



# Employee NEWSLETTER

Employee Assistance Program  
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## The Importance of Your Mental Health

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**Since 1949, May has been recognized as Mental Health Month. Now, more than ever, we need to continue to strive towards reducing the stigma surrounding mental health concerns. This past year presented a number of different challenges and obstacles that tested our strength and resiliency. The global pandemic and social unrest events forced us to cope with situations we never even imagined, and many of us struggled with our mental health as a result.**

Throughout the pandemic, many people who had never experienced mental health challenges found themselves struggling for the first time. If you found your mental health impacted, or that of someone you know, you are not alone. In fact, of the almost half a million individuals that took the anxiety screening at [www.MHAscreening.org](http://www.MHAscreening.org), 79% showed symptoms of moderate to severe anxiety.

It's not easy to talk about your mental health at work, or anywhere for that matter. May is the perfect time to help reduce the stigma around mental health, and to open the conversation to check in on your own mental health, or that of someone you care about. Increasing awareness might encourage you, or someone else, to get the care they need and begin to maintain and/or move towards a higher state of mental health and overall well-being.

### What is Mental Health?

Mental health includes our emotional, psychological, and social well-being. It is more than the absence of mental disorders. Mental health is a state of successful performance in which an individual realizes their own abilities, participates in productive activities, is able to have fulfilling relationships with others, and can cope with change and normal life stressors. Mental health is essential to personal well-being, family and interpersonal relationships, and the ability to contribute to community or society.

### What is Mental Illness?

Mental disorders are health conditions that are characterized by alterations in thinking, mood, and/or behavior that are associated with distress and/or impaired functioning. Mental disorders contribute to a host of problems that may include distress or disability in social, work or family activities. Mental illness is the term that refers collectively to all diagnosable mental disorders. Diagnosable mental health conditions include depression, schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, panic disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD), and borderline personality disorder.

### Mental Health Status

Mental health doesn't always stay the same. Mental illness can affect people of any age, race, religion, or income. It can change as life circumstances change, and as we move through different stages of life. If left untreated, mental illness can have a huge impact on daily living, including your ability to work, care for family, and relate and interact with others. Similar to having other medical conditions like diabetes or heart disease, there is no shame in having a mental illness, and support and treatment are available.

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## How to Protect and Promote Your Mental Health

- Acknowledge that you're not feeling your best without guilt or shame. Talking about your feelings is a way to start the conversation so you feel listened to, supported, and less alone.
- If things are getting too much for you, and you feel you can't cope, ask for help. You might reach out to a friend or family member, or it could be reaching out to a mental health provider.
- When you're feeling down, or distressed, it is easy to be hard on yourself. Practice positive self-talk and compassion, remind yourself of your strengths and reasons for staying well.
- Physical activity can reduce stress, boost your mood, increase concentration, and even help alleviate symptoms of anxiety and depression.
- Getting quality sleep, and enough of it, is essential for physical and mental health. Establish a sleep routine to help ensure you are getting enough.
- If you haven't tried mindfulness before, consider starting a mindfulness practice. Mindfulness has been shown to reduce anxiety and stress, and improve health.
- Even with social distancing, reaching out to friends and family is a great way to reduce anxiety and improve your mental health. When you can't be face to face, calls, text and social media can help you stay connected.
- Acknowledge that you may need professional support. Talking to a mental health provider who has no bias can be beneficial, because they can provide objective support. They can also offer problem-solving and coping techniques.

## You Can Get Started Today

It's important to remember that working on your mental health, or supporting someone you care about, and finding tools that help you thrive takes time. Change won't happen overnight. Instead, by focusing on small changes, and getting appropriate care, you can move through life stressors and develop long-term strategies to support yourself and others you care about on an ongoing basis.

A great starting point for anyone who is ready to start prioritizing their mental health is to take a look at mental health screening tools available on our website at [www.firschoiceeap.com](http://www.firschoiceeap.com). It's a quick, free, and confidential way for someone to assess their mental health and begin finding hope and access to care for healing.

Seeking mental health support? Remember First Choice Health EAP is here for you 24/7. Contact us today at 800-777-4114 to start the conversation.

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