions to create an offering of wellness perks:

- Ask a local gym, community centre, nutritionist, or massage therapist for a corporate discount for your employees.
- Create a listing of government funded resources that support mental and physical health.
- Provide a list of local community organizations that provide services to support recovery from mental illness.

- Hold wellness challenges and ask for prize donations from local wellness practitioners and services.
- Provide regular free educational opportunities for employees and managers to learn about mental health, selfcare and resiliency. Facilitated by community-based subject matter experts in mental health and wellness. Many of these people will do these things for free.

Optimizing Your Employee and Family Assistance Plan

If your organization has an employee benefits plan, it is very likely that your employees aren't making the most of it. According to the 2019 Sun Life Barometer, 60% of working Canadians experiencing mental health challenges aren't accessing support through their workplace benefits and 78% haven't used government-funded services. Some of this is because of stigma but it is also because employees aren't aware of all that is available to them.

- Nearly one-in-five say they don't know anything except that they have some sort of coverage.
- Only one-in-three who currently have disability coverage say they understand the details 'very well'.

Four Ways to Get the Most from Your Employee and Family Assistance Provider (EFAP)

1. Understand.

As a manager, it's important that you know what EFAPs can do for you, your team and your organization. Read up on your program and talk to your benefit provider.

2. Promote.

Let employees know what is available to them and then remind them. Regular internal communications, team discussions, and lunch and learns can all promote a better understanding of the counselling services EFAPs provide and their impacts on wellbeing and mental health.

3. Prevent.

Promoting your EFAP and encouraging employees to use it helps to normalize the topic of mental health and wellbeing. This helps to reduce the stigma attached to mental illness and seeking help.

4. Assess.

Ask your EFAP the following questions to better understand the effectiveness of your benefits offerings:

- How often was the program accessed?
- What are the most common issues employees are dealing with?
- Which benefits offerings are most popular (and which are underutilized)?

Use the information that you receive to improve upon the offerings. And don't forget to ask the experts themselves: your employees. They will tell you what they really value and need.

Sources:

¹ Sun Life Financial Canada. (2019, September 24). Mental health conditions on the rise while helpful resources remain untouched. Retrieved from [Mental health conditions on the rise while helpful resources remain untouched | Sun Life](#)

Disclaimer:

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