



Calm Waters, Deep Currents: Mental Health Below the Surface

Presented by:

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Understanding Trauma in the Workplace

Discussion on how leaders and organizations can support employees after they've experienced a traumatic event. We'll cover both immediate and long-term strategies, focusing on empathy, communication, and workplace resilience.

Why it matters: Trauma impacts mental health, performance, and relationships.

Goal: Equip leaders and colleagues with tools to respond appropriately.

Understanding Trauma in the Workplace

Definition: Deeply distressing or disturbing experiences.

Common effects: Emotional, physical, and work-related changes.

Variables:

- Trauma can stem from workplace incidents, disasters, violence, or personal loss.
- Reactions vary: stress, withdrawal, difficulty focusing, absenteeism.
- Everyone processes trauma differently.
- It's important to recognize that trauma doesn't look the same for everyone.
- Some people might want to talk, others may withdraw. As leaders, our role isn't to diagnose — it's to notice changes and offer support.

Depression



- Feeling sad
- Loss of interest or pleasure in activities previously enjoyed
- Difficulty concentrating and making decisions
- Changes in appetite, including overeating or not eating enough
- Trouble sleeping or sleeping too much
- Fatigue
- Restless activity (e.g., handwringing or pacing) or slowed movements and speech
- Feelings of worthlessness or guilt
- Thoughts of suicide or self-harm

Anxiety

- Feelings of excessive worry or fear about a specific situation or object or, in the case of generalized anxiety, about a wide range of everyday situations
- Avoidance of the situation, object, or place that causes anxiety
- Difficulty concentrating
- Increased heart rate
- Shaking or trembling
- Sweating
- Insomnia
- Feeling restless or irritable
- Feeling out of control or thinking that you're going to die
- Gastrointestinal upset



“High-Functioning” Depression and Anxiety



“High-Functioning” is not a clinical term, but describes hidden signs of depression or anxiety that often go unnoticed



People may appear "normal" as they attend to everyday responsibilities, they may have inner turmoil, unease, sadness, or excessive worry



And people may push themselves to function normally on the outside despite struggling with anxiety or depression. They may fear the "stigma" of mental illness and work hard to hide their emotional pain.

Symptoms of High-Functioning Depression

- Mentally conditioned to bury self in constant work distraction
- Distraction from internal feelings of sadness, hopelessness and ultimately despair
- Slowing down or resting from exhaustion = feeling like failure/not doing enough
- Easier to run away from despair by constantly keeping busy for everyone else around me and ignoring one's own well-being
- Being self-critical; trouble concentrating or making decisions
- Isolating from friends, family, and community
- Spending excessive time in bed or sleep dysfunction

<https://newenglandmedicalgroup.com/high-functioning-depression-and-anxiety/>

<https://adaa.org/living-with-anxiety/personal-stories/your-strong-friends-need-checking-too-despair-and-high>

Symptoms of High-Functioning Anxiety

Constant state of worry and fear.

Fear of failing or being judged.

Being highly self-critical, with a need for perfectionism.

Presenteeism/Absenteeism

Work productivity loss

The Role of the Organization

- Create a safe environment for disclosure.
- Maintain confidentiality and respect privacy.
- Have a clear crisis response policy.



Immediate Support Steps



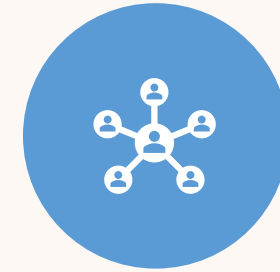
**ACKNOWLEDGE THE
EVENT WITHOUT
PUSHING FOR DETAILS.**



**OFFER FLEXIBLE TIME
OFF IF NEEDED.**



**ENSURE PHYSICAL
SAFETY IF WORKPLACE-
RELATED.**



**COMMUNICATE
AVAILABLE RESOURCES
(EAP, COUNSELING).**

Making Work Work

Tell a trusted coworker. Knowing that someone accepts your condition can be comforting and it may reduce any anticipatory anxiety about having a panic attack at work.

Be realistic. Don't over commit or offer to take on projects if you don't realistically have enough time.

Ask for help. If you're feeling overwhelmed, ask a coworker for help. Later you can return the favor.

