# HR's Guide to

# SUPPORTING EMPLOYEE MENTAL HEALTH

**Namely** HR for Humans

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# Intro

While depression, anxiety, and stress are nothing new, studies show that mental health in the United States is deteriorating among all age groups. Researchers and health officials are concerned about the larger population developing depression, as the existing mental health crisis is intensified from the societal effects of the pandemic.

This could lead to higher substance abuse rates, potential drug overdoses, and even suicide.

Indeed, 40 percent of U.S. adults are already struggling with mental health or substance use. Many people are not receiving proper treatment due to lack of access to care or are afraid to seek out treatment because of the stigma surrounding mental health.

And unfortunately for businesses, this mental health crisis is directly affecting employees, productivity, morale, and their bottom line. Grokker Innovation Labs' 2021 Working Americans' State of Stress research found that stress is a problem for nearly all employees, regardless of their company size, level of seniority, age, or work location (on-site or at home).

And on top of all that, unaddressed mental health issues have major financial repercussions, too. Let's look at some stats:

- Depression costs employers an estimated $44 billion each year in lost productivity

- **US businesses lose up to $300 billion yearly as a result of workplace stress.**

- **Depression leads to $51 billion in costs due to absenteeism and $26 billion in treatment costs.**

- **Work-related stress causes 120,000 deaths and results in $190 billion in healthcare costs yearly.**

- **Companies spend around 75% of a worker's annual salary to cover lost productivity or to replace workers.**

Of course, the bottom line is far from the only reason that companies need to focus on improving mental health in the workplace.

At work, the negative impact of stress manifests most commonly in these ways:

- Difficulty concentrating (50%)

- Procrastinating (46%)

- Lacking inspiration (33%)

- Difficulty connecting with or avoidance of colleagues or clients (31%)

- Missing meetings or deadlines (24%)

While this isn't news to many of us, these stats highlight what is going on with our workforces—and underscore the importance of talking and thinking about supporting employee mental health in the workplace.

Still, discussing mental health and its associated issues in the workplace is often considered taboo—and that means your employees may be scared to be honest about what they're going through. **In fact, in a survey by The Priory, 80% of respondents would worry about an employer's response if they disclosed a mental health condition.** And when they do report stress in the workplace, **only four in 10 workers are offered some kind of help.**

Breaking this stigma will be the first step in building an honest, open workplace, but we'll get into that a bit more later, too.

Caring about your employees' mental health is good for everyone, as healthy, supported employees build a better company culture, help with retention, act as branding experts for your company, and generally drive business success across the board.

In this ebook, we'll discuss how to assess the state of your employees' mental health, how to build a culture of wellness and wellbeing, the mental health benefits your company needs, how to boost morale in a hybrid workforce, and more.
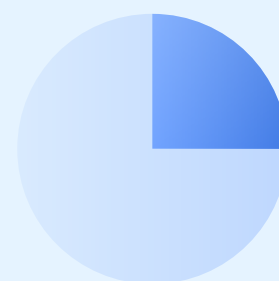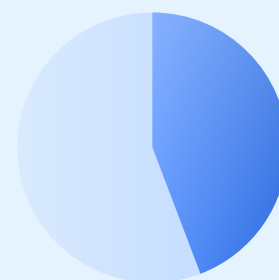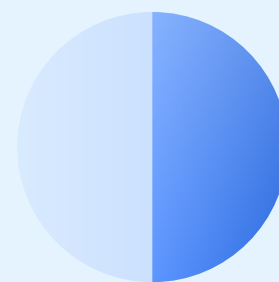
# How to Understand & Assess Employee Mental Health

Mental health issues can often be difficult to detect before they outwardly influence employees' performance or ability to work. Some employees even struggle to recognize or acknowledge their own mental health issues, due to social stigma or fear over how coworkers may perceive them.

To understand the state of your employees' mental health, it's critical to identify the cultural challenges affecting their stress and anxiety within the workplace. This will help you design support systems that address the specific issues facing your employees.

So how can organizations proactively assess their employees' mental health?

