



The 2022 Guide to Workplace Mental Health

Research, Resources, Activities & More



SAMATA HEALTH

Personalized Mental Health Benefits for Teams of All Sizes

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The Current State of Employee Mental Health

It's no secret that while mental health issues were on the rise in America long before the pandemic, the isolation, anxiety and grief we've experienced since March 2020 have accelerated this trend at an alarming pace. Last year, 83% of employees reported struggling with their mental health.¹

83%



83% of American employees surveyed last summer reported struggling with their mental health.

According to a 2021 report from Mental Health America, nine out of 10 employees reported workplace stress negatively affects their mental health.² The effects of this aren't isolated. It is well documented that poor employee mental health directly results in lower productivity and engagement, absenteeism, higher turnover and lower company morale.³

If there is a silver lining to the pandemic's impact on our collective mental health, it is an increased awareness of the challenges employees are facing. Leaders are more motivated than ever to support their teams' mental health.⁴ In fact, the Business Group on Health found that 76% of U.S. employers focused on increasing employee access to mental health services in 2021.⁵

¹ Business Wire, 2020

² Mental Health America, 2021

³ Deloitte, 2020; Sapient Labs, 2020

⁴ Harvard Business Review, 2021

⁵ The Business Group on Health, 2021

While modern, robust mental health benefits are critical for supporting your employees' mental health, they alone are not enough. A company's policies and culture must also be focused on supporting employee mental health. For some employers, this means offering more flexible working hours, reducing workloads, offering caregiver benefits and other structural changes. For all employers, it requires working to shift workplace norms and conversations to be more supportive of the whole individual.

In this guide, we have focused on the topics we believe are most relevant to workplace mental health in 2022. Below, you will find the latest research, resources and exercises to help you best support your team's wellbeing and foster a more supportive workplace culture. We hope you will find it useful.

With Kindness,

Elizabeth + Sarah



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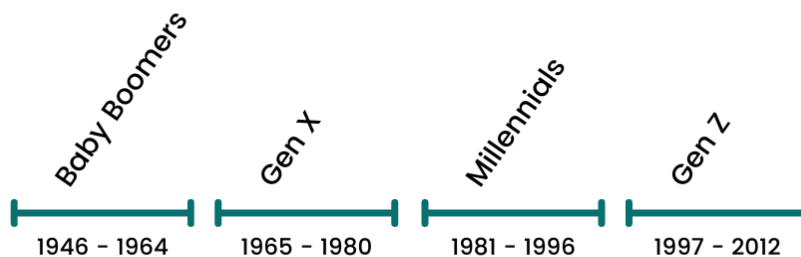


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From Zoomers to Boomers:

Mental Health & a Multigenerational Workforce



Our society's views on mental health have evolved drastically over the last few decades. As a result, one of the biggest challenges in supporting employee mental health today is that each generation represented in the workforce approaches mental health very differently—particularly when it comes to the workplace. In particular, research confirms three major trends that many employers have seen firsthand:

1

According to a 2019 American Psychiatric Association study, **Millennials and Gen Z have greater awareness of mental health challenges.** In fact, 37% of Gen Z have gone to therapy whereas only 22% of baby boomers have gone to therapy.⁶

2

There is a higher incidence of mental health concerns among younger generations.⁷ In late 2020, 71% of Gen Z adults reported feeling “miserable or unhappy.” Additionally, 82% of Gen Z adults said they could have used more emotional support over the last year, compared to 43% of baby boomers who said the same.⁸

3

Twice as many millennials than baby boomers were comfortable discussing their mental health.⁹ Only one in five baby boomers feel it is even appropriate to discuss mental health issues. This age group is also the most likely to avoid sharing concerns about their mental health with their colleagues or manager, or otherwise seek help for mental health concerns.