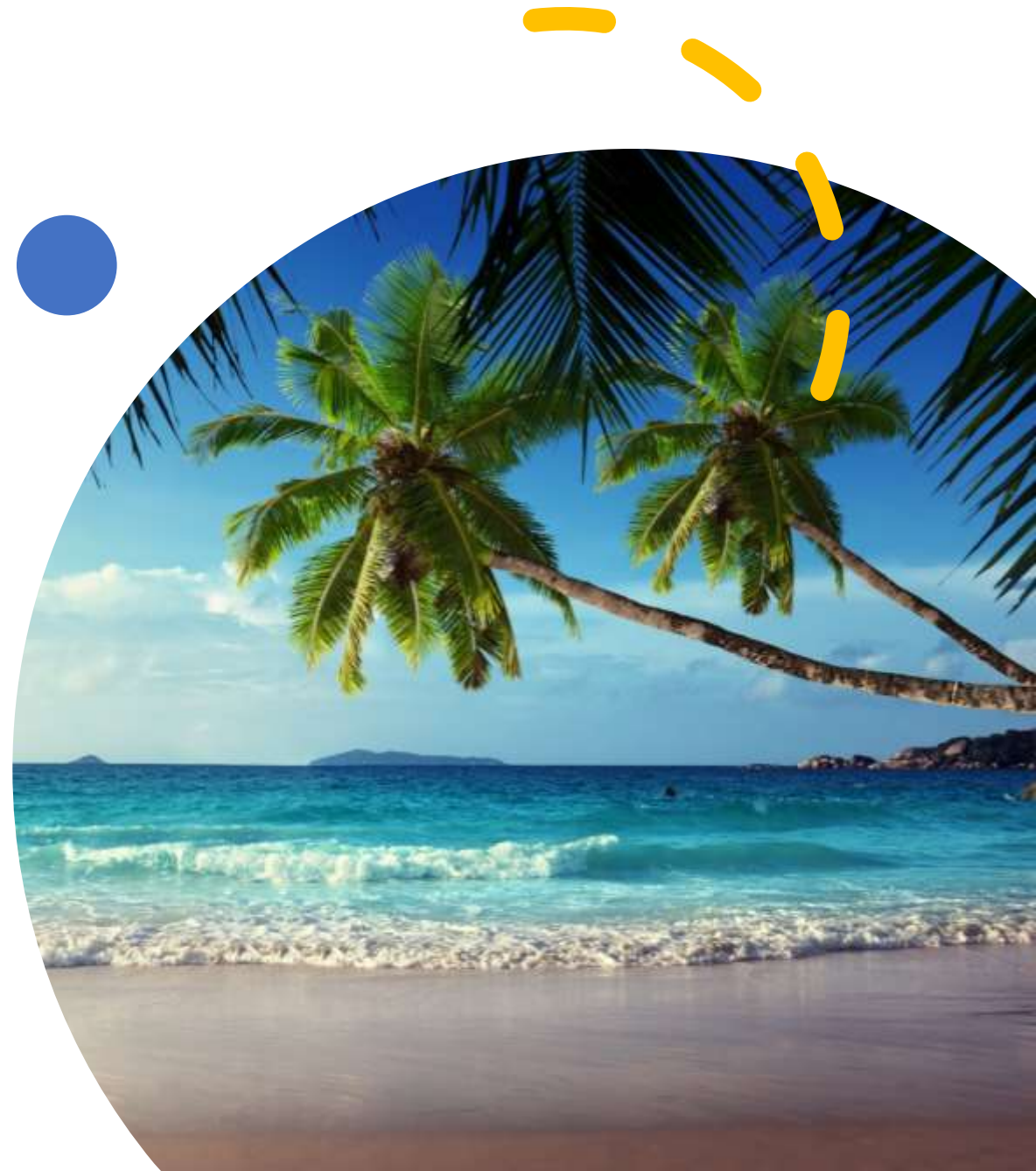


Ongoing Support Strategies

- Check in regularly without pressuring.--privately
- Continue to monitor workload or responsibilities at benchmarks that fit the circumstance.
- Trauma responses may continue at a later time. Continued options for support should be made available on an individual basis.
- Encourage professional help — normalize therapy. Be familiar with the variety of options available through your city's resources
- Foster peer support through trusted colleagues

Leadership Best Practices

- Listen more than you speak.
- Avoid toxic positivity — acknowledge pain.
- Maintain fairness in treatment.
- Get trained in psychological first aid.
- Balance empathy with workplace expectations
- Ask employee what they need instead of assuming.



Resources

Mental health trauma resources

- **988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline:** Call or text 988 — immediate support for anyone in emotional distress.
- **SAMHSA Disaster Distress Helpline:** 1-800-985-5990 (24/7 for those experiencing crisis or trauma after disasters).
- **Crisis Text Line:** Text **HELLO** to 741741 to connect with a trained crisis counselor.
- **National Domestic Violence Hotline:** 1-800-799-7233 or text **START** to 88788.
- **Veterans Crisis Line:** Dial 988, then Press 1.
- **NAMI (National Alliance on Mental Illness):** Support groups, education, helpline (1-800-950-NAMI).

Workplace resources

- **Employee Assistance Program (EAP):** Confidential counseling, legal/financial advice, stress management resources.
- **HR or Wellness Office:** Can help with accommodations, leave policies, or flexible scheduling.
- **Peer Support Programs:** Some organizations have peer mentors or trained peer supporters.
- **Mental Health Days / PTO Flexibility:** Encourage use without stigma.

Personally Recommended Resources

The Grieving
Brain-Mary-
Frances O'Connor

It's OK That
You're Not OK-
Megan Devine

A Grief Observed-
C. S. Lewis

Grief is a Sneaky
Bitch-Lisa
Keefauver

We can't erase the trauma, but we can be a steady presence while healing happens.

QUESTIONS?

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Floresville Event Center

- 600 SH 97 West
- Floresville, TX 78114

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