



### **Mental Health, Substance Use, and Your Well-Being at Work**

Mental health affects all of us, whether directly or through the people we work with every day. According to the National Institute of Mental Health, one in five adults experiences a mental illness each year. That means many employees are managing conditions like depression, anxiety, bipolar disorder, or other psychological challenges while also trying to meet the demands of work and home. Yet only one in three people with a mental illness seeks help, often because of stigma, fear, or not knowing where to turn.

Mental health and substance use are closely connected. Many people who struggle with untreated stress, depression, or anxiety may turn to alcohol or drugs as a way to cope. This doesn't mean they are "bad employees" or lack willpower. It means they are dealing with a health issue that deserves understanding and support. Substance misuse is often a sign that someone is overwhelmed, not that they are irresponsible.

Mental health conditions can affect concentration, sleep, energy, and decision-making. Depression alone increases the risk of workplace injury and contributes to millions of lost workdays each year. These challenges are real, but they are also treatable. When employees get the support they need, they can recover, stay productive, and thrive.

Privacy laws such as the ADA, HIPAA, and FMLA protect employees with mental health conditions, including those recovering from substance use disorders. These laws ensure that your medical information stays private and that you cannot be treated unfairly because of a health condition. They also allow employees to request reasonable accommodations when needed.

Stress levels continue to rise in workplaces across the country, especially as many people work longer hours without additional pay or benefits. Burnout and depression are especially common among millennials, with millennial women reporting the highest rates. These pressures make it even more important to take mental health seriously.

A supportive workplace benefits everyone. Two-thirds of employees say they would take a pay cut for a job that prioritizes mental health.

That tells us something important: people want to work where they feel safe, respected, and able to ask for help.

If you are struggling, you are not alone. Reach out to your supervisor, HR, or the Employee Assistance Program. Asking for help is a sign of strength, and support is available. Your well-being matters—to your team, to your workplace, and to your future.

*The following suicide prevention information, while provided by the Georgia Dept. of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities, will also be helpful to those in states other than Georgia. All online resources listed are available to users nationwide.*

### **From Awareness to Action: Practical Ways to Support Suicide Prevention in Your Community**

May is Mental Health Awareness Month, a crucial time to highlight the significance of emotional well-being and promote meaningful initiatives aimed at preventing suicide. Though the subject can be heavy and sometimes overwhelming, it's important to recognize that suicide is preventable, and each of us has the power to make a positive impact in the lives of those around us.

### **Understanding the Signs**

Being able to identify when someone might be struggling with their mental health is the first essential step toward helping. The warning signs can often be subtle and may vary from person to person, but they typically fall into three categories:

- Emotional cues: Look for signs of persistent sadness, feelings of hopelessness, or thoughts that may be a burden to others. These can manifest as an overall sense of despair or an inability to find joy in activities once enjoyed.
- Behavioral cues: Changes in behavior are often a red flag. This may include social withdrawal from friends and family, a noticeable shift in sleep patterns (either insomnia or oversleeping), significant changes in appetite (eating much less or much more), and the giving away of personal belongings. These actions may indicate resignation or a desire to say goodbye.

- Verbal cues: Pay attention to what someone says. Expressions of wanting to die, feelings of being trapped in their current situation, or statements implying they have no reason to live are serious indicators that someone may be in crisis.

If you notice any of these signs or if something feels “off” in someone’s behavior, it’s essential to trust your instincts. Checking in with them could be a critical step in showing the support they need.

### How to Help

You don’t need to have all the answers or provide a complete solution to make a real difference. What is vital is being present and showing compassion as a friend, family member, or colleague. Here are some actionable steps you can take:

- Start the conversation: Open the dialogue with gentle, honest questions. You could say something like, “I’ve noticed you’ve seemed down lately—how are you really doing?” This approach invites them to express their feelings without pressure.
- Listen without judgment: Create a safe space for them to share their emotions. Allow them to speak freely; don’t rush to fix the situation or minimize their feelings. Sometimes, just being heard can be incredibly powerful.
- Connect them with help: If they express that they are struggling, offer to assist them in finding professional support. This could involve calling or texting a crisis line together, researching local counselors, or identifying support groups that suit their needs.
- Follow-up: After your initial conversation, reach out again. A simple message like, “I’m thinking of you,” or “How have you been since we last talked?” can show that you care and are supportive in the long run.

### Building a Culture of Care

Suicide prevention extends beyond individual conversations; it involves fostering a community where people feel safe to talk about their struggles and seek help. Here are some ways you can contribute to this culture:

- Organize or join local mental health awareness events: Participate in community events or workshops aimed at spreading awareness and educating others about mental health issues.

- Share educational posts and resources (on social media): Utilize your online platforms to disseminate valuable information, including warning signs, mental health resources, and personal stories that normalize discussions about mental illness.
- Advocate for mental health-friendly policies: Advocate for initiatives in your workplace, school, or community that prioritize mental health resources, such as employee assistance programs or mental health days.
- Encourage peer support networks: Promote the idea of regularly checking in with friends or colleagues, consider creating informal support groups where individuals can share their feelings and support each other.

### You Matter, and So Do Your Actions

Every conversation you initiate, every resource you share, and every act of kindness can create ripples of positive change in someone’s life. This month, challenge yourself to commit to one small action. It could be as simple as educating yourself on the warning signs of suicide, reaching out to check on a friend, or sharing important crisis hotline information with your network.

If you or someone you know is struggling, help is readily available:

- **988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline (U.S.)** – Call or text 988 for immediate support.
- **Crisis Text Line**– Text HOME to 741741 to connect with a trained crisis counselor.
- Visit [988lifeline.org](https://988lifeline.org) for a wide range of resources and support options.
- Visit [preventsuicidega.org](https://preventsuicidega.org) for more Georgia suicide prevention resources from DBHDD.

Together, we can transform awareness into action, and our actions can bring hope to those who need it most. Let’s work collectively to create a supportive environment where everyone feels empowered to seek help and support one another.

To learn more about suicide prevention, visit the DBHDD website at:  
<https://dbhdd.georgia.gov/suicide-prevention>.

Or contact the Suicide Prevention Director, Rachael Holloman, at:  
[rachael.holloman@dbhdd.ga.gov](mailto:rachael.holloman@dbhdd.ga.gov).



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