## Gather Data

Implementing quarterly anonymous pulse surveys can be useful in discovering latent mental health issues before they appear more pronounced. Employee responses to surveys will provide a temperature check on the health of the organization, which will give you a sense of which areas or departments require more dedicated support. It will also help you understand how your employees' needs and wellbeing are changing over the course of the pandemic.

## Listen to Your Employees

With the evolving state of work, it's important to directly ask team leaders what they need, listen actively, and respond accordingly. This may take the form of a staff survey or an honest two-way conversation with a supervisor of the department. Try not to make assumptions about the wellbeing of employees—learn to lead with empathy, listen carefully, and be willing to adapt to the changing needs they communicate.

## Incorporate Wellness in the Review Process

Embedding a wellness component into the employee review process allows managers to ask for feedback on how supported employees feel. This may entail a section in the review for employee input on company culture and benefit offerings with respect to wellness and mental health support.

Regardless of whether your company holds monthly, quarterly, or annual reviews, they will provide insight on the efficacy of your wellness benefits and efforts. This can help lay the foundation for improving or pivoting your benefits strategy to better attract and retain your employees.

# Wellbeing As a Part of Organizational Culture

As remote work continues to increase in popularity, work-life boundaries have become blurred and employees are feeling the need to disconnect more than ever before. In fact, nearly **70 percent** of professionals say they now work on the weekends, and **45 percent** say they regularly work more hours during the week than they did before.

To encourage self-care values and a healthy work-life balance, leaders must focus on making wellbeing a fundamental part of organizational culture.

Let's take a closer look at how to approach organizational and cultural wellbeing in the hybrid workplace.

## Establish Boundaries

The erosion of work-life boundaries is largely the result of an undefined beginning and end to the work day. For many employees, the lack of separation between home and work has led to an increase in pressure, distractions, and demands on time throughout the workday.

Establishing clear boundaries around working hours helps employees disconnect after work, recalibrate, and start each day refreshed. Creating windows of time where employees are not expected to work, (such as virtual commutes or coffee breaks), offers them the chance to reflect, set goals, and develop a more holistic perspective on their work.

## Model Balance & Wellness

Every manager, supervisor, or team lead should exemplify their commitment to wellbeing and a healthy work-life balance. Valuing your own wellbeing shows your team that you practice what you preach, and that you're also prioritizing their happiness and mental health.

This could mean taking your planned vacation time and not checking email, or being transparent about time blocked off for doctor's appointments or personal obligations. You could also recommend a useful resource, like a self-help book or wellness seminar.

In modeling wellness for your team, it's essential to promote open dialogue and take accountability for the impact of your actions. Demonstrating support through modeling the appropriate behavior is also key in cultivating a culture of **psychological safety** and trust.

## Examine Company Values

As a leader, it's critical to revisit your company values and determine whether they still hold true in the current social and economic climate. Do your values feel authentic after a year of remote work? How are you showing up for your employees during this time? It will have a direct influence on their productivity, happiness, and engagement.

Consider how you'll bring these values into a hybrid working environment. Be sure to incorporate elements of both in-person and remote work—this might require adapting to a new way of working together and communicating. For instance, the organization might end up relying more on **digital tools** for collaboration and recognition, or adopting a flexible work schedule.

## Monitor Workloads

Given the nature of remote work, it can be challenging to determine whether an employee is carrying too heavy a workload. Your organization may have downsized in the last year, which could have shifted the weight of tasks distributed amongst your employees. Employees may have difficulty being productive at home because they are sharing a workspace with relatives or roommates. Or your employees could be dealing with child care or elderly care from home, and may need accommodations with their workload.

