How Can You Play a Part in National Suicide Prevention Month?

The pandemic which we find ourselves in is certainly causing continual change and uncertainties. Individuals and families are adapting regularly to new school and work schedules and find themselves concerned over the economy, job security, and much more. When viewed from a mental health perspective, researchers see that **leading risk factors that contribute to suicide and suicidal thoughts are now part of employees’ everyday life:** prolonged isolation, feelings of hopelessness, financial loss, and stress from prejudice and discrimination. In fact, the CDC reported results from June 2020 surveys showed that the prevalence of symptoms of anxiety disorder was approximately three times those reported in the second quarter of 2019, and prevalence of depressive disorder was approximately four times that reported in the second quarter of 2019.

Mental health can be a difficult topic to broach for many people. A recent article in Forbes Magazine entitled “3 Guiding Principles For Workplaces This National Suicide Prevention Month And Beyond” suggests the first most important rule is to “name mental health for what it is.” Rather than generalizing towards wellness terms, we should specifically name diagnosable conditions, thereby reducing the stigma surrounding them.

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Additional best practices include:

- Focus on resilience. Instead of "suicide attempter," say "a person who has lived through a suicide attempt."
- Don’t assume impairment. Instead of “suffering from” or “struggling with” mental health, say “living with” or “managing” a mental health condition.
- Avoid derisive or trivializing comments tied to mental health, such as calling someone “crazy” or “insane,” or saying “I’m OCD” to describe cleanliness.

Creating a culture of support around mental health in the workplace is another important step in raising awareness for and valuing the importance of mental health.

Below, you will find a number of helpful tips on how to talk about mental health and suicide as leaders, managers, and colleagues.

**Leaders:**

- Be proactive, consistent, and clear when communicating about organizational changes and developments throughout the pandemic.
- Ensure that mental health remains a priority amidst ongoing events.

**Managers:**

- Be open about your own challenges, normalizing them.
- Model healthy behaviors, such as “off-hours” for responding to emails at night.
- Offer flexibility within teams.

**Colleagues:**

- Find opportunities for check-ins, as a team or outside of work.
- If you see a colleague who might be struggling—mental health-related or not, ask them if they are ok. But don’t assume you understand what they are going through.

If warning signs of suicide do appear, don’t hesitate to follow these steps to better gauge and support that person.

**The National Suicide Prevention Hotline is available for support:** 800-273-8255.