

Healthy at Work

A guide to supporting your
team's mental well-being



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The background of the page is a blurred photograph of two people, a woman on the left and a man on the right, standing in a brightly lit hallway. They appear to be in conversation, with the woman holding a folder or document. The lighting is soft and natural, suggesting an indoor office or public space environment.

The State of Iowa Department of Administrative Services (DAS) — in partnership with your health plan administrator, Wellmark® Blue Cross® and Blue Shield® — presents the ***Healthy at Work*** guide. Designed specifically for State of Iowa leaders, this guide outlines important information to help you support employee well-being at work, at home and everywhere in between.

In the following pages, you'll learn how to identify if an employee is struggling, what to do when they need help and how to guide them to additional mental health services if needed.

The content of this manual is informational in nature and is not intended to be, and should not be, used as a substitute for medical care, counseling, peer support or treatment of any kind.



Helping employees be **healthy** at work

Your team is influenced by stressors everywhere they go. Just as problems from their personal lives may travel with them to work, issues from the office can follow that same road back home.

As a State of Iowa leader, you're uniquely positioned to observe your team in a variety of work-related settings. This gives you an opportunity to identify when someone may be struggling — and guide them to resources that can help.

For information and actionable steps to help you better understand and assist your employees, the *Healthy at Work* guide captures key insights you can use every day, including:

- 1 Resources to support your and your team's mental health** at work and on the go.
- 2 Practical tips to foster a healthy work environment** in which your employees feel valued and safe coming to you if problems arise.
- 3 Links to State of Iowa benefits and services** to help you and your team be healthy and productive.

Why does mental health at work matter?

When an employee struggles with mental health, it can often impact the entire team, resulting in:

- Absenteeism
- Reduced productivity
- Team member conflicts
- Low morale
- High employee turnover
- Errors in projects or deliverables

But, even more importantly, mental health challenges can be painful and disruptive to team members and their families. And while we can't heal mental illness, we can learn how to reduce stress and support those who are struggling.



OUR COMMITMENT TO WORKPLACE WELL-BEING

The State of Iowa is dedicated to protecting and improving the health and resiliency of the people we employ, as well as the individuals, families and communities we serve across the state.

Our investment in mental well-being is just as strong as our investment in physical well-being. An important component of that is to foster a sense of purpose in our employees.

Learn more about how encouraging engagement in personal well-being can boost a sense of purpose and improve overall mental health.

How do I know if someone is struggling, and what can I do to help?



You know your people, and how they act and perform on both good days and bad. But if something consistently just doesn't feel right, and you're concerned about an employee's mental health — it may be time to initiate a conversation. The following information can help you set the right tone for your discussion and guide your employee to additional support.

■ SIGNS TO WATCH FOR

If you're concerned about a team member's mental health, watch for these signs that may indicate they're struggling:

- An unhealthy, unkempt appearance; or significant appearance changes
- Trouble concentrating
- Decreased motivation or productivity
- Mood swings
- Unnecessary fear, worry or anxiety
- Being overly hard on themselves
- Taking a lot of time off
- Withdrawal from social situations and interactions (including conversations with colleagues)

■ STARTING A CONVERSATION

If an employee is exhibiting one or more of the behaviors listed on [page 6](#) with increasing frequency, it may be time to schedule a private meeting and express your concern. Here's how:



Choose an appropriate place

If you can meet face-to-face, find a private location at work, such as your office.



Have a dialogue

This is a good opportunity to identify stressors and resolve work-related impacts, too. And if you have specific concerns, like declining performance, it's important to address those in your conversation. Ask simple, non-judgmental questions as they explain what they are going through.



Encourage them to seek support

Ask your team member if they have a support system and if they're aware of their State of Iowa benefits and mental health resources. Direct them to the [Healthy Everywhere employee guide](#) or the [DAS EAP website](#) for additional tools and information.



Build trust

Your team member has shared sensitive information, so reassure them you can be trusted. Discuss what information, if any, they would like shared and with whom.



Follow up with an action plan

Before you end the conversation, discuss a workplace action plan for the employee. Talk through next steps that feel comfortable for you both and set up a time to meet again soon.

FINDING THE RIGHT WORDS

Try these phrases when speaking with an employee about their mental health.

Would you like to talk about what's going on?

I've noticed you're not yourself lately, and I want to make sure you're okay.

I'm worried about you. You're normally so ____, but lately you've seemed ____.

I'm listening; tell me more.

You may feel alone, but I know others are going through similar experiences.

Thank you. I really appreciate you putting your trust in me.

I may not understand your exact experience, but I've struggled in the past, too. It can be so hard.

I'm always here if you need to talk.

I'm going to schedule time for us to meet again in ____ days. Between now and then, can you think about some of the things that may be causing you worry at work? I want to see what we can do to reduce some of the stress you're feeling.



■ OFFERING WORKPLACE ADJUSTMENTS

While workplace adjustments should be unique to every individual, they don't need to be expensive or disruptive to be effective. Meet with your employee to come up with discreet solutions that work for everyone.

Opportunities to make adjustments may include:

- Help prioritizing projects (or breaking large projects into smaller goals)
- A safe place where a team member can go to gather their emotions
- Flexibility with medical and mental health provider appointments
- Adjusting nearby workplace noises (like telephone volume)
- Additional coaching or mentoring
- Temporary adjustments to work hours or locations



Workplace adjustments are unique to each employee.

