



# Creating a Supportive Workplace for Employee Mental Health

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A Toolkit for City of New York Managers and Supervisors



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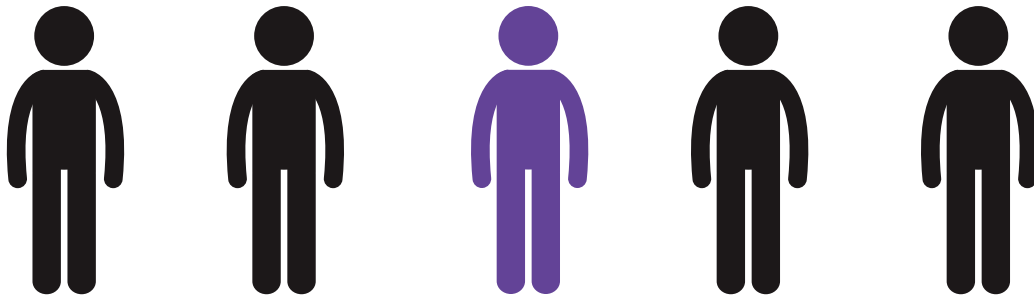
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**Approximately 1 in 5 New Yorkers experience a mental health disorder each year.**



The City of New York employs over 380,000 people, **which means as many as 75,000 City employees may experience a mental health disorder this year.** If an employee is not struggling with their own mental health challenges, they are most likely working alongside someone who is.

Mental health challenges are extremely common, but they frequently remain hidden due to the stigma associated with it. Stigma can be seen as judgmental attitudes, discriminating behavior and perceptions that lead to shame and self-neglect. Fortunately, we can change the conversation around mental health.

**"Let's Talk"** is WorkWell NYC's campaign to eliminate mental health stigma in the City of New York workforce by creating supportive workplaces and building resilience in employees. The *Let's Talk* Toolkit provides valuable information and resources to help city employees support mental health awareness in their workplace, and improve their mental health and resiliency.

The "Let's Talk" mission is to empower New York City employees to address mental health stigma in the workplace, support colleagues with mental health challenges and to use and share mental health resources.



**Promoting** education, awareness, and knowledge about mental health in the workplace



**Changing** the culture around discussing mental health in the workplace



**Empowering** employees to take up calls to action, to seek resources and offer support to each other

LET'S **TALK**

# Tools for Managers and Supervisors



Managers and supervisors can create an environment where employees feel safe seeking support for their mental health needs. The following strategies and techniques can be used by managers and supervisors to prioritize mental health at work.



**Serve as a Leader** – Model supportive workplace behavior and mindfulness. For example, schedule Be Well mental health and resilience workshops for your staff; open a staff meeting with a short meditation practice; or provide time at meetings for staff to reflect on current challenges at work.



**Talk Openly** – Talk about mental health with curiosity and empathy and foster dialogue about mental health at work. For example, ask open ended questions about how people are feeling; share individual challenges; acknowledge experiences and needs; and practice reflexive listening.



**Share Mental Health Resources** – Connect employees to mental health resources and encourage staff to seek help when needed. The Employee Assistance Program (EAP) is available for all City employees and their family members as a free resource. Check out the Resources section in this toolkit for additional resources, or visit [nyc.gov/bewell](http://nyc.gov/bewell).

**All employers are required to provide reasonable accommodations for employees who have disabilities, unless doing so causes undue burden for the employer. Managers and supervisors can work with Human Resources to ensure an employee with a mental health disability can thrive at work.**

## **What is a mental health disability?**

Mental health disability is a term that describes a broad range of mental and emotional conditions that affect mood, thinking and behavior.

Everyone has a mental health concern from time to time. But a mental health concern becomes a mental health disability when ongoing signs and symptoms cause frequent stress and affect ability to function. The most common forms of a mental health disability are anxiety, depression and schizophrenia.

## **What is a reasonable accommodation?**

A reasonable accommodation is any change in the workplace or the way things are done that enables an individual with a disability to enjoy equal employment opportunities. Examples of reasonable accommodations include:

- Providing flexible schedules
- Allowing for a later start time when public transportation is less crowded
- Providing a quiet place to work or noise cancelling headphones
- Allowing for remote work or attending meetings remotely
- Giving more frequent reminders of tasks and due dates

Please contact your EEO or HR office for detailed information about the accommodation process.



