UNITED WAY
Northwest Vermont

AN EMPLOYER GUIDE TO SUPPORTING EMPLOYEE MENTAL HEALTH

An employer toolkit provided by United Way of Northwest Vermont's Working Bridges program and the Mental Health Initiative adapted from the **WorkLife Partnership Toolkit.**



WORKING BRIDGES | MENTAL HEALTH INITIATIVE

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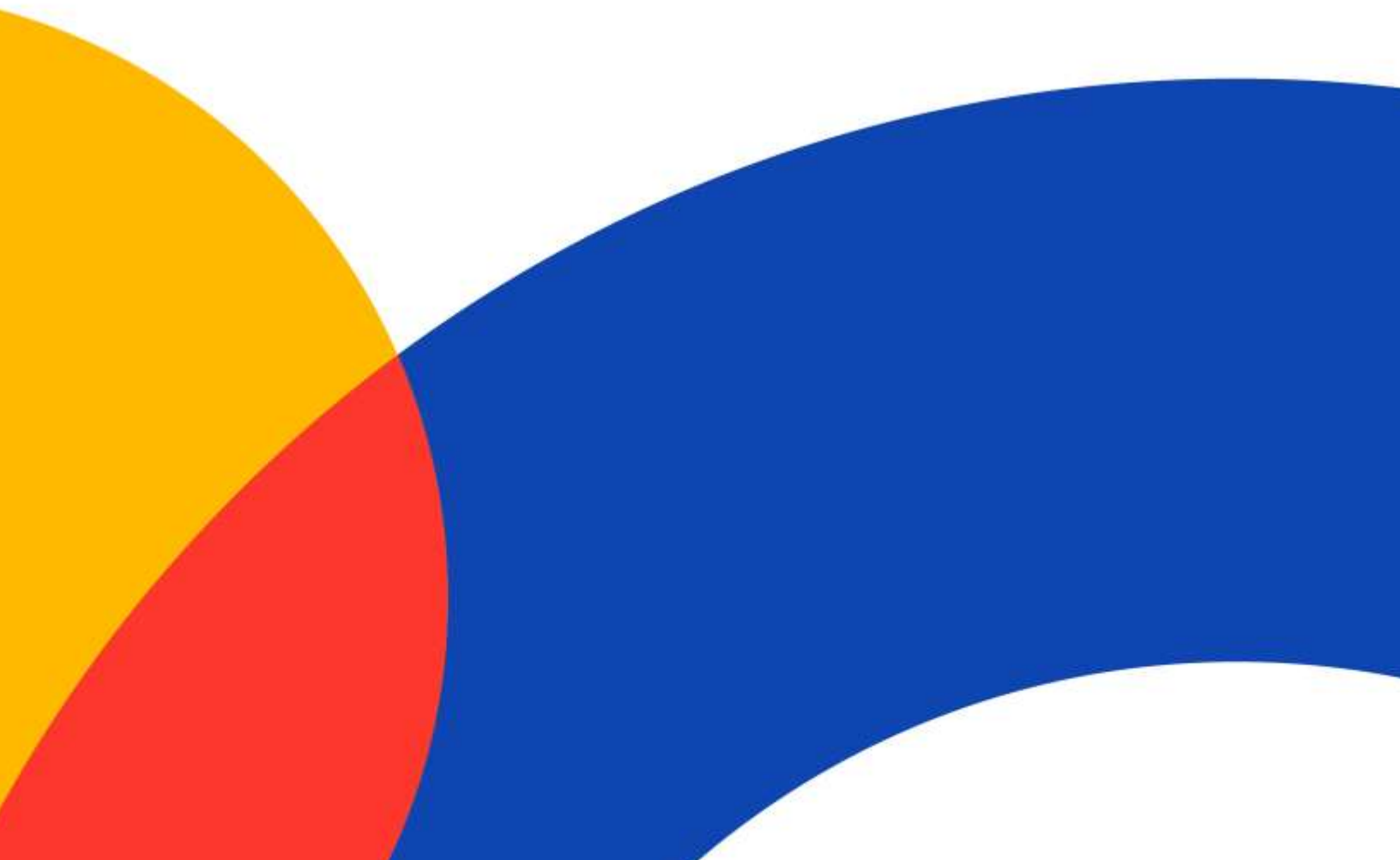
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WHERE TO REFER EMPLOYEES FOR SUPPORT

