Introduction

Traditionally mental health has not been a topic commonly addressed in the workplace. However, that trend has begun to change. Because mental health is so integral to a person's overall wellbeing, it's importance as a workplace topic of discussion is significantly increasing. Also, we faced many challenges in 2020 that are continuing into 2021 that potentially impact the mental health of nearly everyone. This week we are going to take some time to discuss the basics of mental health in your workplace.

Monday- What is Mental Health

Understanding what is meant when discussing mental health is a critical first step. In a nutshell, mental health is a person's condition with regards to their psychological and emotional wellbeing. It also helps determine how we handle stress, relate to others and make choices. Many factors contribute to mental health problems including:

- Biological factors, such as genes or brain chemistry
- Life experiences, such as trauma or abuse
- Everyday stressors that are not addressed in a healthy manner

Tuesday – Early Warning Signs

Yesterday we discussed the meaning of the term mental health. The next step is recognizing the early warning signs of mental health decline, which will allow you to act before the conditions develops into an illness. Some of these signs include:

- Eating or sleeping too much or too little

- Pulling away from people and usual activities

- Having low or no energy

- Feeling numb or like nothing matters

- Having unexplained aches and pains

- Feeling helpless or hopeless

- Smoking, drinking, or using drugs more than usual

- Feeling unusually confused, forgetful, on edge, angry, upset, worried, or scared

- Yelling or fighting with family and friends

- Experiencing severe mood swings that cause problems in relationships

- Having persistent thoughts and memories you can't get out of your head

- Hearing voices or believing things that are not true

- Thinking of harming yourself or others

- Inability to perform daily tasks like taking care of your kids or getting to work or school

Wednesday – What Employers Can Do

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Now that we've covered the basic definition of mental health and the early warning signs to recognize decline, let's discuss what employers can do to help improve their employee's mental health. The workplace is an excellent place to start addressing the critical role mental health plays in a person's overall wellbeing. Many of us spend a large portion of our day in the workplace and what happens in the workplace can often spill over into our personal lives as well. Having training, resources and an overall better understanding of mental health will create a vastly improved work environmental. Here are some basic suggestions of ways to promote positive mental health in your workplace.

- Communication. Sharing information with colleagues on the topic of mental health is a critical first step.
- Implement a wellness team. This team could be comprised of employees in different departments that come up with creative ways to motivate each other to create a healthier and more positive work environmental.
- Provide managers with training to help them recognize the signs and symptoms of stress and depression in team members and coach them on resources available to get their employees the help they need.
- Give employees opportunities to participate in decisions about issues that affect job stress.

Thursday – What Employees Can Do

Yesterday we discussed what employers can do to help with employees achieve better mental health. Now let's talk about what you can do as an individual to improve your mental health.

- Participate in mental health improvement activities and resources offered by employers.
- Be open minded about the experiences and feelings of other colleagues, offer peer support and encourage others to seek help when appropriate.
- Eat healthy, exercise regularly and get an appropriate amount of sleep, typically 7 to 8 hours for most adults.
- Take the time to reflect on positive experiences and express happiness and gratitude.
- Ask for help when needed, at one time or another nearly all of us have battled with declining mental health. You are not alone.

Friday – Open Discussion

This week we've defined the term mental health, reviewed early warning signs, and discussed tips for employers and employees on improving mental health. Now let's open it up to the group to discuss their thoughts and experiences with mental health.

- Do you feel that mental health is an important factor in your workplace? Why or why not?
- Have you experienced challenges with mental health issues in the past? How did you overcome these issues?
- Do you have suggestions for ways to improve mental health in your workplace?

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