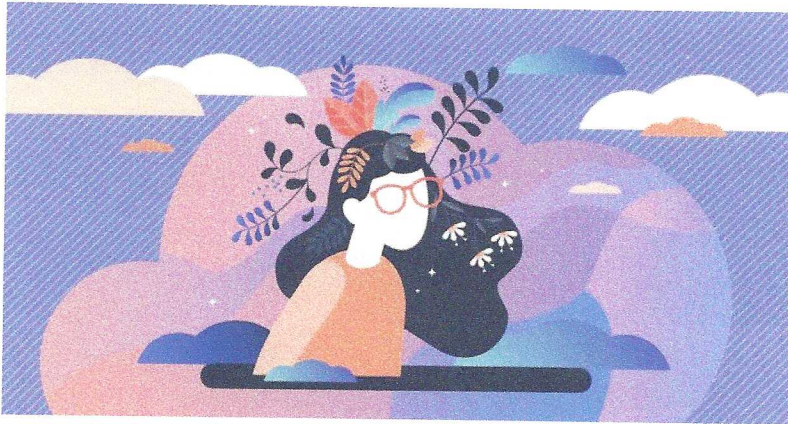


SuperEval Blog

Supporting the Mental Health of Your School's Employees (<https://supereval.com/blog/supporting-the-mental-health-of-your-schools-employees/>)

September 9th, 2020



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[content/uploads/2020/09/AdobeStock_336425203-scaled.jpeg](https://supereval.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/AdobeStock_336425203-scaled.jpeg)) *Trigger Warning: Mental Health, Suicide, Depression.*

COVID-19 has proven to be not only a dangerous respiratory infection, but it is also a strain on our healthcare system, economy, a challenge for school leaders, parents, students, and a political hot topic. What we often don't think of is that the global pandemic has also been a significant factor increasing the number of cases of mental health disorders across the country and their severity. Even though your teachers and administrators are committed to your students' academic progress, they, too, are living with the daily challenges of the pandemic. Some may have spouses who have lost their jobs or family members who have lost their lives from the disease. Still, others may be battling the emotional effects of isolation during self-quarantine. Whether your teachers are educating in-person, virtually, or through a hybrid model, or all of the above, take time to formalize a system to support their wellness during this time of ongoing strain.

The Emotional Impact

A global pandemic is an understandably anxiety-inducing event. Still, for millions of Americans, all the complexities and facets of the COVID-19 crisis are initiating or exacerbating severe cases of emotional duress. Healthline (<https://www.healthline.com/health-news/what-covid-19-is-doing-to-our-mental-health>) reports that Americans are reporting significantly increased symptoms of anxiety and depression related to the pandemic, in particular, women, minorities, individuals with existing health conditions, and adults under age 34. Not only have self-reported rates of mental health disorders increased, but they are also significantly above historical norms. In a recent Healthline survey, 49 percent of respondents showed some signs of depression, ranging from mild to severe—a rate 12 percent higher than historical numbers.¹

While many Americans are self-aware of changes to their emotional state and have reached out for help, many others are suffering in silence, and their pain is going unnoticed. At the same time, they are living in isolation while following stay-at-home recommendations. In some cases, the effects of depression on those unable to get help may be dire. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) report that suicide is the tenth leading cause of death in the U.S. and that it increased 35 percent between 1999 to 2018.² A recent article published by *Psychology Today* reports that “the unprecedented public health actions needed to contain [COVID-19], along with social distancing requirements, stay-at-home orders, and stress due to job loss, may well result in far more suicides in the years to come.”³

Of the millions of Americans struggling with the fear, uncertainty, and loss caused by COVID-19, members of your faculty and staff are inevitably among them. As a school leader, you can help someone in need of support or initiate a critical intervention by remaining aware of the signs of depression and other mental health disorders and ensuring your teachers know how to get the help they need from reputable resources.

Supporting Your Employees' Mental Health

What follows are several avenues to aid your teachers during the school year, and all year long.