Plan regular check-ins with your employees to understand their perspectives and continuously assess the current allocation of resources and tasks. If something isn't working, or if employees feel overwhelmed, it may be time to redesign the job or shift the workload in a way that is more manageable.
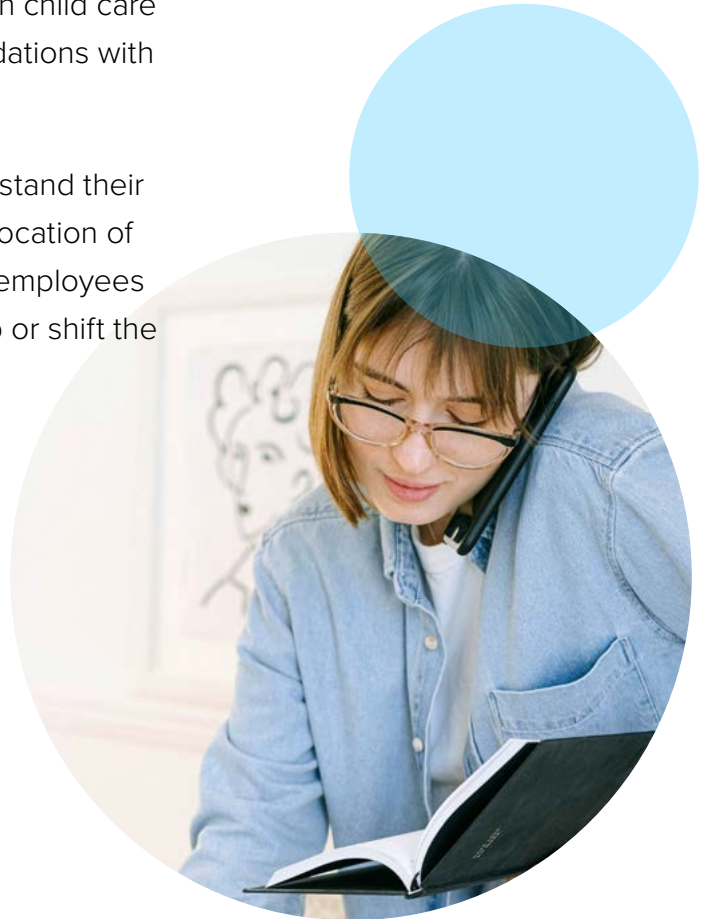
# Mental Health Tips for the Hybrid Workplace

In addition to focusing on wellbeing in your hybrid workplace culture, you should also support your employees on a daily basis. By giving them useful tips, you can help them prioritize their mental health—both inside and outside of work.

Here are some tips you can share with your employees:

## Find Your Way to Destress

When dealing with stress, some people lose sleep while others lose their appetite. Since stress looks different for everyone, destressing does too. Help your employees find ways to reduce their stress. From eating healthfully to meditating, give them examples of ways to destress in case they aren't sure what works best for them yet. Consider hosting information sessions to help them learn about different strategies.

In addition to helping employees discover ways to reduce their stress, you need to give them the opportunity to act on them. For instance, you can't tell employees they should take more time off without actually letting them do so. If your employees do want to take more time off, consider expanding your PTO policy or declaring company-wide mental health days.

## Take Breaks Throughout the Day

To help employees prioritize their mental health, you should encourage them to take breaks from work throughout the day. Allowing employees to work flexible hours can help them destress and be more engaged when working—whether they're in the office or at home. Maybe an employee wants to take a longer lunch or attend a meditation class mid-work day to destress. Being flexible will also enable employees who are struggling to find available mental health services after working hours to get the support they need.

## Maintain a Balanced Diet & Exercise

There are many studies that prove what you eat and how often you exercise impacts how you feel. By having a balanced diet and exercising regularly, you can improve your mental health and wellbeing. Help your employees learn how to maintain a healthy diet by hosting seminars and sharing resources, like Medical News Today's Guide to Eating a Balanced Diet.

To encourage employees to exercise often, consider hosting fitness challenges throughout the year. Doing so will not only motivate employees to workout more, but will also keep employees in the office and at home connected with some friendly competition.

## Follow Ergonomics Tips

Whether employees are working in the office or at home, ergonomics are important. The goal of ergonomics is to create safe, comfortable, and productive workspaces by bringing human abilities and limitations into the design of a workspace—including the individual's body size, strength, skill, speed, sensory abilities, and even attitudes.