988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline 988 provides 24/7 connection to confidential support with local counselors and mental health professionals.	**988** https://988lifeline.org
HOPE Works 24-hour crisis counseling and advocacy for individuals affected by sexual violence	**802-863-1236** hopeworksvt.org
Howard Center's First Call (Chittenden County) Phone support, crisis intervention, assessment and referrals.	**802-488-7777** howardcenter.org/first-call-for-chittenden-county
NCSS (Northwestern Counseling & Support Services) Emergency Services Hotline (Franklin & Grand Isle Counties)	**802-524-6554** ncssinc.org/community-mental-health/crisis-services
NAMI (National Alliance on Mental Illness) Helpline	**800-950-NAMI (6264); Text "NAMI" to 741741** ncssinc.org/community-mental-health/crisis-services
National Domestic Violence Hotline	**800-799-SAFE (7233)** thehotline.org
Northern New England Poison Center	**800-222-1222; Text "POISON" to 85511** nnepc.org
Pathways Vermont Support Line Peer support line open 24/7	**Call or text (833) VT-TALKS / (833) 888-2557** pathwaysvermont.org
"RAINN (Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network) Sexual Violence Hotline Sexual Violence Hotline	**800-656-HOPE (4673)** rainn.org/about-national-sexual-assault-telephone-hotline
SAMHSA (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration) National Helpline	**800-662-HELP (4357)** samhsa.gov/find-help/national-helpline
Trans Lifeline A peer support phone service run by trans people for trans and questioning peers.	**877-565-8860** translifeline.org/hotline

Trevor Lifeline/Text Provides suicide prevention and crisis intervention services to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning (LGBTQ) young people. It offers free, 24/7, confidential counseling.	Call **866-488-7386**; Text "**START**" to **678-678** **TrevorChat**–instant messaging at thetrevorproject.org/get-help **thetrevorproject.org**
VT Crisis Text Line Free 24/7 support and information for anyone in any type of crisis	Text "**VT**" to **741741** vtcrisistextline.org
Veterans Crisis Line 24/7, confidential crisis support for Veterans and their loved ones. Online chat also available.	Call **988** and Press **1** Text **838255** veteranscrisisline.net



VERMONT DESIGNATED AGENCIES' CRISIS LINES

Addison County: Counseling Service of Addison County (CSAC) csac-vt.org	Crisis Line: **802-388-7641**
Bennington County: United Counseling Service (UCS) ucsvt.org	Crisis Line: **802-442-5491** (Bennington)
Chittenden County: Howard Center howardcenter.org	Crisis Line: **802-488-7777** (First Call for Chittenden County)
Franklin and Grand Isle Counties: Northwestern Counseling and Support Services (NCSS) ncssinc.org	Crisis Line: **802-524-6554**
Lamoille County: Lamoille County Mental Health Services lamoille.org	Crisis Line: **802-888-5026** (Monday through Friday 8am to 4:30pm)
Orange County: Clara Martin Center claramartin.org	Crisis Line: **800-639-6360**
Orleans and Essex Counties: Northeast Kingdom Human Services (NKHS) nkhs.org	Crisis Line: **802-334-6744** (Newport); **802-748-3181** (St. Johnsbury)
Rutland County: Rutland Mental Health Services & Community Care Network rmhsccn.org	Crisis Line: **802-775-1000**
Washington County: Washington County Mental Health Services wcmhs.org	Crisis Line: **802-229-0591**
Windsor and Windham Counties: Health Care & Rehabilitation Services (HCRS) hcrs.org	Crisis Line: **(800) 622-4235**

