

~~stigma~~free FLORIDA

Information for Employees

You notice a favorite co-worker is having trouble at work. That person is taking many unexplained breaks. He's absent frequently, without a good reason. He looks worried, distracted, or listless. He seems forgetful. You want to help, but you don't know how. You feel too awkward to ask about his well-being. And then your co-worker leaves his job, and you wish you could have intervened.

Has this happened to you? Or, could you be that co-worker?

Are you having difficulty with your emotions or your concentration? Perhaps you feel overwhelmed. Maybe you're afraid to ask for help or open up to a colleague, hoping no one notices your struggles.

You're not alone. Sadly, one in five workers in the U.S. will be affected by a mental illness in any given year. That doesn't count the employees who are caregivers for a loved one or family member with a mental illness.

The stigma surrounding mental illness often prevents people from seeking help. Oftentimes, they fear the consequences of disclosure.

Science has proven that mental illness, like heart disease or diabetes, is a treatable health issue. Most people who seek help can improve their quality of life and continue working productively. But that takes support from the workplace.

That's where you come in. Each employee can play a vital role in shaping workplace attitudes and creating a stigma-free environment. You can promote anti-discrimination just by the way you treat a colleague, work as a team, and get involved in initiatives that promote positive health and wellbeing. If you face mental health challenges yourself, then you know how important these things are.

Here are 10 things you can do in your workplace:

1. If you suspect a colleague is struggling with mental illness, reach out to that person.
2. Try to understand your co-workers' situation and encourage them to seek support.
3. Listen to your co-worker – without making judgments.
4. Be supportive; it's not helpful to pressure them to "just to get over it," or assume their problem will just go away.
5. Encourage open communication when problems arise.
6. Speak up about instances of discrimination, bullying or harassment toward the individual.
7. Avoid putting labels on individuals ("she's so bi-polar" or "he's crazy").
8. Be a role model and promote the kind of culture that inspires people to do their best.
9. If you feel comfortable, share your own personal experience of a mental illness.
10. Be open to learning more about mental illness.

Encouraging open dialogue in the workplace *will* help reduce stigma. And you can be part of that effort.

*Information by HeadsUp.org/au & Stamp Out Stigma and the "CEOs Against Stigma" campaign
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