# Workplace Accommodations for Individuals with Mental Health Disabilities

## Additional Resources

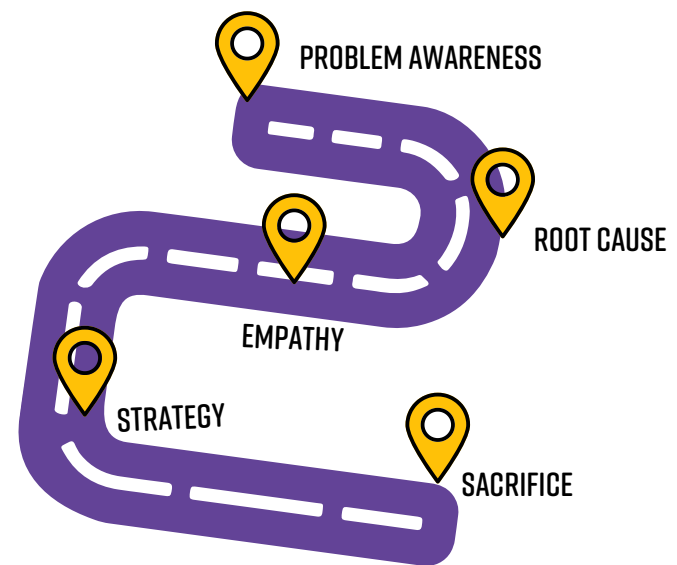
- [NYC Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities](#)
- [NYC Employee Assistance Program](#)
- [Reasonable Accommodations at a Glance](#)
- [NYC Commission on Human Rights](#)
- [Job Accommodation Network](#)



A recent survey by Glassdoor found that **43% of US employees have seen or experienced racism at work**. Managers and supervisors are afforded a high level of control over norms and policies to address racism at work and to promote racial equity. The following roadmap, developed by Robert Livingston for Harvard Business Review, provides a guide for managers to promote racial equity at work.

**Step 1: Problem Awareness** – Managers should honestly and objectively review where racial discrimination occurs at their workplace.

**Step 2: Root Cause Analysis** – After honestly assessing where racial discrimination is occurring, managers should evaluate the root cause of this discrimination. It is important to be mindful of the structural dynamics that have created the system, not just the individuals that operate in it.



**Step 3: Empathy** – Once an organization is aware of the problem and its underlying causes, the next question is whether they care enough to do something about it. Managers can take concrete action to raise awareness and empathy around racial injustice, which can motivate the organization to address racial inequity at the workplace.

**Step 4: Strategy** – After the foundation has been laid, it's finally time for the "what do we do about it" stage. Managers can focus on three distinct but interconnected categories: impacting personal attitudes about racism at the workplace; establishing an anti-racist organizational culture, tied to core values and modeled by behavior from top leaders; and guiding formal institutional diversity policies.

**Step 5: Sacrifice** – After developing a strategy, managers should make a commitment to invest the time, energy and resources necessary to bring racial equity to the workplace.

Psychological safety is the belief that you won't be punished or humiliated for speaking up with ideas, questions, concerns, or mistakes. It's a shared belief held by members of a team that others on the team will not embarrass, reject, or punish you for speaking up. Managers and supervisors can take the following actions to promote psychological safety in the workplace.



## INVITE EMPLOYEE FEEDBACK

Managers should proactively invite input from employees. For instance, after presenting an idea at a team meeting, managers can say something like "What do we think about that idea?" In one-on-one meetings, managers can directly ask employees for their ideas and feedback.



## BE OPEN TO FEEDBACK

Having a positive reaction to employee feedback is essential to promoting psychological safety at work. Managers may not always agree with the feedback, but it is important to acknowledge this feedback and demonstrate a commitment to listening. Managers should be open to challenging conversations and being wrong.



## FOSTER A TEAM ATMOSPHERE

Managers should create a shared understanding of the nature of the work employees are engaging in and why everyone's input matters. By creating a team atmosphere, employees will be more likely to collaborate and respect feedback.



# Resources





It is important to use specific and standardized language around mental health. Using the correct language reduces stigma and accurately represents the breadth of emotional, social and psychological experiences associated with mental health.