OTHER VERMONT RESOURCES

Alyssum alyssum.org	Peer residential crisis respite and hospital diversion service.
American Foundation for Suicide Prevention afsp.org/chapter/vermont#programs	Resources for people having thoughts of suicide as well as suicide loss support groups and other resources for families and friends.
Connecting Cultures/New England Survivors of Torture and Trauma (NESTT) connectingculturesvt.org/mental-health-services	Provides direct clinical services, outreach, research and evaluation for refugees, immigrants, and asylum seekers.
Facing Suicide VT facingsuicidevt.com	Suicide prevention resources from the Department of Mental Health.
National Alliance on Mental Illness – VT namivt.org/support	Free peer and family support groups.
Northeastern Family Institute (NFI) nfivermont.org	Mental health and educational services to Vermont's children and families grounded in trauma-informed care.
Outright Vermont outrightvt.org	Support for the LGBTQ+ community.
Pathways Vermont pathwaysvermont.org/get-support	Pathways Vermont works to end homelessness and provide innovative mental health alternatives by supporting self-directed roads to recovery and wellness in an atmosphere of dignity, respect, choice and hope.
Recovery Centers healthvermont.gov	Recovery support to people in and seeking recovery from substance abuse and support to their families and friends.
Recovery Vermont recoveryvermont.org	Recovery Vermont celebrates substance use disorder recovery in Vermont through trainings, advocacy, and innovative leadership programs.

Spectrum Youth & Family Services spectrumvt.org/need-help-now	Empowers teenagers, young adults, and their families to make and sustain positive changes through prevention, intervention, and life skills services.
Turning Point Center of Chittenden County turningpointcentervt.org	A peer-run recovery center that offers a safe and substance-free environment in which to find assistance in recovery from the disease of addiction.
Vermont 2-1-1 vermont211.org	A statewide, confidential information and referral helpline that connects callers to available human services.
Vermont Mental Health Agencies vermontcarepartners.org/intake-and-crisis-lines	Mental health services information and crisis lines listed by county.
Vermont Network for a Violence-Free Vermont vtnetwork.org/get-help	A network of 15 independent non-profit organizations which provide domestic and sexual violence advocacy to survivors of violence in VT.
Vermont Psychiatric Survivors vermontpsychiatricsurvivors.org	An independent, statewide mutual support and civil rights advocacy organization run by and for psychiatric survivors.
Vermont Suicide Prevention Center (VTSPC) vtspc.org/suicide-resources/list-of-resources	VTSPC serves as a state-wide resource fostering a sustainable approach to suicide prevention in Vermont.

SOME COMMON SIGNS AN EMPLOYEE MIGHT NEED MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT

- Lack of motivation
- Falling asleep
- Confrontational
- Missing work
- Lack of focus
- Frequent personal calls/texting
- Complaining
- Withdrawal from others
- Arriving late/ leaving early
- Crying
- Irritability
- Losing focus

HOW MENTAL HEALTH SHOWS UP AT WORK

Being able to recognize when someone is struggling with their mental health at work can be critical, because most people won't volunteer it. Many of us feel afraid or ashamed to admit when we're suffering, especially when it comes to mental health. We're all told that we need to stay professional at work and to not let our personal problems affect our performance. Employees may fear judgment, being vulnerable, or even that their job will be at risk. If you learn to recognize early signs that someone may need greater support, you can get them connected sooner, preventing more serious problems down the road.

Symptoms of mental illness can be very different for different people. You may guess that an employee who often looks like they've been crying is hurting or depressed, but for someone else, depression might show up as anger or irritability. One of the most important things to recognize is simply **a sudden change in behavior.** If an employee who has always been reliable and conscientious is becoming sloppy and absent minded, it's likely there is something pulling their focus and making it hard to keep up at work.

