

Employee Talk Paths

Conversations around behavioral health can be difficult to navigate. Below you'll find some ways to make these conversations productive and supportive.



ONE-ON-ONE

Try these talk paths in both regular and unscheduled individual interactions.

STEP 1: START THE CONVERSATION

General check-in:

"How have things been going for you this week? You've been doing a great job. Are you feeling supported?"

Check-in after spotting a sign of struggle:

"I know you have a lot on your plate right now. I want to check how it's been going for you this week and if you're feeling supported."

STEP 2: LISTEN AND RESPOND

If you receive a positive response:

"I'm glad things have been going well. My door is always open if anything changes. Even if it's later on today, don't hesitate to let me know."

If you receive a positive response, but still see signs of something being wrong (e.g., avoiding eye contact if out of character, worrisome jokes or a noticeable change in energy):

"Don't feel like you have to paint anything in a positive light. If there's anything else going on, I'd really like to talk it through with you, if that would be helpful. If not, no problem, but I'm always here."

If you receive a negative response:

"I'm really sorry things have been difficult. I think it can be helpful to talk it out, if you're interested. No pressure, of course. But I'm here for you. Can we talk about some of the things we have in place that might be useful?"

STEP 3: TAKE ACTION TO HELP

If they're interested in discussing further (and this is not a regular check-in):

"Do you have time now? If not, let's set something up to talk this out."

If they aren't interested in discussing further:

"No problem. Let me know if you change your mind. And just know you're not alone. Our HR team is an excellent resource, so don't hesitate to reach out to them. They really helped me out when I [had a similar experience]."

If they're hesitant due to concern about being a "burden" or a "bother":

"Talking about what's really going on is never a burden for me. It's actually a big part of why I'm here. It's my job, and my privilege."

STEP 4: DISCUSS AND SOLVE

Reassure them:

"That sounds really difficult. I'm so sorry you've been going through this."

"Just know how great and valuable you are to our team. Everyone struggles with these types of issues from time to time."

Ask how work is contributing to any stress they're experiencing:

"Has your workload been exacerbating these concerns? Does anything feel like too much? I'd be happy to take a look with you and see if there's anything we can shift or take off your plate."

Offer help:

"I'm glad I understand now how work has been contributing to this situation. It's important to me that we help, not hinder your health, and I'll think about ways we can better support you and come back to you as soon as possible."

"I just want to point out a few resources we have through our benefits package that I think you might find very helpful. They've been a big support for me."

Thank them:

"I really appreciate this open and honest conversation. I know it's not easy to talk about these things and it means a lot that you feel comfortable enough with me to discuss this."

Follow up:

"I've been thinking a lot about our last conversation, and I wanted to check in and see how you've been doing."

"I wanted to touch base about our last conversation – here are a few more ways we can help."

TEAM MEETINGS

Team meetings are a great opportunity to reinforce your support. Allow employees time to bounce ideas off each other and get at the truth in a different way, particularly around how work may be negatively impacting everyone's behavioral health.

STEP 1: START THE CONVERSATION

"I wanted to talk today about behavioral health. It impacts us all, personally and professionally, and we as a company have some great resources to help. So, I want to make sure you're aware of them:

"First, there's myself. As your manager, your well-being is critical to me. Whether it's personal or professional, know my door is always open. No judgment. Please reach out. I can and will help support you.

"Second, as a team, we're here for each other. Especially with work challenges. I encourage you each to speak up on any of our team meetings with concerns and we can address them as a group.

"Third, we as a company have great health benefits related to behavioral health, here are a few of the highlights: [Add key resources from HR]."

STEP 2: CONTINUE TO BRING IT UP AND DISCUSS AS A TEAM

"All right, everyone. What went well this week? What didn't go so well?"

"What was the most challenging aspect of the week for you all? I can go first."

Share your ups and downs:

"I found some projects to be really rewarding this week. Challenging, but in a good way. I found others to be difficult in a way I haven't enjoyed. So we're looking at some ways we might be able to approach those differently internally. I'd love your input on that, if anyone is willing to share their opinion."

"I've actually found it very difficult to balance my home life with [a hardship] lately, and I want to fix that. So I want you all to know I'm taking a mental health day this Friday."

Directly address behavioral health issues:

"These are stressful times. I want you all to know how important it is to us to support this amazing team in ways that actually feel helpful to you all. So I'll just remind you of a few things we've made available to you..."

"Let's talk behavioral health for a minute. Who has questions about the resources we went over last week? What else do you find yourselves wanting or needing? This is really important, so please let me know."

When you notice signs of burnout, address it head-on:

“You’ve all been working extremely hard lately. We know how lucky we are to have you on our team. And while ebbs and flows are natural in any work environment, it’s very important to us to keep these at healthy levels. What do you feel could be done more on the part of [this company] to prevent burnout?”

“I notice the [specific department] team really going the extra mile. Let’s make sure it isn’t too far in the wrong direction. Do you all feel adequately supported? Can you talk a little bit about why you’ve been working late? We want to help.”

Regularly – maybe every quarter – open up for questions about benefits and resources:

“Anyone come across new issues or questions about our resources since we last met?”

“Is our current benefits package working for everyone? What’s missing? What’s confusing?”

Follow up on past meeting points:

“How have the changes we implemented since our last discussion gone over with all of you? What’s worked? What still needs to be addressed?”

“I know the company has made some changes since our last conversation. How have these been affecting you and your workloads? I’d love some honest feedback. This is a safe space, as always, and this is really important.”

Behavioral health conversations can be challenging. But you have support. Remain open in your communications with your employees, and you will be taking a huge step forward in creating a safe space for everyone to express themselves.

Refer back to these talk paths and your Managers’ Handbook, “Supporting the Behavioral Health of Your Employees,” whenever necessary. Utilize the resources below if you need additional support.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

[How to Start and Continue a Conversation About Mental Health](#)

[Language Matters](#)

[Key Behavioral Health Insights](#)