⁶ American Psychological Association, 2020

⁹ American Psychiatric Association, 2019

How to Talk About Mental Health with Each Generation

There is no one-size-fits-all approach to supporting your employees' mental health needs, and employers should approach the topic of mental health with their employees in a generationally responsive way. The best way to achieve this is by providing employees with multiple opportunities to seek help via different access points to accommodate differences in comfort level and education around mental health. Below are a few ideas for how to approach these conversations with employees of each generation.

Millennials & Gen Z

These employees benefit most from an upfront approach. Supervisors of millennial or Gen Z employees should feel comfortable asking them directly how they're doing, and if they are feeling stressed or overwhelmed at work. Even if an employee doesn't report current mental health concerns, remind them of any mental health benefits & tools the company offers.



Millennials and Gen Z are also digital natives, and are accustomed to an on-demand world. These groups will respond best to mental health tools and benefits that allow them to instantly access support. And because millennials and Gen Z tend to be more community-focused than prior generations, they may also benefit from options like support groups or team wellness workshops.

Gen X and Baby Boomers

Gen X and baby boomers tend to be more private about their mental health, and will likely appreciate a subtler approach. If your workforce includes many Gen X and baby boomer employees, you may also need to focus more of your efforts on educational opportunities and normalizing mental health challenges and treatment. Research has found that members of these generations are able to self-identify symptoms of mental health disorders, like insomnia, but they aren't always able to connect their symptoms to mental

health challenges.¹⁰



Leadership can help educate employees and normalize mental health challenges and treatment through team-wide programming, like periodic wellness workshops led by experts in mental health, and sharing other supportive content.

Leaders should also strive to

create an open and supportive culture that encourages discussion around mental health issues. Instead of asking your Gen X and baby boomer employees how they are holding up directly, offer them a safe space to share. Consider implementing periodic, private “wellness checks” for all employees to normalize the experience. And as always, be sure to remind your entire team—early, often, and through several different mediums—of any mental health benefits or tools your company offers, should they need more support.

¹⁰ Georgia Southern University, 2017

All About Employee Burnout

Oh burnout. It's one of the trickiest topics for employers & their employees. Approximately 3 out of 4 American¹¹ employees reported experiencing workplace burnout in 2020. As employers know, stressed employees lead to high turnover rates, lower quality work, and overall financial loss. Luckily, there is lots employers can do for their employees to keep them happy and healthy.



How to Recognize Employee Burnout

Employee burnout does not only impact the individual employee; it affects the entire company. In fact, burnout can dramatically lower morale in the workplace and create tension among teammates. Employees who are burnt out are more likely to:

- call out of work.
- struggle to find motivation or stay motivated.
- create tension in the workplace.
- perform poorly, especially in comparison to previous months.

What Causes Employee Burnout?

Employees may begin to experience burnout if the workplace has become a stressful or exhausting environment. A few common causes of workplace burnout include an excessive workload, poor work/life balance, tension in the workplace, and micromanaging.

In turn, burnout impacts a person's motivation, energy levels, mood, and overall well being. It can become a very serious issue, leading to problems like depression,

¹¹ Spring Health, 2020

substance abuse, and relationship problems. Burnout is often caused by feelings of stress and overwhelm.

How You Can Prevent Employee Burnout?

Taking good care of your business' employees is the best way to take care of your business. Employees who are happy and healthy will provide your business with the highest quality work. Understanding how vital your employee's wellbeing is to the success of your business may lead you to wonder just what you should do to care for it. There are many steps you can take to keep your employees happy and healthy, including:

- **Communication.** Ensuring that each employee feels as though their voice matters in your company will prove to be a great way to keep them happy. You can help your employees feel heard by listening to and giving their ideas consideration, showing them appreciation for their hard work, and making sure to focus on the positives in their work before giving them constructive criticism.
- **Encourage a healthy work/life balance.** Set and follow clear boundaries for work hours, break time, time to go home, and time off. Encouraging your employees to have a healthy work/life balance will help reduce stress, improve their mental and physical health, and increase their motivation and drive for their work.
- **Set attainable goals and expectations.** Setting goals for your employees that are too difficult to accomplish will create stress and decrease their motivation. Feelings of accomplishment can increase your employee's motivation, so creating goals and expectations that employees feel they can reach can prove to be beneficial to everyone.