When you see problems like the ones above, you can choose to treat it as a standard performance problem, issuing warnings and setting expectations, and ultimately letting the employee go if they can't get back on track. But with that approach, you risk losing that great employee for good. In many situations, looking beyond the behavior at work to find the root cause is much more likely to solve the performance problem, getting you back to the hard-working employee you value.

HOW TO TALK TO AN EMPLOYEE IN CRISIS

So, when you've noticed some of the symptoms of a problem, what do you say? Reaching out to a person you see struggling comes naturally to some, but for many, it feels stressful or overwhelming. You might be afraid to say the wrong thing or to make things worse. You might be afraid to open yourself up to too much of their personal life and take on too much responsibility or worry.

Finding a balance is the key. It's possible to acknowledge what you're seeing in someone's performance and check in on how they're doing without asking for the private details of their situation. Here's how that can sound:

"I've noticed _____ behavior lately, and it seems to be getting in the way of doing your job fully. This isn't consistent with what I've seen from you as an employee. I'm wondering if there is something going on in your work or home life that might be contributing to this situation?"

If the employee reveals some of what they're going through, you can affirm their feelings or their pain, but draw boundaries and not probe deeper. It's a common instinct, but it's best not to promise things like "it's going to be okay" because that's outside of your control, and it can hurt trust later on.

When planning for what steps they can take next to address the problem, allow the employee to collaborate in what would be the best approach for them. If you have a helper personality, you may feel like you can solve the problem for them, but setting their own goal and plan does more to build their confidence and resilience.

"It sounds like you have a lot going on right now. I want you to get the support you need. What are the steps have you taken so far? What do you know about the employee benefits we offer?"

WHAT YOU CAN DO TO HELP EMPLOYEES

Validate their feelings They may feel guilt or shame that they're struggling, and it can mean a lot to hear a boss say that sounds hard, and everyone needs help sometimes.

Brainstorm a plan for self-care Explore what self-care can look like for them to cope with stress or burnout. Looking to hobbies, interests, and socialization are important.

Review their personal support system Many people withdraw from loved ones and fear being a burden. Encourage them to reach out to friends or family they trust.

Connect them to a resource If there is an employee benefit that might help, ask if they know it's available. Having some key community resources for the issues common in your workforce lets you connect employees to help without taking on too much yourself.

Continue to check in Following up to see if that resource helped or to ask them how they're doing goes a long way to making someone feel supported at work.

CONNECTING TO A THERAPIST

There are lots of different ways to find a therapist:

- Consulting your physician
- Calling Vermont 211
- Consulting EAP (Employee Assistance Program) or a Working Bridges Resource Coordinator
- Asking your health insurance carrier (database of in-network providers)

HOW TO MAKE A RESOURCE REFERRAL THAT STICKS

People want to be capable and independent. For most of us, it's hard to admit when we need help. That means getting someone connected to a resource is not as simple as suggesting it could help them. Here's what you can do to make it easier for your employees to accept help, and more likely they'll follow through.

Normalize the need
To be vulnerable, people need to feel safe. The key to a conversation that feels safe for an employee is approaching it without judgment. To avoid making them feel singled out, reassure them that everyone has tough times when they're struggling and needs help at some point. If possible, try to separate this conversation from their performance, which will likely make them feel worried or defensive. If you want to suggest they take advantage of one of their employee benefits, remind them it's something they earn as part of the compensation your company provides to attract and retain great employees.

Respect their privacy
The hardest balance to strike may be understanding the problem enough to help while respecting their privacy. Be clear up front that they don't need to give you any personal details and keep the conversation open-ended so they're able to share as much as they're comfortable with. For many people, their employer is the last person they want to be aware when they're having a hard time. Let them know that you understand they may not want to talk to their manager, but it might help to have someone else to talk to.

Build trust
Because the referral is coming from their employer, people often worry that connecting with a resource will affect their employment. The most important thing you can say about a referral is that it's completely confidential. The resource is for them, it's an independent third party, and nothing they say will be shared with you or the company.