Reach out to your agency's HR staff or DAS HR Consultant to learn more about what adjustments may be available for your team members.

■ WHEN A TEAM MEMBER NEEDS EXTENDED TIME OFF

Just like with a physical illness or injury, a team member with a mental health concern may need to take extended time away from work to heal. As a leader, you can help with their healing by showing empathy and by making the transition as supportive and stress-free as possible.

Take the pressure off:

Be clear that the State of Iowa and your team will be there for them during their absence.

Streamline the process:

Help set up any necessary meetings with HR and identify how to manage the [FMLA](#) or [long-term disability](#) benefits processes.

Be kind:

Make it clear your employee should not return until their health care provider verifies they are ready.

Make a communication plan:

Discuss if regular communication about their leave status should be maintained while they're out of the office.

Communicate clearly:

Keep an open line of communication between you, your employee and the rest of your team. It's vital to resolve concerns as they arise, and keep everyone informed of adjustments to plans or shifts in expectations.



RETURNING TO WORK

To help support your employee's return to work, while ensuring a smooth transition for the entire team, try the following strategies:

- **Plan ahead.** Have a rough schedule in place for your team member's first day back, to minimize stress and ensure they feel included and welcomed. (For example, invite them to get coffee or lunch.)
- **Set the tone.** Make sure your team is up-to-date on transition plans, and know they can come to you privately with concerns or questions.
- **Stay in touch.** Discuss tasks, responsibilities and expectations with the returning employee. If temporary adjustments are made, schedule follow-up meetings to discuss progress and assess the effectiveness of the adjustments.



What should I do if a team member is having an **active mental health crisis?**

A mental health crisis can take many forms — self-harm, panic attacks, suicidal ideation — but no matter what kind of crisis someone might be going through, you can help. If it's safe to do so, follow these steps to calm your team member and de-escalate the situation until help arrives.

- ✓ Do not leave the team member alone. Stay with them, while you reach out for medical or HR support.
- ✓ While you wait for help, give the team member your undivided attention.
- ✓ Ask them gentle, non-judgmental questions and listen calmly and attentively. Show that you're actively listening with eye contact, body language and an empathetic tone.
- ✓ Don't worry about thinking of the perfect thing to say. Simply establish a human connection, and demonstrate with your words and actions that you care about their well-being.
- ✓ Don't minimize their feelings or offer advice. Rather, reassure them what they are feeling is not their fault and that you and the agency can provide resources to help.

Taking care of yourself

Not sure how to start your own mental health journey? The following steps can point you in the right direction.



Download the Healthy Everywhere employee guide for more well-being tools you and your team can use.

Practice self-care.

Making time for yourself is key to protecting your own mental health and well-being. Taking breaks to step away from your work area can help you lower stress levels and feel more focused.

Establish your support network.

Connect with a friend, workplace colleague, loved one or therapist on a regular basis to debrief with, or collect objective feedback from.

Stay connected.

In addition to building a support network, be sure to keep in touch with peers who hold similar responsibilities as you at work. Occasionally, management can feel lonely. Connecting with other team leaders can help you feel less isolated and more connected to the work you're doing and the people you're managing.

Try to stay active.

Regular physical activity can strengthen your body and mind. Make time for exercise as often as you can. If your schedule is packed, try scheduling walking meetings with co-workers or taking the stairs instead of the elevator.

Cultivate self-awareness.

Monitor your own emotional, physical and mental well-being. If you notice changes, seek help from your physician or a mental health provider sooner rather than later.

Leave work at work.

Setting healthy boundaries between your personal and work life can help you be more focused and engaged at work — and more relaxed and present at home.

Know your limits.

Recognizing when you may need a helping hand is important. As a manager, asking for help from your own leader or team can help build trust and lessen your load.

Self-care looks different for everyone, and it may take some trial and error for you to build a routine that feels right for you. As you try new things, give yourself time to explore and learn more about all of the tools and options you have available. The following page outlines a collection of mental health resources and services to further support you and your team.

Resources

for State of Iowa leaders

To point you towards the right resources and tools needed to meet a variety of workplace challenges, use the following roadmap as your guide:

■ PROVIDED BY THE STATE OF IOWA

Management support:

- Read the [Managers and Supervisors Manual](#) on the [DAS website](#) or connect directly with your agency's HR staff or DAS HR Consultant

Employee assistance:

- Check out the [State of Iowa Employee Assistance Program \(EAP\)](#): Administered by Acentra Health: 1-800-833-3031; [EAPHelpLink.com](#) (Company code: IOWA)

Substance abuse support:

- Connect confidentially 24/7 with [YourLifelowa.org](#)

■ PROVIDED BY WELLMARK® BLUE CROSS® AND BLUE SHIELD®

Health care tools:

- Find in-network providers: [Wellmark.com/Finder](#)

Mental health support:

- Connect with Doctor On Demand® to speak directly with a mental health professional: [DoctorOnDemand.com/Wellmark](#)
- Speak with a BEWELL24/7® on-call nurse: 1-844-84-BEWELL (23935)

Employer resources:

- Check out the [Blue@WorkSM](#) Wellmark employer blog

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Are you or someone you care about experiencing a serious crisis that requires immediate help?

Text or call the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline to connect with a trained counselor 24/7.