

CHECKING IN WITH YOUR TEAM AND TALKING ABOUT MENTAL HEALTH

With an uncertain and anxiety-provoking year—including the pandemic, trauma around racial injustice, wildfires, hurricanes, political unrest and more—and a growing mental health pandemic, checking in with your team isn't optional. It's vital.

A continuing remote workforce also means that we will see our colleagues much less often, which makes it harder to notice if someone is struggling.

The Mind Share Partners 2019 *Mental Health at Work Report* found that before the pandemic employees were least comfortable talking with their company's HR and senior leaders about mental health at work, regardless of their level of seniority. When conversations about mental health did occur, fewer than half were described as positive experiences.

Now more than ever, it's important for leaders to create safety and have conversations around mental health in their workplace. When having these conversations, it's also important to remember that every demographic group—and those at their intersections—experience mental health in the workplace differently.

This activity will help you effectively check in with your team members, both individually and as a group.

1. WAYS TO SUPPORT INDIVIDUALS.

Create a safe space by being vulnerable and empathetic and by asking open-ended questions focused on work.

Don't diagnose colleagues or assume what they need. Remember that it's not your job to be a therapist or solve their mental health problems. Respect their privacy and let them share what they want to or do not about their health.

- Create intentional opportunities for 1:1 check-ins throughout the workweek
- Be intentional about the questions you ask beyond "How are you?" For example, "How has the transition been? What support would be helpful to you?"

What is one thing you can start doing within your organization to check in with employees individually? *(Examples: Create a weekly or biweekly 1:1 with those you work closely with; encourage managers to check in with their team members)*

What is one question you can ask to open a conversation? *(Examples: I noticed that you've been quieter in meetings—how are you?; I noticed that you've been working late a lot—what support would be helpful to you?)*

Reassure them about the validity of what they're experiencing and their value to the company. Make sure to follow up. Remember that you don't have to be a therapist or solve their mental health problems. Respect their privacy and let them share what they want to or do not about their health. *(Example: I hear you. That must be difficult. You are valued here, and I want to make sure I can support you. Can we check in tomorrow so I can think through some solutions to help you?)*

In cases where an employee discloses a mental health condition to you, tell the employee that you will notify HR and that you will work together with HR and the employee on a plan forward. Express your gratitude and appreciation for the employee.

2. WAYS TO SUPPORT TEAMS.

Be creative about leveraging technology to check in with teams. We may not see our colleagues as much, making it harder to notice if someone is struggling.

What's one way you will leverage technology to check in with your teams?

(Examples: Virtual happy hours, virtual working sessions, virtual company all-hands meetings)

Share company resources for mental health and encourage their use. Remind employees about the company's mental health resources regularly and through multiple channels. Make them easy to find.

It's also an opportunity to adopt new resources or adapt existing ones to bolster resources during this time. Some ways you can do this are:

- Virtual therapy or coaching for mental-health support
- Employee-resource groups focused on mental health—see the Mind Share Partners “How to Create an ERG for Mental Health” tool kit
- Mental health training and awareness programs

What are two ways you can ensure that employees know about the resources your company offers?

(Examples: Send an email about the current resources your company offers; include mental health resources in onboarding materials; cover mental health resources available in your next company all-hands meeting.)