To build trust, it's also helpful to build a personal connection. You can share why you recommend the resource or talk about a specific experience where they helped you or another staff member. If you know the person they'll be connecting with, share their name and your experience with them.

Make the connection
If it's possible, making a direct connection can make the difference when someone is feeling overwhelmed or unsure:

"Can I introduce you to _____ the next time they are in our office?"

"Can I give your number so they can reach out?"

"Would it be okay if I followed up with you to see if you got the support you need?"



Check in and encourage
Following up to be sure your employee got help does a lot to build trust and make your employees feel supported. Tell them you don't need details but ask if they got what they needed. As you see an improvement in their work, let them know and encourage them to continue. It takes courage to reach out for care, and it can mean a lot to have that effort appreciated.

Respect their decision
No matter how helpful and respectful your referrals are, not everyone will decide to reach out. It can be helpful to remember that you won't ever know the full situation, and the person's decision may be the best one for them. Be mindful of how one's experiences, culture, or identity may impact their ability to access certain resources. It can be so difficult to reach out for help or to face a hard situation, and it's important not to judge if the person isn't ready.

BUILDING A SUPPORTIVE WORKPLACE CULTURE

One of the most critical pieces of supporting individual employees' mental health is creating a culture where people feel safe. When the income you and your family depend on is at stake, it takes a tremendous amount of trust to admit when you need help. Even if you know your performance hasn't slipped, you wonder–will people still see me the same way? Will they think I'm less capable or stop relying on me? Will I be given less work? Will my hours be cut? Will my position be eliminated? It takes time and commitment to develop the kind of culture that allows people to be open and brave.

Listen non-judgmentally
Look for ways to learn what your employees want for mental health resources and supports. Where do your employees get help, now or in the past? What are resources in community that employees rely on, value, or have trusted relationships with? Learn from your employees about what's important to their mental health wellbeing.

Lead by example
In the same way that employees may hesitate to ask for time off if they never see their boss take a break, people will resist asking for help if their company's leaders never show their own vulnerabilities. Be intentional about repeating the message that everyone deals with issues outside of work and at some point, everyone needs understanding and support. If you're comfortable, talk about your own experiences of a time when you struggled with something personal that followed you to work, and how you got help.

Train managers and supervisors to help
One of the most impactful ways to shift your culture is to train managers and supervisors in how to recognize and respond to symptoms of mental illness. Mental Health First Aid is a nonprofit program offered nationwide to train people in how to identify, understand and respond to signs of mental illnesses and substance use disorders. Training managers in how to respond appropriately

and effectively takes the fear and hesitation out of starting conversations about mental health. It can teach them to ask the right questions and connect someone with the best resources to get them the help they need.

Consider your policies

Supportive company policies are a meaningful way to stand behind your words, and there are simple policies that can make all the difference.

Adjusting your paid time off policy to include mental health is one of the most critical changes a company can make. The stigma around mental health is prevalent, and most employees won't assume their sick time can be used for mental health needs unless they're given explicit permission. Some employers also choose to offer a few days specifically as mental health days. This can make a powerful statement about your company's understanding and support for mental health needs, though you might also consider whether your employees would feel too embarrassed to take them.

Along with the time off itself, review your process for requesting time off. Does the process require people disclose a reason when taking sick time? Or provide burdensome documentation? Could that be preventing people from taking the time they need? Do your managers know how to handle requests without unintentionally pressuring people to share more than they're comfortable with? Do managers know how to handle a concern with someone taking too much time off? Simple changes to the process can make a big difference in how it feels to employees.

You can also look at your disability and accommodations policies. You likely know that mental health is included in disability laws and protections, but do your employees know? Making sure they're informed about their rights has an additional benefit of helping them trust that you will respect those rights. If an employee feels safe from discrimination or retaliation, they're much more likely to speak up and ask for an accommodation they need before it becomes a bigger issue.

