Are You Doing Enough? 6 Simple Tips to Improve Your Employees' Mental Health

By William Schroeder, LPC at [Just Mind Counseling](#)

The nature of mental health is that it doesn't run parallel to the events in someone's life.

Yes, depression, anxiety, and other mental health challenges are influenced by external factors, but even when everything seems to be going "perfectly" for someone on the surface, that person may be struggling.

It is true, though, that hardships can (and usually do) negatively impact our mental health, and that's why in 2020, many people are suffering at a deeper level than they otherwise might. Even those who might not normally experience many mental health issues now find themselves in a great deal of emotional turmoil as we enter the pandemic's 9th month in the United States.

In Texas, at least, this trend is hard to miss. Mental health therapists across the state have seen a large uptick in the number of people seeking support. The [CDC has also reported a historic rise in mental health and substance abuse issues](#) during the pandemic.

Considering all of this, if you run a business, there may never be a more important time to support your employees' mental health.

The benefits of providing that support extend beyond ethics and altruism. According to the World Health Organization, businesses lose an estimated $1 trillion is lost per year due to untreated anxiety, depression, and substance abuse in their employees. But there's good news: WHO has also found that for every [$1 employers invest into treatment for their employees, they see a return of $4 due to improved health and productivity](#).

So what can you do to support your employees during this challenging time, and especially during the upcoming holidays (a difficult time for many people regardless of the year)?

Here's a list of some simple—and in many cases, free—suggestions for how you can look after your employees, as well as your business.

1. **Validate that this is a challenging time, and offer support.** One of the easiest ways to support your employees is simply to offer them resources. Those resources might include information about an Employee Assistance Program, a list of articles on how to recognize [signs that they may need support](#) and on [how to find the right therapist](#), and links to your insurance company to help them find therapists in-network and/or telehealth options. If you want to compile a list of helpful articles to share with employees, here are some to get you started:

   a. [5 Reasons to See a Therapist](#)
   b. [Intriguing Reasons to Give Talk Therapy a Try](#)

      c.   [Quarantine Fatigue and Stress is Real](#)

2. **Create a workplace culture that encourages honesty, openness, and vulnerability.** A big component in getting people comfortable enough to seek support is breaking the stigma around asking for that help. Business owners and leaders are in a position to guide the way. If you've experienced your own struggle with mental health and can [share that struggle without oversharing](#), it could go a long way in helping others. During the pandemic, many Texans have had to navigate multiple hardships, and it can help to have a forum simply to talk about those experiences. Have an open-door policy with employees, and set the example that having struggles is normal.

3. **Model healthy behaviors from the top down.** Mental health therapists get a lot of calls from business owners and executives who are overwhelmed. They're drowning in stress, not getting enough sleep, and not taking care of themselves. No doubt, these are challenging times, but leadership must model healthy behaviors, not only for themselves but their employees. Examples include taking breaks, making time for rest and exercise, taking a walk in the middle of the day, having a therapy appointment, turning off email at a specific time each day, or taking a staycation to keep you from burning out.

4. **Foster a culture of connection, particularly for working remotely.** Companies and organizations with more people working from home are having the most challenging time with maintaining a sense of community. Here's how you can help.

    a. **Check in with people.** Making time to ask different employees how they're doing can go a long way. Many employees report that they feel less connected with their companies due to a lack of checking in. If you need to, set a reminder to check-in with employees on a regular basis to see how they're doing. If someone shares that they're struggling, you won't always know what to say or do—and you don't have to. The most important thing is to just hear them and listen.

    b. **Be creative and find virtual and in-person options to connect.** Companies such as GitLab are offering technical solutions like [Donut](#), which automates the water cooler experience. Some companies have even started virtual lunch hours, in which lunch is delivered to team members individually, and then everyone connects while they eat over Zoom. If virtual events become tiresome or employees have Zoom fatigue, then think about smaller outdoor events. Examples could include having a breakfast taco event next to a food truck, or an outdoor coffee/hot chocolate break.

5. **Flexibility is key.** As leadership and companies face challenging times, listening to employees, engaging in flexible thinking, and being as inclusive as possible when thinking of solutions can go a long way. You can only help problem-solve any issues that come up if you know what's happening with your employees. For instance, with many schools still closed (or about to close again), a lot of people are struggling with finding a balance between childcare and work responsibilities. Listening to your employees about

what in particular they're finding difficult and what could help them—perhaps shifting lunch hour times, daily meetings, etc.—will help you find customized solutions that will actually work for them, rather than guessing at what they might need. This allows you to maintain high standards while easing stress throughout your business, and that can help you thrive during periods of change. Encourage your team and employees to share how they've had to adapt during these times, as it might give you ideas on how to address potential issues.

6. **Communicate proactively and regularly.** Research shows that the more frequently and clearly you communicate with your team about changes, support their ideas, and both hear and express potential concerns, the less likely they are to have mental health issues. According to a study released this spring (and about a month into shutdowns across the U.S.), [46% of employees reported that at the time of the study, their employers had not shared any mental health resources with them](). Again, if you do share resources (and we suggest you do), remember to normalize them so employees won't feel stigmatized by seeking support.

In what ways has your company offered mental health support during the pandemic? We'd love to read your suggestions in the comments below.