Mental Health Awareness at the Office

Nearly one in five Americans experience a diagnosable mental health condition in any given year, according to Mental Health America. For many, the issue stems from work-related stress, yet mental health is one of the least talked about topics, especially in the workplace. Furthermore, work environment and agency culture have a significant effect on employees' mental and emotional well-being, yet many agencies and managers neglect, or are unsure how, to provide a mentally healthy atmosphere.

The importance of a positive work environment

While many employees experience intermittent situational stress, some contend with the added challenge of working in a negative environment, which can lead to or worsen more adverse effects, such as persistent anxiety, physical health problems, and even depression.

This may be compounded more for employees who may already be dealing with non-work-related mental health concerns. Ultimately, the agency is affected by the toll that a negative work environment has on its employees because it can result in:

- Increased absenteeism and decreased presenteeism
- Reduced employee engagement, performance, and productivity
- Breakdowns in communication among coworkers
- Higher medical and disability costs

How to foster a more mentally healthy workplace

1. **Reduce the stigma.** One good way to increase mental health awareness in the workplace is to start talking about it more and stop treating the topic as taboo. Speaking openly and respectfully about mental health issues—possibly even sharing a personal example if you feel comfortable—helps employees realize they're not alone and that they'll be supported during a tough time.

2. **Provide easy access to mental health resources.** Ensuring that practical advice is available to your employees is essential, as is permitting them the time and privacy to take care of their mental health. Let your team know where and to whom they can go for information and support, such as the Employee Assistance Program (EAP). It can even be as easy distributing EAP promotional brochures, or making sure employees know about the EAP website, www.FOH4You.com.

3. **Support employees with mental health conditions.** If an employee makes you aware of a mental health issue, offer support by listening with compassion and reminding them that you are available for them, while still keeping professional boundaries. If needed, make reasonable adjustments that will allow those with mental health conditions to continue doing their job effectively.

4. **Promote self-care and work-life balance.** We all need a break now and again to rest our mind, body, and spirit. Ask what it might take to help employees feel more relaxed and comfortable in their work environment. Encourage employees to take breaks and to use the leave they're entitled to. Making the workspace more relaxed and encouraging your staff to occasionally recharge can go a long way toward preventing health or other concerns down the line.

For more tips, guidance, and resources you can use to create an emotionally healthy environment and work culture for your employees, call your EAP any time, day or night, to speak with a consultant. Remember, the EAP is not just a counseling resource; supervisor consultations can improve your confidence as you lead your employees through this challenging time.

The EAP is a voluntary and confidential employee benefit available to federal employees at no cost.

Over 45 Million Americans
are experiencing a mental illness

Nearly 1 in 5 Americans
will experience a diagnosable mental health condition in a given year

The State of Mental Health in America 2020
Annual report by Mental Health America

24 HOURS A DAY
800-222-0364
TTY: 888-262-7848
foh4you.com