Below are a few key mental health terms to help guide respectful and thoughtful conversations.



**Mental health** is a state of well-being in which the individual realizes their abilities, can cope with the normal stressors of life, can work productively, and is able to contribute to their community.[1]



**Mental health problems** is a broad term that recognizes the mental health spectrum from health, to challenge, to illness, and acknowledges the breadth of these experiences.[2]



**Mental health challenges** may be experienced by all of us and do not necessarily refer to an underlying condition or illness. A mental health challenge can arise at particularly stressful moments in our lives (e.g. stress related to the COVID-19 pandemic, job loss, feeling socially isolated or grieving), and this term typically refers to time-bound events.



**Vicarious trauma** (also referred to as secondary trauma) is an occupational challenge due to continuous exposure to victims of trauma and violence. Frequent interactions with individuals who have experienced trauma is associated with negative psychological, emotional, and cognitive effects.[3]

1] World Health Organization. (2004). Promoting mental health: concepts, emerging evidence, practice (Summary Report) Geneva: World Health Organization.

2] Mental Health Commission of Canada. (2009). Toward recovery & well-being. Calgary: Mental Health Commission of Canada, Calgary

3] Bercier, M. L., & Maynard, B. R. (2015). Interventions for secondary traumatic stress with mental health workers: A systematic review. Research on Social Work Practice, 25(1), 81-89.



Be Well Workshops are designed to support and enhance mental resilience through small, tailored self-care programming. Programming can be offered virtually at the agency or departmental level, and tailored to the unique needs of employees, anywhere. Worksites can request one Be Well Workshop per quarter.



### Introduction to Mindful Meditation

Learn meditation techniques for relaxation and stress reduction. All levels welcome!



### Creating Supportive Connections

Learn how supportive connections can aid in stress management, strategies for combating social isolation, and steps you can take to strengthen your social network.



### Mindfulness Matters

Learn different ways of cultivating mindfulness and integrating it into your daily self-care practice.



### Sleep Soundly

Learn about the connection between sleep and mental health, various sleep disorders, and strategies for improving your sleep quality.



### Establishing Work-Life Harmony

Learn how to create a more harmonious life by maximizing leisure time, pacing work schedules, and setting boundaries to avoid burnout and minimize stress.



### Mindful Journaling

Learn and practice tips and tricks for mindful journaling to expand creativity and meaningful change in our lives.

**Sign up for a Be Well Workshop by visiting**  
**[on.nyc.gov/workshops](https://on.nyc.gov/workshops)**



FOR ADDITIONAL BE WELL RESOURCES VISIT [NYC.GOV/BEWELL](https://nyc.gov/bewell)

- [Just Five Website - invest 5 minutes to learn about substance misuse](#)
- [Suicide Prevention - Signs and How To Help](#)
- [Understanding Racial Inequity](#)
- [Asian Americans - COVID-19 and Discrimination](#)
- [Tools to Build Self-Belief](#)
- [Building Your Emotional Resilience](#)
- [Building Resilience: Humor and Laughter](#)
- [Calming Uncertainty Stress](#)
- [Behavioral Addictions - Signs and Recovery](#)
- [What to Expect From Therapy](#)





## NYC Employee Assistance Program (EAP)

- Free and confidential support for employees and their families.
- Onsite support following crises at the workplace.
- 212-306-7660 | [eap@olr.nyc.gov](mailto:eap@olr.nyc.gov) | [nyc.gov/eap](http://nyc.gov/eap)



## NYC 988

- Free and confidential 24/7 mental health support for you or someone you care about.
- Call or text message to 988 | Chat at [nyc.gov/988](http://nyc.gov/988)
- Digital app library

*Texting and live chat services are available in English, Spanish and Traditional Chinese. Free over-the-phone interpretation services are available in more than 200 languages.*



## WorkWell NYC

- Access recordings and slides of previous webinars on topics such as stress management, building resilience, and more.
- Discover tools and resources, such as tips to staying mentally healthy and a meditation 101 guide.
- Visit WorkWell NYC at [nyc.gov/workwellnyc](http://nyc.gov/workwellnyc) for additional tools and resources to help you lead a healthy lifestyle.