Although ergonomics tips focus on reducing the risk of injuries and musculoskeletal disorders, they can also impact mental health. Having a decluttered and clean workspace can make employees feel more comfortable, reduce their stress, and help them stay engaged. Overall, ergonomics tips can benefit both employees' physical and mental health.
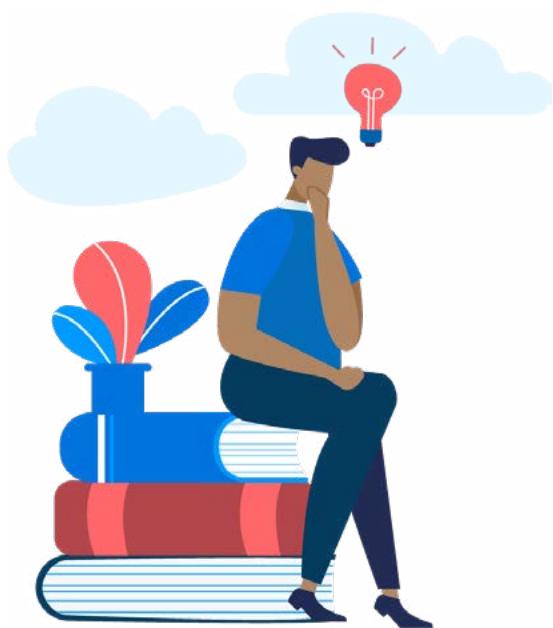
# Employee Mental Health Benefits You Need in 2021 & 2022

Reevaluating your benefits will not only help you retain your current employees, but it will also help you attract potential candidates in 2021 and beyond

So what benefits can you offer your employees to support their mental health?

In case you're not sure, we've got you covered.

## EAPs

Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs) are voluntary programs that offer employees free and confidential services to address a variety of issues—such as work-related problems, mental health conditions, alcohol and substance abuse, family problems, and psychological disorders. These programs are funded by employers and offered through third party providers to give employees the support they need.

Depending on what employees are struggling with, EAPs connect them to professional counselors and resources that they may not have access to otherwise. And based on research, these programs are successful. According to a study involving 56 EAP vendors, 86 percent of employees who participated had clinical improvements.

## Telehealth Services

**32 percent** of companies considered adding or expanding their telehealth programs this year. Telehealth services allow employees to call or video chat with doctors and professionals—all over the phone, no in person visit needed.

**First Stop Health** is a best-in-class telehealth vendor. In addition to specializing in telemedicine, First Stop Health also offers virtual mental health services. As an optional and affordable add-on, First Stop Health provides unlimited virtual mental health services at no cost to the employee. Patients are paired with counselors licensed in their state who specialize in specific mental health issues, such as depression, anxiety, stress, grief, marital, work and family issues, and alcohol and drug dependencies. There's no cost to employees (employers pay a per-employee-per-month fee) and no pre-defined restrictions on the number of counseling visits or different concerns for which a patient may be treated.

## Healthcare Concierge

**TouchCare** is a healthcare concierge whose goal is to put the focus of healthcare back on consumers by helping them to make better healthcare decisions. To support employees' mental health, TouchCare offers **MindCare**—which gives employees virtual access to licensed therapists. MindCare enables employees to access high-quality, convenient, and confidential mental health services within days, so that they can get the support they need.

## 24/7 Helplines

To support employees at all times of the day, companies are providing them with 24/7 helplines and counseling numbers. **Talkspace** is a platform that enables users to access online confidential therapy—from wherever, whenever.

## Discounts on Mental Health Apps

From scrolling on social media to tracking workouts, people use their phones today more than ever before. So what better way to have access to mental health services than on the go? From **Moodfit** and **MoodMission** to **Headspace**, there are so many helpful mental health apps out there. By offering discounts on apps as part of your benefits plans, you can encourage your employees to utilize them. In case you need help deciding which app is best to offer your employees, check out **Digital Tools and Solutions for Mental Health**.

## Virtual Meditation Classes

For anyone struggling with anxiety and stress, meditation can be extremely helpful. Consider offering memberships or discounts for virtual meditation classes so that both employees in the office and working from home can participate. You can also host meditation sessions throughout the year via companies like **Meditation House.**

## About Namely

Distinguished by its intense commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion, HR technology leader Namely is an employer of choice that helps mid-sized employers and their employees thrive. Delivering and streamlining the complexities of recruiting, onboarding, time & attendance, performance management, benefits administration, compliance, payroll and analytics from a single platform, Namely also offers Managed Payroll and Benefits services. The company further differentiates the client experience through personalized service and easy-to-use applications.

Learn more at **Namely.com** and follow us **@NamelyHR**.