Understanding the role of an Employee Assistance Program (EAP)

EAPs can be a valuable support for employee mental health, but it's important to know what they can do–and what they can't. An EAP's main function is to provide short-term counseling services to employees and their families. Many also offer education programs on topics like quitting smoking and stress management. Some may also include workplace conflict management and mediation.

Most EAPs are limited to 3–8 sessions, so they're most effective for short term issues. For deeper needs, the EAP will refer the employee to an outside provider, potentially disrupting their care. There's also a challenge of awareness, with average utilization hovering about 5%. A good EAP can be a valuable resource for your staff, but it's important to ask thorough questions about the service they'll provide. Offering more sessions can improve continuation of care.

WHAT YOU CAN DO TO GROW AND STRENGTHEN A WORKPLACE CULTURE THAT SUPPORTS EMPLOYEE MENTAL HEALTH ☑

- ☐ Examine employee benefits
- ☐ Examine sick days/mental health days policies
- ☐ Have visible on-site information about mental health resources and wellness
- ☐ Work with a local partner to provide wraparound services and supports like Working Bridges
- ☐ Ask employees what information is important to them and offer informational opportunities or trainings on relevant topics
- ☐ Make sure employees understand their benefits
- ☐ Provide an Employee Assistance Program (EAP) benefit
- ☐ Provide on-site recovery coaching

RECOMMENDED EMPLOYEE BENEFITS

The employee benefits market is expanding and doing much more to meet the needs of workers. These new benefits reflect a greater understanding of the importance of an employee's total wellness–physical, mental, emotional, and financial–and the way they are interconnected. Here are a few options to consider that can expand your support for employee mental health.

Direct mental health coverage

The most direct option to consider is covering the cost of mental health treatment for your employees. Investing in mental health treatment has been shown to be cost effective. **Many evidence-based treatments can save $2 to $4 for every dollar invested in prevention and early intervention.**

However, when it comes to mental health, one size won't fit all. People have different needs, different levels of comfort, and come from different cultures that think about mental health in very different ways. To offer benefits that will successfully reach a diverse population, flexibility is key.

Disability insurance

Disability coverage is not something most employees plan to use, but it's comforting to know it's there. We hear from employees that they need mental illness and substance abuse coverage as a part of their disability plans. Recently, benefit companies have heard this feedback as well, and many are offering new plans that treat these illnesses like any other claim, with no reduction in benefits, lifetime maximum or separate benefit period. If you offer your employees disability coverage, find out from your provider how they treat disability due to mental illness, and let your employees know what their coverage includes.

Making the Case
For all the data you need to make a smart business case for mental health benefits, download the American Heart Association CEO Roundtable report Mental Health - A Workforce Crisis.

Hospital indemnity insurance
When it comes to health care, one of the biggest challenges people face is fear of the unknown cost. Hospital indemnity insurance provides employees with the choice and control they need to avoid gaps in medical coverage and help cover deductibles. This can reduce worries and fears about coverage that contribute to workplace stress and mental anxiety. Stress over medical bills often prevents people from seeking treatment early, when a condition is most treatable and affordable.

Working Bridges Resource Coordinators
Resource Coordinators can be a key support for employee mental health because of their hyper-local, relationship-based, **interconnected approach**. For some employees, just having someone to listen when you're coping with a lot can **make the difference**. When an employee needs counseling or treatment, Resource Coordinators, while **not** mental health providers, **are** certified **Community Resource Specialists (CRS)** and can connect your employees to internal benefits like EAP as well as resources in the community such as community mental health providers, sliding scale providers, peer support networks, crisis and warm lines. They can help employees **access their medical benefits**, understand their co-pays, or find an in-network provider. Resource Coordinators are trusted people in the workplace, onsite, week after week.

