Mind Your Mental Health

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What is Mental Health?

According to the Center for Disease Control, the term mental health is inclusive of "our emotional, psychological, and social well-being" (CDC, 2021). Our mental health encompasses how we behave, think, and communicate, as well as how we interact with others. Contrary to popular belief, mental health is not simply the absence of mental illness; Instead, mental health is a psychological state of well-being which determines one's capacity to navigate tasks productively, overcome life's challenges and stressors, and to live harmoniously.

Managing Workplace Stress

One of the most critical elements of creating a healthy work environment is learning to combat and mitigate stress in the workplace. According to the World Health Organization, work related stress can occur when an employee feels that there is a mismatch between one's knowledge and capabilities, and the demands of a workplace (WHO, 2020). However, developing healthy coping strategies when one begins to feel overwhelmed is instrumental in managing, and in many cases, eradicating workplace stress. One example of a healthy coping strategy is maintaining fluid communication with coworkers and supervisors. Employing fluid communication can ensure that expectations and needs are understood and fulfilled. In addition, establishing set goals and priorities can assist in maintaining productivity, and can create a sense of accomplishment when tasks are completed. Finally, taking time to recharge by stepping away from your desk during your lunch break allows time to recenter yourself, and can assist in combating a sedentary lifestyle!

Did You Know?

Anxiety disorders are the most common mental illness in the U.S., affecting 40 million adults in the United States age 18 and older, or 18.1% of the population every year.

Anxiety disorders develop from a complex set of risk factors, including genetics, brain chemistry, personality, and life events.

*Source: Anxiety and Depression Association of America, 2022

The EAP

Who can I call? The Employee Assistance Program (EAP) can provide support and referrals for a vast array of employee and family concerns including mental health services, caregiving, childcare, legal matters, and financial issues. See how EAP can be right for you and your family needs. Utilize OPM's Work-Life Contact Tool to locate your agency's EAP coordinator today!

In this month of Mental Health Awareness, it is important to spread knowledge, provide support, start conversations, and most importantly, to combat stigmas surrounding mental health. 1 in 5 Americans will experience a mental illness each year, and up to 50% of adults will be diagnosed with a mental illness at some point in their lifetime (CDC, 2021). Furthermore, mental health is directly related to physical health, with mental illnesses such as depression being associated with an increased risk for multiple chronic illnesses including diabetes and heart disease. Some examples of harmful effects of stigmas surrounding mental health can include:

- Reluctance to seek help or treatment
- Lack of understanding by family, friends, co-workers or others
- Fewer opportunities for work, school, or social activities
- Bullying, physical violence or harassment
- Health insurance that doesn't adequately cover your mental illness treatment
- The belief that you'll never succeed at certain challenges, or you can't improve your situations
- Fear of losing your security clearance if you seek treatment

Steps to Reduce Mental Health Stigmas:

- Seek treatment
- Don't isolate yourself
- Don't equate yourself with your illness
- Join a support group
- Understand that FEHB healthcare plans cover a vast array of mental health treatment options
- Understand that seeking mental health treatment is not grounds for losing a security clearance

Let's work together to end misconceptions surrounding mental health, and to inspire a happier, healthier workforce!

The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline provides 24/7, free and confidential support to those in distress or crisis. Contact 1-800-273-8255 if you are in need of assistance.

OPM's WorkLife staff is here to assist. Contact us at worklife@opm.gov

Improving Mental Health: One Step at a Time

Mental Health is a critical aspect of how we are able to manage and function in our daily lives. Learning how to overcome stress and anxiety, as well as how to prioritize our mental well-being are crucial to achieving a positive mindset. Below are a few tips you may consider practicing to strengthen your mental health.

1. Exercise regularly:
30 minutes of daily exercise has been associated with increased mood and physical health.

2. Eat well-balanced meals and stay hydrated:
A healthy diet can improve daily focus.

3. Practice mindfulness:
Relaxing activities such as meditation and breathing exercises can significantly improve morale and lower stress levels.

4. Get a good night's sleep:
While sleep requirements can vary with age, adults ages 18-64 require 7-9 hours of sleep each night.
5. Schedule time for self-care:
Practicing self care has been associated with decreased levels of anxiety, anger, and stress and increased positivity.