Coping with Compassion Fatigue (for HR Professionals)

Imagine: It's Friday, and you're deep in your inbox, trying to wrap up a busy week. A colleague knocks on your door, and before you can stop them, they start venting to you about their difficulties with their manager... for the fourth time this week.

When they came by on Monday, Tuesday & Thursday this week, you offered your support and deeply empathized with their situation. But by the time Friday rolls around, you find you no longer have the patience to listen to them. It's not that you don't care about them anymore—it's just that you can't continue to *feel for* what they are going through.

What is Compassion Fatigue?

When we're experiencing compassion fatigue, we feel a diminished ability to empathize and feel compassion for others, and we become more apathetic about other peoples' issues. Compassion Fatigue is also referred to as the "negative cost of caring" or as "secondary traumatic stress." While it's different from burnout, they often co-exist.¹²

Compassion fatigue is frequently seen in caregiving professions—traditionally in fields like nursing, but increasingly in fields like human resources as well. Parents and other caregivers often also experience compassion fatigue at home.



¹² American Institute of Stress, 2020

Taking the Judgement Out of Compassion Fatigue

If you start to feel compassion fatigue creeping in, try not to judge yourself. You may be wondering, “what’s wrong with me?” or “why can’t I be nicer?” ***The thing is, compassion fatigue isn’t a choice. Compassion-fatigued brains aren’t firing the same neurotransmitters as they usually do, and that’s not our fault.*** Similarly, you wouldn’t expect your car to run on an empty tank of gas!

Next Steps: How to Cope

1 Recognize the difference within yourself.

We can’t tackle the issue until we find out what’s going on. First, notice what you’re feeling. Is it stress about a work project, and you need more support from your team? Or is it something bigger?

If it’s compassion fatigue, take a break. This could mean taking a day off, or just blocking time on your calendar to work with no distractions. The goal is to take some time away from those who lean on you & focus on your own needs. You’ll still be there for them when you’re ready and able to return.

2 Recognize the difference in others.

It’s one thing for a coworker to vent to you from time to time about their boss or an annoying traffic jam from their ride in. We all need support sometimes. However, *you are not their therapist*. We’ll say it again for our HR folks— *you are not their therapist*. Coworkers may not realize the impact their sharing has on others. And if it’s something you think needs professional attention, find a gentle way to tell them that!

**Set Boundaries**

Setting boundaries is easier said than done, but it's an essential skill to master for anyone struggling with compassion fatigue. Check out our tips below!

Tips for Setting Boundaries

1. Set boundaries clearly, calmly, firmly, respectfully and in as few words as possible.
2. Do not justify, get angry or apologize for the boundary you are setting.
3. You are not responsible for the other person's reaction to the boundary you are setting.
4. If you feel selfish or guilty, remind yourself why you're setting the boundary.
5. Remind people of your boundaries if they cross them.

For more tips on setting boundaries, check out [this guide](#) from Healthline. Highlights include: learning to say no, safeguarding your space & more!

How to Support Your BIPOC Employees' Mental Health

For many employees, the pandemic has not been the only source of trauma these last few years. After footage of the police killing of an unarmed black man, George Floyd, was widely circulated in the news, reports of poorer mental health spiked, particularly among BIPOC communities.¹³ (For those who aren't familiar with this acronym, BIPOC stands for Black, Indigenous, People of Color, and is used to acknowledge the severe impact of systemic racial injustices on these particular communities.)¹⁴

We know that trauma has incredibly serious impacts on our mental and physical health, and racial trauma is no different.¹⁵ In fact, it can even impair key brain structures and circuitry.¹⁶ Though recent events such as George Floyd's murder have garnered a great deal of attention, it is important to recognize that racial violence is not new, and that many people have been paying close attention to these issues for a very long time. Every time a related event takes place, it brings feelings of trauma to the surface (this is called "[vicarious racism](#)").¹⁷



Promoting anti-racism in your workplace can play a large role in supporting the mental health of your BIPOC employees. Below are just a few suggestions for making your workplace safer and more supportive for BIPOC employees.

