



# Supervisor NEWSLETTER

Employee Assistance Program  
May 2020

## May is Mental Health Month

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**Since 1949, May has been recognized as Mental Health Awareness Month. Over the course of the past several months, the coronavirus pandemic has impacted and altered the daily lives and mental well-being of millions globally. This month's newsletter is focused on raising awareness of the mental health impact of COVID-19 and ways to support employees who may be experiencing difficulties in response to the outbreak.**

Since January when the World Health Organization (WHO) determined the outbreak of the novel coronavirus disease, COVID-19, to be a "public health emergency of international concern", stress levels everywhere have increased. Adding the extended period of social isolation, disruption of work and daily life, plus the stress and uncertainty surrounding the illness is creating an environment where mental health is negatively impacted in most everyone. Those already suffering from mental illness and substance disorders are facing increased challenges to manage their conditions. Reports are also showing spikes in post-traumatic stress disorder being documented among vulnerable populations, health workers, and other front-line personnel.

In a recent survey by mental health provider Ginger, nearly seven out of ten employees indicated that the COVID-19 pandemic is the most stressful time of their entire professional career. Overall, 88% of workers reported experiencing moderate to extreme stress over the past 4 to 6 weeks. Also, 62% of workers reported

losing at least one hour a day in productivity due to pandemic related stress, with 32% losing more than two hours per day.

It is not surprising that employees are struggling with engagement and productivity while facing the stress of disruption in the workplace, or even unemployment. This is a time when they are looking to leadership for help easing their anxiety, while employers face unique challenges of their own. As employers address business continuity planning and mounting stressors of the ever-changing business environment, remaining calm and mindful of employee needs can positively impact employee mental health and productivity.

2020 is a long way from 1949, but conversations about mental health in the workplace can still be difficult. Now is the perfect opportunity to reduce the stigma around mental health, and open the door to effective and supportive communication. Mindfulness, the practice of being present, is one method of reducing stress that can be applied at all levels across an organization, and can help encourage calmness and concentration in the workplace.

Dr. Mark Mitchnick, CEO of MindSciences, recently offered leadership tips and ideas for reducing anxiety in the workplace during the coronavirus pandemic.

Leadership is always important. Leaders are there to take away some of the uncertainty, which is key to leveraging the neuroscience of anxiety.

### **Some tips for how to communicate with employees and clients:**

- **Listening.** Just knowing you are being heard eliminates a great deal of uncertainty. It is especially important for HR senior management to create the conditions where this can happen.

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- **Touching base regularly with remote employees.** As more of us are forced to work remotely as an infection control measure, many people not used to this kind of physical isolation from co-workers will experience increased anxiety. Make sure staff is equipped for good remote communications and schedule regular video “face time” when possible.
- **Providing regular updates on company status.** That said, like the news, too much is not useful and can itself induce stress. Updates should be regular, informative, and short, but not excessive. The goal is to make staff feel connected to the big picture, but not overwhelmed.
- **Offering tools to help with stress and anxiety.** Mindfulness is a technique anyone can learn, and its effectiveness in reducing anxiety has been clinically proven. Even simply taking a few breaths is one of the oldest and most reliable ways to reboot your brain. Evidence-based employee health and wellness programs are a key part of a holistic approach.

#### **Some actions leadership can take to help calm employees and clients:**

- **Lead by example.** Don't ask employees to do anything that you, as the leader, are not willing to do yourself.
- **Be proactive with clients.** They are no different than the rest of us in that they are looking for leadership. Communicate succinctly and honestly. In the current remote-working situation, video conferencing is a solid substitute for in-person meetings.
- **When stating a problem, offer a solution before being asked.** If your company missed a deadline, present a new timeline with the resources dedicated to making it happen.
- **Don't blame others for things beyond your control.** Right now, your clients are under the same pressures and facing similar challenges. Present solutions without blaming the situation.

#### **How can leadership stay calm themselves and promote a calm atmosphere among employees?**

Here is a straightforward mindfulness system that leadership can put to work right now through practicing and sharing:

1. **Recognize** what you are feeling, including fear and other uncomfortable feelings. Trying to suppress negative feelings never works.
2. **Accept** those feelings without judgment.
3. **Investigate** whatever the feeling is. Embrace the emotion and get curious about how it is impacting you in mind and body.
4. **Take deep breaths.** This is one of the most reliable ways to reboot.

Make doing this a habit. Setting a reminder to go through these steps every few hours during times of high stress can be very effective. This is also a great pre-meeting ritual. You can't overdose on mindfulness, so use as often as needed. In time, this becomes automatic and always there to get you in the right frame of mind.

First Choice Health EAP is here to partner with your organization to stop the mental health stigma. We provide confidential assessment and referral services to help employees resolve personal or work related problems that may affect job performance, along with mental and emotional health issues. Contact our EAP experts at (800) 777-4114 for supervisory or leadership consultations and support to help navigate these difficult times. We are here for you, your employees, and families 24/7, online or by phone.

#### **Resources:**

<https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/03/1059542>

<https://news.berkeley.edu/2020/04/17/covid-19-mental-health-and-well-being-for-ourselves-and-our-children/>

<https://www.ajmc.com/newsroom/how-has-covid19-affected-mental-health-severity-of-stress-among-employees>

<https://hrexecutive.com/hres-number-of-the-day-coronavirus-stress/>

<https://www.benefitspro.com/2020/03/18/how-leaders-can-help-employees-and-clients-reduce-anxiety-in-times-of-great-stress/>

<https://www.mindful.org/what-is-mindfulness/>