INCLUSIVE HIRING/RECRUITING RESOURCES

A4TD a4td.org	A4TD is a leader in the design and operation of training and employment programs that work for individuals, businesses, and community partners.
HireAbility Vermont hireabilityvt.com	HireAbility Vermont is an energized network of employment and job skills specialists, and counselors who are dedicated to breaking down the barriers that have traditionally kept good jobs out of reach of Vermonters with disabilities

VT Works for Women vtworksforwomen.org	Vermont Works for Women's mission is to promote economic justice by advancing gender equity and supporting women and youth at every stage of their career journeys.
Working Fields workingfields.com	Working Fields is a mission-driven staffing agency that works for associates and employers alike, connecting individuals in recovery from substance use addiction to employment and offering ongoing support in a unique peer coaching model.

TRAININGS

- Alternatives to Suicide
- Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training (ASIST)
- Ask Suicide Questions (ASQ)
- Counseling on Access to Lethal Means (CALM)
- Collaborative Assessment and Management of Suicidality (CAMS)
- Columbia Suicide Severity Ratings Scale (CSSRS)
- End the Silence [NAMI presentation]
- Gizmo 4 Mental Health and Gizmo's Pawsome Guide to Mental Health (for youth)
- Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) - (Teen, Youth, Work)
- Question Persuade Refer (QPR)
- SafeSide Prevention
- Umatter
- Zero Suicide

EMPLOYER MENTAL HEALTH TOOLKIT BACKGROUND

Mental health is a part of overall wellness that is just as important as physical health, but it is rarely given the same emphasis in our healthcare, education, and workplace settings. Paying attention to one's mental health and accessing care when appropriate are essential to wellbeing and are as important for physical health as they are for social and emotional health. However, mental health is often seen as a separate area of wellness only directly addressed when there are recognized "issues," such as a mental health diagnosis or condition. While mental health is more nuanced than living with a mental health condition versus not, mental illness is also a normal part of life for many and **an estimated 1 in 5 U.S. adults experience a mental illness** each year [SAMHSA]. The uncertainty and disruption caused by the pandemic have exacerbated those existing mental health concerns for some and seen others having their first experience with a mental health concern or crisis. If you work in Human Resources or support employees as a supervisor, manager, or team lead, you have probably seen this first-hand or even experienced a mental health challenge yourself.

According to the National Safety Council, there are also significant costs to employers when their employees' mental health needs go unmet:



Employers play an important role in supporting employees who may be facing mental health and other life challenges by connecting them to resources and acting as a source of stability and continuity in their lives. Supporting employees and offering them wraparound services benefits not only the employee, but also the employer, by increasing retention and productivity while fostering a sense of community among the workplace at large. Employers also have the power to adapt workplaces to better meet the needs of all their employees and change the culture of their workplace to be more inclusive, supportive, and trauma informed.

United Way's Working Bridges' Resource Coordinators are one way that employers in Vermont can support their employees. Working Bridges is leading the way in changing what it means to get connected to resources at work with a model that takes the burden off individual workplaces and HR teams by bringing in an onsite Resource Coordinator, a trusted information and referral specialist familiar with the local terrain of human services. Resource Coordinators leverage both

internal and external benefits, partnerships, and resources to connect employees with individualized support, confidentially.

Working Bridges has teamed up with United Way's Mental Health Initiative to create this "Mental Health Toolkit" for employers to use as a guide for those in HR, managers, and other roles in the workplace that help support employees. This guide will walk you through the steps you can take to support individual employees, strengthen your workplace's culture, and keep a human-centered, whole-person perspective as you talk about mental health more broadly in your workplace. The time is now to make changes to benefits that support employee mental health to drive employee recruitment, retention, engagement, and wellbeing. It's a business imperative that requires many approaches, including many things that cost nothing, such as creating workplace cultures where employees can talk about mental health without stigma.

SOURCES

Based off of text directly taken from: worklifepartnership.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/WorkLife-Partnership-The-Complete-Guide-to-Supporting-Employee-Mental-Health-1.pdf

Also referencing:

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NIMH: nimh.nih.gov/health/statistics/mental-illness

SAMHSA: samhsa.gov/data/sites/default/files/2021-10/2020_NSDUH_Highlights.pdf