¹³ Verywell Mind, 2020

¹⁴ CBS News, 2020

¹⁵ Harvard Health, 2021

¹⁶ McEwan and Morrison, 2013

¹⁷ The Conversation, 2016

1 Educate Yourself. It can be draining for your BIPOC employees to feel the burden of educating their colleagues on their culture and the impacts of racism. Encourage your team to educate themselves about systemic racism and the BIPOC experience. You can start by sharing the anti-racism resource guides found [here](#) and [here](#), which include suggestions for articles, podcasts, books, films and more. We also highly recommend employers invest in comprehensive, high quality racial bias training for their teams.

2 Be Intentional. It is critical for leaders to be intentional about holding space for BIPOC employees. This means extending grace and compassion using both your words and your actions, and making an effort to genuinely see and hear your BIPOC employees for who they are beyond their job descriptions. Take time to check in with your BIPOC employees when you recognize they may be vulnerable and in need of support, like in the wake of new racial trauma. Our top recommendation? Help your BIPOC employees feel seen by affirming their experience. Here are some ideas for starting the conversation:

- “Please let me know how I can show up for you.”
- “Please take the time you need to process current events.”
- “I see you and I know you’re trying your best despite the circumstances.”
- “How can I support you through this?”

3 Ensure Cultural Competency in Your Mental Health Offerings. A major barrier to BIPOC individuals receiving mental healthcare is a lack of BIPOC and culturally competent mental health care providers. One study revealed that 83.6% of psychologists in the United States are White, while only 14.6% are people of color.¹⁸ Understandably, many BIPOC individuals don’t feel comfortable confiding in a mental health provider who doesn’t understand or validate their identity, experiences and struggles. If your company offers mental health benefits or other mental health resources, it is critical to ensure they are culturally competent and inclusive for all employees.

¹⁸ American Psychological Association, 2015

How to Respect Your Employees' Privacy While Supporting Their Mental Health

While awareness of mental health concerns is perhaps higher than ever, mental health is still an incredibly sensitive and personal subject for many. Privacy fears may deter some employees from using their employer-sponsored mental health benefits. For example, some employees may fear an employer-sponsored therapist will report information they share with the therapist back to their employer. Employees may also worry that revealing mental health challenges like suicidal thoughts or panic attacks could result in losing their job.

When discussing or introducing mental health resources, ***it is crucial that employers address these privacy concerns up-front. Employers should emphasize that everything an employee tells their therapist is confidential, and will not be shared with their employer or impact their position.*** Educating employees about HIPAA may be helpful if they remain skeptical. You can find a full summary of the HIPAA Privacy Rule [here](#). In essence, the HIPAA Privacy Rule dictates that therapists may only break employee confidentiality when:

1. The client presents an imminent danger to themselves or others. (For example, if the client states that they plan to go home and physically abuse another person after a session, their therapist must report this to the authorities.)
2. The therapist suspects child, elder or dependent adult abuse.
3. The therapist receives a court order requiring them to reveal certain information.
4. The client asks them to share! (For example, a client may want their primary care provider to speak with their therapist about certain treatment options.)¹⁹

Finally, employers should be careful to remind employees that while they support and care for their mental health, the company's HR team and other leaders are not mental health providers. You cannot directly help employees tackle their mental health concerns, but you can (and should!) set them up with the right resources.

¹⁹ [United States Department of Health and Human Services](#)

The Importance of Robust Employee Mental Health Benefits

Fact: Even employees with great health insurance lack access to mental healthcare. Only about half of mental health providers in the U.S. accept any insurance,²⁰ and as a result, those who do often aren't accepting new clients. Even pre-pandemic, 60% of employees who sought mental health care had to pay for it out-of-pocket.²¹

Many employers already offer an Employee Assistance Program (or "EAP"), which is often included as part of the employer's life or health insurance plan. However, these legacy products are outdated, and aren't built for today's employees. This is made clear by their dismally low engagement rates: the national average for EAP use within a company continues to be just 3% to 4%.²² Thankfully, there are new mental health benefits of the market built specifically for today's employees.

