**Everything You Should Know About Depression in the Workplace**

Depression is one of the most common mental illnesses. According to the [National Institute of Mental Health](https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/statistics/major-depression.shtml) (NIMH), depression affects more than 16 million American adults each year. Depression is a serious condition that can happen to anyone and affects people from all different walks of life.

It might not be the most pleasant topic to discuss, but it’s crucial that depression is addressed in the workplace. While the [stigma](https://info.totalwellnesshealth.com/blog/5-ways-to-fight-the-stigma-of-mental-illness-in-the-workplace) surrounding depression in the workplace isn’t nearly what it used to be a decade ago, there are still many barriers in the workplace that make it difficult for employees to be honest with employers about living with depression.

Fortunately, employers are focusing on [mental health in the workplace](https://info.totalwellnesshealth.com/blog/mental_health_employee_wellness_programs) now more than ever. In fact, a [2017 Behavioral Health Survey](http://www.managedhealthcareexecutive.com/managed-healthcare-executive/news/behavioral-health-top-priority-employers) showed that 88% of U.S. employers want to make behavioral health a top priority over the next three years. Many companies are leading the way in promoting mental health awareness in the workplace by encouraging mental health days, providing resources, and creating wellness initiatives focused on mental wellbeing.

Both employers and employees alike can benefit from educating themselves on depression. Here’s what you need to know about depression in the workplace:

**What is Depression?**

According to NIMH, depression is a common but serious mood disorder. It causes severe symptoms that affect how you feel, think, and handle daily activities. Symptoms of depression must last for at least two weeks to be diagnosed as clinical depression. Some forms of depression include:

* Persistent depressive disorder
* Atypical depression
* Postpartum depression
* Psychotic depression
* Seasonal affective disorder
* Bipolar depression

**Common Risk Factors**

Depression can happen to anyone at any age, but it most commonly begins during adulthood. According to NIMH, research suggests that depression is caused by a combination of genetic, biological, environmental, and psychological factors. Some of these risk factors include:

* Personal or family history of depression
* Major life changes, trauma, or chronic stress
* Certain physical illnesses and medications

**Symptoms**

Clinical depression can cause both psychological and physical symptoms that are very unpleasant. According to [WebMD](https://www.webmd.com/depression/guide/detecting-depression#1), some of the most common symptoms of depression include:

* Trouble concentrating, remembering details, and making decisions
* Fatigue
* Feelings of guilt, worthlessness, and helplessness
* Pessimism and hopelessness
* Insomnia, early-morning wakefulness, or sleeping too much
* Irritability
* Restlessness
* Loss of interest in things once pleasurable
* Overeating or appetite loss
* Aches, pains, headaches, or cramps
* Digestive problems that don't get better, even with treatment
* Persistent sad, anxious, or "empty" feelings
* Suicidal thoughts or attempts

**Signs of Depression in the Workplace**

Depression isn’t always obvious. Many employees in your company that are dealing with clinical depression might be putting on a smiling face at work. Some signs of depression in the workplace might include:

* Trouble concentrating
* Sudden decrease in overall work performance
* Increase of sick days/PTO/personal days
* Loss of confidence
* Irritability and anger
* Changes in social behaviors
* Fatigue and lethargy
* Loss of motivation
* Frequently expressing negative thoughts
* Changes in daily routine – eating, physical activity, etc.
* Changes in personal appearance or hygiene

**Effects in the Workplace**

When left untreated, depression can have many negative effects in the workplace. Some potential effects of depression in the workplace include:

* Lost productivity
* Absenteeism
* Lack of motivation
* [Low morale](https://info.totalwellnesshealth.com/blog/6-easy-ways-to-boost-employee-morale)
* Decrease in work performance
* Incomplete projects and tasks
* Stressed and unhappy employees

**Costs**

Depression is considered to be one of the most costly health conditions for businesses. According to [Mental Health America](http://www.mentalhealthamerica.net/conditions/depression-workplace) (MHA), depression is as costly as heart disease or AIDS – costing over $51 billion in lost productivity and absenteeism and $26 billion in direct treatment costs.

**What Employers Can Do**

In most cases, employers should never directly ask an employee if he or she is depressed – even if the employer has good intentions in doing so. Asking this could be violating your employee’s privacy and open your company to lawsuits. It’s much better to use an approach that provides employees with resources they’ll need when dealing with depression.

Some ways employers can help address depression in the workplace include:

**Provide mental health education.** It all starts with education. The more employers and employees know about depression, the easier it is to address it in the workplace. Employers and colleagues can learn how to choose the right words and stay supportive of their peers who might be living with depression. Consider bringing in a mental health professional a couple times a year to host an informative [lunch and learn](https://info.totalwellnesshealth.com/blog/host-the-perfect-lunch-and-learn-for-your-employees) or add mental health awareness to your company’s wellness program initiatives.

**Break the stigma.** It’s essential that employers help break the stigma surrounding depression and mental illness in the workplace. Employees won’t feel comfortable communicating their mental health needs if they feel they will be reprimanded or treated differently at work. Check out this [blog post](https://info.totalwellnesshealth.com/blog/5-ways-to-fight-the-stigma-of-mental-illness-in-the-workplace) for some helpful tips on fighting the stigma of mental illness at your company.

**Encourage mental health days.** No employee should ever feel discouraged or ashamed to take a [mental health day](https://info.totalwellnesshealth.com/blog/tips-for-taking-a-mental-health-day-off). Mental health days are necessary to help employees recover and get back on track. Without mental health days, employees are likely to experience burnout or experience even more difficulties with their mental health.

**Provide resources.** One of the best ways to support employees with depression is by providing them the resources they need to seek professional help. Bring in an on-site therapist, offer an employee assistance program (EAP), and choose an employee health plan that includes mental health coverage.

**Maintain open communication.** Ensure that your employees always have a safe and confidential way to disclose any information or concerns about their mental health in the workplace. Let employees know who they can talk to about these issues and let them know that your company will do everything they can to help them.

Being able to openly address depression in the workplace is a great start in supporting the mental wellbeing of your employees. While these types of conversations aren’t generally easy to have, you can help make them easier and easier by breaking the stigma of mental illness at your company.