

11 TIPS FOR TALKING TO AN EMPLOYEE WITH A MENTAL HEALTH CONCERN

Has an employee ever approached you with a mental health concern? Here are 11 tips to start the conversation.



- 1.** Feel more prepared by educating yourself about mental health concerns at mhanational.org/MentalHealthInfo.
- 2.** Ensure you are in a mentally healthy headspace before offering support to others.
- 3.** Ask the employee with a mental health concern appropriate, open-ended questions, such as:
 - “How are you feeling today?”
 - “Why do you think you feel this way?”
 - “How do you feel this might be affecting your work?”
 - “How can I help?”
- 4.** Actively listen with your complete attention on the speaker.
- 5.** Resist thinking about how you should respond next or offer advice or solutions.
- 6.** Validate their experiences and express your understanding back to them.
- 7.** If comfortable and appropriate, relate to them on a personal level and share your own experiences.
- 8.** Refer them to your organization’s resources or online mental health screening at screening.mhanational.org.
- 9.** Always respect the employee’s need for and right to privacy if they disclose a mental health condition, and be aware of your personal biases against mental health conditions.
- 10.** Know your comfort level when supporting other people. You are not expected to be a mental health professional, but you can still help others by opening the conversation and referring them to the appropriate resources.
- 11.** Educate yourself on the process for asking HR to help with providing accommodations or navigating benefits.

UNDERSTANDING STRESS AND BURNOUT

A certain amount of stress is healthy and is intended to help your body react quickly and effectively to a high-pressure situation. Employees can learn to manage stress, such as practicing healthy habits and maintaining a healthy life-work balance. However, chronic stress, where you're perpetually reacting with the fight-or-flight response, can pose serious concerns for your physical and mental health and lead to burnout.

What is burnout?

The World Health Organization defines burnout as a syndrome resulting from chronic workplace stress that has not been successfully managed and is a condition specific to the workplace.¹ As a people manager, understand, observe, and discuss strategies to reduce burnout risk with your employees. Here are three primary symptoms of burnout to watch for in workers, and potential solutions:

Burnout Symptom	Emotional Exhaustion	Reduced Self-Efficacy	Cynicism
Definition	Feeling emotionally drained, having depleted energy, or feeling restless	Lacking confidence in personal ability to complete tasks or exert control over motivation successfully	Feeling less empathy, more resentful, or even hatred towards work activities or peer interactions
Question(s) to ask yourself or your peer	Am I feeling more irritable toward my peers? Am I frustrated by situations that did not bother me before?	Do I feel like I am performing well? Do I feel like my work meaningfully contributes to my organization? Do I feel like I am stuck in my job?	Do I care less about my efforts? Am I feeling more resentful towards my team or manager?
Potential solution	Take a vacation (or staycation) to rest, recover, and recharge from workplace stressors	Evaluate, adapt, or reduce workload in collaboration with a manager	Consider an adaptation or transition to a new or existing project, team, manager, department, or position

1. "Burn-out an 'Occupational Phenomenon': International Classification of Diseases." World Health Organization, World Health Organization, <https://www.who.int/news/item/28-05-2019-burn-out-an-occupational-phenomenon-international-classification-of-diseases>.