



Mental Health and the Workplace

Get to know the facts...

- Untreated mental illness costs the nation \$105 billion in lost productivity each year.
- Five of the ten leading disabilities worldwide are mental illnesses.
- Psychological problems account for 61 percent of absences from work each year.
- Depression is known as the common cold as 1 in 20 workers are experiencing it on any given day.
- Mental illness is a biological disorder and needs treatment.
- It is *not* caused by a lack of character, personal weakness or poor upbringing.
- It cannot be overcome through willpower; treatment is necessary and can be very successful.

Mental illness can happen to anyone:

- Regardless of race, age, religion or income
- One in five people have it
- One in four families are affected by it

Signs of mental illness include:

- Working slowly
- Missing deadlines
- Calling in sick frequently
- Increasing absenteeism
- Expressing irritability and anger
- Difficulty concentrating and making decisions
- Appearing numb or emotionless
- Withdrawing from work activity
- Overworking
- Forgetting directives, procedures and requests
- Having difficulty with work transitions or changes in routines

What can you do?

Educate—Learn how to recognize (not diagnose) the symptoms of mental illness. Employees and managers at all levels of the organization need to learn about mental illnesses, stress, wellness, available health and mental health benefits, and how to access those services.

De-stigmatize—Stigma begins with hurtful labels, such as “crazy” or “nuts.” Set an example with your language and encourage staff at all levels to discontinue using such words. Start using “people-first” language (for example: “a person with schizophrenia,” as opposed to the dehumanizing term, “a schizophrenic”). Help employees feel comfortable in accessing care for mental illness.

Support—You don’t have to become a therapist in order to have compassion for what your employee is experiencing. Create a safe environment in which staff members are encouraged to talk about stress, workloads, family commitments and other issues. Addressing employees’ mental health needs makes good economic sense.

The National Alliance on Mental Illness can help. For information on referrals, support groups and educational classes/programs, contact NAMI San Diego at (800) 523-5933. Or visit www.namisandiego.org (Information was taken from Mental Health America, visit www.nmha.org)