



Supervisor NEWSLETTER

Employee Assistance Program
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Critical Steps Your Workplace Can Take Today to Prevent Suicide

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Employers can play a vital role in suicide prevention. Historically, suicide, mental health, and well-being have been underrepresented in workplace health and safety efforts, but this is changing.

In some European countries, there are workplace standards for workplace psychosocial hazards that put workers at risk for suicide. Additionally, in France, employers have been made accountable for toxic workplaces and management practices that contributed to worker suicides. Some of the latest workplace research and best practices for the prevention of suicide are summarized below as a resource for employers and workers.

The Workplace as a Risk Factor for Suicide

The effects of work on suicide are complex. Work can be protective against suicide as a source of personal satisfaction and meaning, interpersonal contacts, and financial security. However, when work is poorly organized or when workplace risks are not managed, work can raise suicide risk in some workers.

Workplace Suicide Risk Factors

There are many different factors that have been shown to adversely affect mental health, and directly or indirectly impact suicidal thoughts, behaviors, and death. Many of these workplace factors interact with non-workplace

factors to further increase suicide risk.

Workplace factors that contribute to an increased risk of suicide include:

- Low job security, low pay, and job stress
- Access to lethal means – the ability to obtain things like medications and firearms
- Work organization factors such as long work hours, shift work
- Workplace bullying

In addition, some occupations have been found to have higher suicide rates than others.

Workplace factors that contribute to an increased risk of suicide include:

- Construction Workers
- Law Enforcement Officers
- Veterinarians
- Some Healthcare Workers

The Workplace as an Education, Prevention, and Intervention Site

Workplaces are an important setting for suicide prevention efforts. Workers spend a significant amount of time at work and co-workers and supervisors often notice important changes in thoughts or behaviors that may be signals for increased suicide risk. Additionally, most people who die by suicide are of working age (16-64). Many workplaces are engaged with improving worker mental health and well-being but are still reticent to consider and include suicide prevention in their programming. Since many workplaces already have structures and resources in place to help employees access various types of assistance—adding suicide prevention is a logical next step.

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However, suicide prevention in the workplace is not one size fits all. What works and what is needed for one occupation or industry may not be applicable to another. Some general strategies that positively impact workplaces include:

- Limiting access to lethal means
- Providing peer support
- Increasing access to mental health services
- Reducing stigma to encourage easier access to quality care.

The World Health Organization

Employers and co-workers should look out for the following signs:

- Expression of thoughts or feelings about wanting to end their life.
- Expression of feelings of isolation, loneliness, hopelessness, or loss of self-esteem.
- Withdrawal from colleagues, decrease in work performance or difficulty completing tasks.
- Changes in behavior, such as restlessness, irritability, impulsivity, recklessness or aggression.
- Speaking about arranging end-of-life personal affairs such as making a will.
- Abuse of alcohol or other substances.
- Depressed mood or mentioning of previous suicidal behavior.
- Bullying or harassment.
- Particular attention should be paid to people who are losing their job.

What co-workers can do if worried about a colleague:

- Express empathy and concern, encourage them to talk, and listen without judgment.
- Ask if there is anyone they would like to call or have called.
- Encourage them to reach out to health or counselling services inside the organization, if available, or otherwise outside the organization, and offer to call or go there together.
- If they have attempted suicide or indicate they are about to intentionally harm themselves, remove access to means and do not leave them alone. Seek immediate support from health services.

What employers or managers can do:

- Provide information sessions for your staff on mental health and suicide prevention.
- Ensure all staff know what resources are available for support
- Foster a work environment in which colleagues feel comfortable talking about problems that have an impact on their ability to do their job effectively.
- Become familiar with relevant legislation.
- Identify and reduce work-related stressors which can negatively impact mental health.
- Design and implement a plan for how to sensitively manage and communicate the suicide or suicide attempt of an employee in a way that minimizes further distress.

Conclusion

The human toll of suicide is increasing. The COVID-19 pandemic added to increased stress, mental health issues, suicidal ideation, attempts, and suicide deaths. This has helped to raise awareness of these issues and demonstrate to workplace leaders that suicide prevention should be a part of health and safety programs and policies.

Workplaces are critical in suicide prevention because work-related factors are associated with suicide and because workplaces can be effective suicide prevention sites. Your actions can improve the lives of all your workers and may even save the life of some. Utilize some of the resources in this blog to bring awareness to your workplace today.

If you or someone you know needs immediate assistance, call or text 988 or chat 988lifeline.org. 988 connects you with a trained crisis counselor who can help.

Employee Assistance Program (EAP)

For non-crisis needs, you can reach out to First Choice Health EAP to receive help getting connected with a counselor. Call us at (800) 777-4114 for assistance.

References:

<https://blogs.cdc.gov/niosh-science-blog/2023/03/15/preventing-workplace-suicide/>