

Supporting Suicide Prevention in the Workplace

In honor of Suicide Prevention Awareness Month, we're emphasizing the importance of talking about mental health in the workplace and checking in on our colleagues who may be struggling.

Mental health challenges are universal. According to the [National Institute of Mental Health](#), an estimated one in five adults in the United States will develop a diagnosable behavioral health condition in a typical year. The stress of the coronavirus pandemic has intensified the occurrence of mental health issues, including suicidal ideation. [Lyra Health](#) research conducted early in the pandemic found that 12 percent of workers surveyed reported thoughts of self-harm or suicide.

According to the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) (CDC), suicide remains a leading cause of death in the United States. Despite the growing awareness around the issues of suicide and self-harm, people often shy away from discussing these topics. This hesitancy contributes to the stigma around mental health and can prevent people from seeking treatment for mental health conditions.

We can all play an important role in minimizing this stigma by normalizing the discussion of mental health in the workplace. This month, learn how to look for warning signs of suicide and how to respond when a coworker appears to be struggling with their mental health.



Hi! I'm Dr. Browne

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I'm a clinical psychologist and workforce transformation program manager at Lyra, your mental health benefit. I'm passionate about destigmatizing mental health care and helping you improve your mental health at work and at home.

Understanding suicide

[According to the CDC](#), someone dies by suicide every 11 minutes. A combination of circumstances—including a mental health condition, a serious physical illness, or other life events, such as prolonged bereavement, social isolation, or legal or financial difficulties—could lead someone to have thoughts of suicide. Because people often avoid discussing the topic of suicide, experiencing thoughts of self-harm or death can feel isolating.

While suicide unfortunately occurs more often than some may think, it's important for those in distress to know they are not alone so that conversations around this topic can be normalized.

How common is suicide?

In 2020, an estimated 45,979 people died by suicide in the United States. This concerning statistic is even more alarming when combined with the even higher numbers of people who attempted suicide, seriously planned an attempt, or had serious thoughts of suicide.

In 2020: 



Sources

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2020). [CDC WONDER: Underlying cause of death](#). Retrieved from www.cdc.gov on June 8, 2022

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. (2021). [Key substance use and mental health indicators in the United States: Results from the 2020 National Survey on Drug Use and Health \(PDF, 3.6 MB\)](#).

Retrieved from www.samhsa.gov on June 8, 2022

How to look for signs of suicide risk

Coworkers can play a crucial role in suicide prevention. While it can feel awkward or uncomfortable to approach a colleague who may be struggling, checking in with others can provide opportunities for that person to seek the care they need.

Every person shows their feelings differently, and there is no universal warning sign for suicide risk. However, there are some common behaviors that may indicate a person is thinking of suicide or experiencing a significant mental health concern. For example, someone who is having thoughts of suicide may make comments about feeling hopeless or wishing “everything would just end.” Paying attention to warning signs and taking the appropriate actions to respond can help someone get the care and support they need.

Signs that indicate someone may be thinking of suicide or experiencing a significant mental health concern include:

- Persistent sadness or irritability
- Increasingly aggressive or hostile behavior
- Neglecting basic hygiene or one’s appearance
- Withdrawal from people or activities
- Increased use of drugs or alcohol
- Giving away cherished or valuable possessions
- Excessive shame or humiliation
- Statements about feeling trapped or hopeless
- Expressing thoughts of wanting to die

6 steps for reaching out to a coworker

If you notice warning signs that may indicate a coworker is experiencing emotional distress, consult with human resources or employee relations to learn more about relevant workplace policies and protocol. Consider checking in with the colleague and connecting them to professional support.

If there's no imminent risk and you're not sure where to start, these steps can help guide the conversation:

1. **Be direct:** "I notice that you haven't seemed like yourself lately."
2. **Describe what you see:** "I notice you haven't been responding to emails and you seem distracted in meetings."
3. **Ask open-ended questions:** "How have you been lately?" "Tell me more." Do more listening rather than talking.
4. **Validate and reassure them that help is available:** "I can understand why this feels so difficult. I care about you and want to make sure you get the support you need."
5. **Encourage the coworker to seek support:** "Have you thought about talking with HR or employee relations? They can connect you to helpful support in this type of situation."
6. **Avoid common pitfalls:** Try not to be judgmental, don't try to diagnose, and avoid giving advice or becoming the employee's sole source of support. The goal of this conversation is to help connect your colleague to the appropriate resource.

In cases where a person has a plan for how they will harm themselves and intends to use that plan, call local emergency personnel immediately.

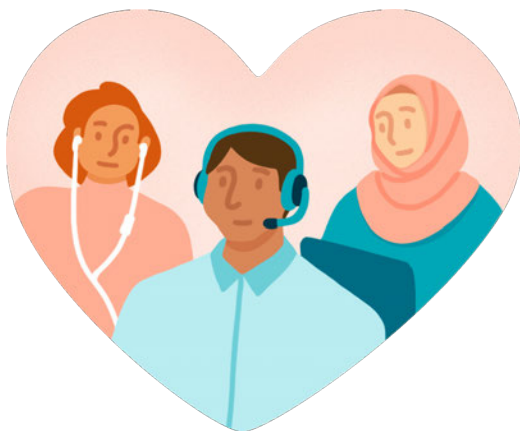
Concerned about your employee? A note for managers

Lyra offers specialized support for leaders who have concerns about an employee's mental health. These manager consultations are available via Lyra's 24/7 care team.* To initiate a consultation, call our care team and let the customer support specialist know you're requesting a manager consultation. For urgent requests, a clinician will contact you within one hour.

If you believe an employee is at imminent risk of harming themselves or others, do not call Lyra; call 911 or your security team, consistent with your company's protocol. Lyra will not proactively contact an employee of concern; however, we can guide managers interested in connecting their teams with the professional care they need.

Get access to care

Employers and coworkers can play a powerful role in suicide prevention. With this goal in mind, it's important that any mention or indicator of suicide or self-harm be taken seriously in the workplace. By talking to your coworkers when they show signs of distress, you can help connect them with the resources and care they may need to support their mental well-being.



When we face struggles, we don't have to figure it all out on our own. Lyra's support is always available for you and your colleagues.

Visit care.lyrahealth.com for more information about our services and to register for care.

*Some exclusions may apply. While most managers have access to manager consults, visit care.lyrahealth.com to confirm eligibility.