Promoting Mental Health in the Workplace during COVID-19: Practicing Acceptance & Mindfulness

Presented by Thrive in Your Workplace and NYC Service
Language Access

Directions: For simultaneous interpretation of today’s presentation, please dial the numbers below and use the Meeting ID that corresponds with your language of choice. For best results, turn down the volume on your computer and mute yourself on your phone to allow others to hear the interpreter more clearly.

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Thrive in Your Workplace (TWP) helps local employers integrate mental health support in the workplace to:

- Promote employees’ emotional wellbeing
- Facilitate access to mental healthcare
- Create cultures of positive mental health at work

We work with employers from across sectors to shape customized workplace mental health strategies and implement workplace mental health programming. We also offer free training, resources and events to support the resilience of New York City’s workforce.
Housekeeping & ground rules

• Your video and audio will be off during the webinar

• Please use the chat for questions about the topic of today’s training
  o We will hold dedicated time for Q&A at the end of training

• Be respectful and civil

• Anyone not adhering to these ground rules will be removed from the conversation
Rachael Steimnitz, MPH, is a public health professional who helps organizations develop and implement health improvement programs. She currently leads content development and implementation for Thrive in Your Workplace, working closely with employers across New York City. Previously, she supported various quality initiatives for Health and Hospitals Corporation (H+H) and directed trainings and programs at the State Office of Mental Health. Rachael has a BA from the New School and a Master’s in Public Health in Sociomedical Sciences from the Mailman School of Public Health at Columbia University.
Chris Lynn-Logue, MSW, is a social worker and mental health advocate. He currently works at the Mayor’s Office of ThriveNYC as the Employer Engagement Manager for Thrive in Your Workplace. Before working for ThriveNYC, he worked at the Department of Youth and Community Development as a Program Manager for Cornerstone Programs. In that capacity, he managed community centers located in NYCHA public housing developments. In addition to his work with community centers, Chris has also worked with the Mayor’s Youth Leadership Council, the Young Men’s Initiative, and other youth-related initiatives. Christopher earned his Master’s in Social Work from New York University’s Silver School of Social Work and his Bachelor's Degree in Sociology from Morehouse College.
Agenda

• Impact of COVID-19 on mental health in workplace and volunteer programs
• Recognizing signs and symptoms of mental health challenges
• Managing stress and anxiety
• Organizational strategies to support mental health
• Q & A
Understanding the mental health spectrum

- **Mental health** is a state of wellbeing in which people can cope with the normal stressors of life, work productively, and contribute to their communities.

- **Mental health problems** is a broad term that recognizes that mental health is a spectrum and we all experience mental health challenges:
  - E.g. daily stress or stress related to COVID-19, anxiety related to uncertainty, social isolation and loneliness, or grief.

- **Mental illnesses** are conditions in which people’s thinking, mood and behaviors negatively impact their day-to-day functioning:
  - E.g. depression, anxiety, schizophrenia, and others, as well as addictions.
Mental health challenges affect all of us in different ways

In New York City:

- 1 in 5 adults struggle with mental illness every year
- Suicide is the sixth leading cause of death
- Over half a million adult New Yorkers are estimated to have depression, yet less than 40% report receiving care for it
- Mood disorders are the 3rd most common cause of hospitalization for both youth and adults age 18-44
During the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, mental health concerns are prevalent:

- 85% of workers feel "worried and anxious they may catch COVID-19"
- 85% are also "worried and anxious they may lose their jobs"
- 84% of American workers report "really struggling" with employment-related matters. The reasons include mental health (37%), changes at work (27%), and managing money at home (23%)
General signs of emotional distress

- Fear and worry about your own health and that of your loved ones
- Changes in sleep or eating patterns
- Difficulty concentrating
- Worsening of chronic health problems
- Worsening of mental health conditions
- Increased use of alcohol, tobacco, or other drugs
• Research estimates that mental health disorders will cost nations $16.3 trillion between 2011 and 2030

• More workers are absent from work because of stress and anxiety than because of physical illness or injury

• Depression is estimated to cause 200 million lost workdays each year at a cost to employers of $17 to $44 billion

• A recent WHO-led study estimates that depression and anxiety disorders cost the global economy US$1 trillion each year in lost productivity
Burnout may also be exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic

In an anonymous poll of professionals about their experiences, 73% reported burnout at the end of April, a 12% increase from the 61% who reported burnout in mid-February.

Why?