Offer an Employee Assistance Program (EAP)

If your district does not already offer an EAP, talk to your benefits provider about available options. EAPs provide free services for employees to assist them with personal or work-related problems that may impact their job performance, physical health, or mental and emotional well-being. Often, the EAP will connect employees with professional organizations and specialty support agencies. An EAP might be able to help employees find resources for such current needs as:

- Counseling for depression and anxiety
- Health care
- Substance use disorder treatment and recovery
- Grief counseling
- Child-care and virtual schooling issues
- Elder-care issues
- Financial challenges (e.g., wage reductions, student loan repayment, debt, investment losses)
- Housing concerns
- Family issues (e.g., marriage/partner conflicts, parenting challenges)
- Workplace concerns (e.g., sudden work-from-home, job stress, co-worker communications)

Review Your Health Care Benefits Plan

Talk to your district benefits plan leaders to better understand the available coverage for employees in need of mental health disorder screening and treatment. Your benefits plan might offer coverage options for inpatient and outpatient treatment and prescription medication.

Also, familiarize yourself with your Family Medical Leave Act policy so that you can offer teachers the support of taking time off to focus on their wellness. Your team might also be eligible for time-off under The Families First Coronavirus Response Act (<https://www.dol.gov/agencies/whd/pandemic/ffcra-employee-paid-leave>) (FFCRA). The Act requires certain employers to provide employees with paid sick leave or expanded family and medical leave for specified reasons related to COVID-19. Such scenarios include cases when an employee is unable to work because they are quarantined, they need to care for an individual subject to quarantine, or to care for a child whose school or child care provider is closed or unavailable for reasons related to COVID-19. FFCRA applies to certain public employers and private employers with fewer than 500 employees. Talk to your human resources department to determine if your teachers may be eligible for time-off under FFCRA.

Foster Dialogue and Discussion

Returning to a consistent, effective education model is every parent and teacher's hope for the upcoming school year, but it might not be possible. As a school leader, you also need to protect the health and well-being of your faculty (<https://supereval.com/blog/make-mental-health-a-priority-for-staff-and-students/>), which means it may not be in their best interest to attempt a "business as normal" approach to the new school year. Consistently check-in with your staff to ask how they are coping with the ongoing pandemic. Ensure they know that you are available as a resource and that you want to support them professionally and enable them to maintain a safe, healthy home.

Provide reminders during meetings, via email, in staff newsletters, and from all other available channels about resources from your benefits provider, as well as local organizations and community partners who also aim to support mental health and wellness during the COVID-19 recovery process.

Support Those Who Raise Their Hand and Ask for Help

For those brave enough to acknowledge to you as their employer that they are struggling and need help, work with your human resources department to support them and their recovery. By playing an active role in your employee's recovery and healing, you take a significant step in reinforcing your caring culture, which will foster employee loyalty and job satisfaction, which are just as critical now as they are always.

Remember To Take Care of Yourself Too

Your school district personnel very likely feel that their colleagues are their extended family, which is why showing them the same understanding and grace that we are showing our loved ones during the crisis is critical to our collective national recovery. As you actively work to support your employees during the pandemic, ensure that you are self-reflecting on your well-being too. After all, we are all in the same boat trying to navigate the waters of uncertainty. To be the type of resilient and confident leader that your school needs, you also need to operate from a place of strength and emotional stability. If you need help, visit the National Network of Depression Centers (<https://nndc.org/resource-links/>) to find a resource near you.

Sources:

1. Holland, K. (2020, May 08). What COVID-19 Is Doing to Our Mental Health. Retrieved September 09, 2020, from <https://www.healthline.com/health-news/what-covid-19-is-doing-to-our-mental-health>
2. CDC. (2020, April 08). Products – Data Briefs – Number 361 – March 2020. Retrieved September 09, 2020, from <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/products/databriefs/db362.htm>
3. Vitelli, R., Ph.D. (2020, June 07). Are We Facing a Post-COVID-19 Suicide Epidemic? Retrieved September 09, 2020, from <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/media-spotlight/202006/are-we-facing-post-covid-19-suicide-epidemic>
4. [Text of footnote 4]

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