• Great uncertainty around every part of virus response (lack of control)

• Boundaries between work and home are blurred (role confusion and ambiguity)

• Sheltering at home and isolation (lack of community)

• Pandemic has affected communities differently (lack of fairness)
Good news: Mental health support helps

• Most people who experience a mental health issue will recover and live full, active lives

• Most individuals with mental health challenges will improve with appropriate diagnosis and treatment

• 80% of employees treated for mental health problems report improvements in their job satisfaction and productivity
Strategies for managing stress and promoting wellbeing
The mental health trifecta for emotional wellbeing

**Social support:** While physically distancing, you can maintain your social connections to friends, family members and loved ones. Stay in touch.

**Exercise and nutrition:** Mood and physical health are linked. Maintain your healthy habits – like prioritizing enough sleep, eating a healthy diet, and doing consistent physical activity like walking, stretching and working out.

**Routine:** Structure can be grounding. Stay in-tune with sleep and eating patterns, and set a regular, daily schedule, particularly when working or volunteering from home!
Evaluating our thought patterns

Thoughts

Feelings or emotions

Behaviors or actions
Types of Negative Thought Patterns

• **All or Nothing Thinking**: Things are black and white, failing to see alternative options or “the grey area”

• **Catastrophizing**: Assuming the worst-case as an inevitable fact

• **Mind-reading**: Imagining we know, for certain, what others are thinking or fortune-telling (predicting the future with certainty)

• **Labeling**: Assigning labels to ourselves (or to other people)
Tips to manage negative thoughts

• Reframe
  o “I am stuck inside” to “I can finally focus on my home and myself”

• Challenge the thought
  o What is the evidence that this is true?

• Is there another possibility / explanation or possible outcome?
  o What do I know to be true right now?
Mindfulness can improve your wellbeing and how you manage staff

Key elements:
- Awareness of your current experience and the actions you perform
- Focusing your mind on the present, not the past or future
- Allowing an experience to occur without judging it to be good or bad

Effects:
- Improve mood and positive emotions
- Decrease anxiety and burnout
- Improve physical health outcomes, such as heart disease and others
Use RAIN to manage your emotions and provide reassurance to others

The acronym **RAIN** is a helpful mnemonic for guiding practicing mindfulness:

- **R**ecognize what is going on
- **A**llow the experience to be there, just as it is
- **I**nvestigate with kindness
- **N**urture with (self-)compassion
Organizational approaches to promote mental health in the workplace and volunteer programs
Increase awareness and knowledge about mental health

- Name the issue
- Educate employees and volunteers about signs of mental health challenges
- Co-facilitate meetings with employee champions to enlist feedback about organizational culture and possible solutions
- Provide frequent communication about resources for mental health
- Conduct a survey to identify concerns about mental health
Build a foundation of organizational support

- Lead with compassion
- Model supportive behavior and self care practices
- Communicate consistently and openly about organizational goals and priorities to reduce anxiety and provide clear guidance
- Show appreciation for high-quality work
- Provide clear role descriptions and autonomy
Create opportunities for social support

- Relationships are a key part of maintaining both mental and physical health.
- Social support gives us the feeling of being loved, cared for, respected, and belonging to a group.
- A strong social support system can improve or protect mental health and decrease symptoms of depression and anxiety.
Facilitate access to mental health care resources

• Provide information about benefits, such as an Employee Assistance Program or insurance coverage, including expansion in services related to COVID-19

• Share information about free mental health resource in NYC for staff members who receive their health coverage outside of your organization

• Train managers and staff overseeing volunteers to identify individuals who may be struggling, to supportively discuss mental health, and to help them access resources
Addressing mental health at work has a cascading impact

Your attitude and actions create a ripple effect among your employees and volunteers and set the tone for creating a workplace culture where it is okay to talk about mental health.

Your staff and volunteers are your greatest asset – when they feel confident and engaged in their work, it boosts morale and productivity.

By managing and supporting your own mental health, you create the space to support your direct reports and affect their lives both at work and at home.
Please send us your questions through the **chat** function.

**Note:** Slides will be made available to registrants after the session.
Mental health support is available

New Yorkers can visit the ThriveNYC Resource Guide to Mental Health Services to Access While at Home for regularly updated resources, including services tailored to the needs of aging New Yorkers, veterans, students and young people, and people harmed by violence, crime, or abuse.

Follow @MentalHealthNYC on Twitter for the latest updates.
Thank you for joining us!

Visit https://thrivenyc.cityofnewyork.us/workplace to learn more about workplace mental health or contact twp@thrive.nyc.gov to schedule a free consultation.

Please share your feedback via the brief evaluation survey shared in the chat.
References


References


• Leopold RS. A Year in the Life of a Million American Workers. New York, New York: MetLife Disability Group; 2001

References