A mental health benefit in 2022 should provide an easy-to-use, digital interface to meet employees where they are. It should also treat employees as individuals, considering their preferences and offering a broad range of culturally competent, licensed therapists, ideally for multiple covered therapy sessions.²³ Lastly, a great mental health benefit should offer supplemental supportive tools and content to remind employees that the benefit is available to them, and to help support them in between therapy sessions.



Adequately supporting your employees' mental health requires a multifaceted approach, and robust [mental health benefits](#) alone are not sufficient. However, they are necessary to ensure your employees are well supported when they need it most.

²⁰ Quartz, 2016

²¹ Business Wire, 2020

²² Carchietta, 2015

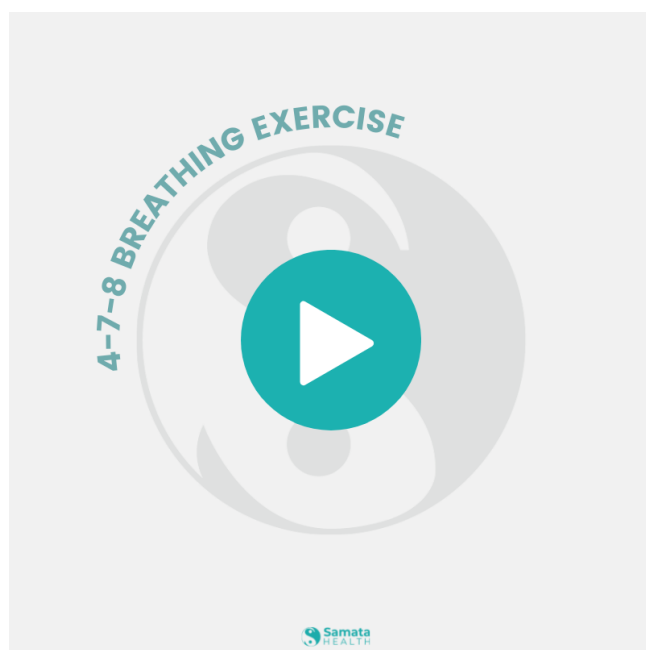
²³ HRZone, 2021

Exercises You Can Lead to Support Your Team

Quick mindfulness breaks are a great way to incorporate mental health awareness into your everyday workplace culture. While there are [many ways to practice mindfulness at work](#), we've compiled a few exercises below to get you started. Try using one to kick off your next staff meeting and help everyone feel more centered and present. These are great mindfulness tools that employees can use anywhere, anytime!

4-7-8 Breathing Exercise

Did you know that a simple breathing exercise can help employees relax & manage their stress? It can!



How to Practice with Your Team

[Click here and follow along for a breathing exercise from our team.](#)

You can also find similar exercises [here](#) and [here](#).

Why It Works: Mindfulness 101

Let's break it down. Our autonomic nervous system is the part of us that responds to anxiety. It is in charge of keeping us safe, and triggers the fight

or flight response. This is what tells us to run when we see, let's say, a bear. This system also controls our rest and relaxation response.²⁴

The thing is, we can't be in relaxation mode and fight or flight mode at the same time. If we turn one mode on, it suppresses the other. Deep, intentional breathing is one of the easiest ways to switch into rest & relaxation mode.²⁵

²⁴ Britannica, 2021

²⁵ Harvard Health, 2020

5-4-3-2-1 Exercise

Also known as the “five senses” exercise, 5-4-3-2-1 is an activity designed to make it easy to practice mindfulness quickly in any situation.

How To Do the Exercise With Your Team

Gather your team (in-person or virtually) and have them sit & get comfortable. Have everyone take a big “reset” breath, and then walk them through the exercise:

1. Notice five things you can *see*. This can be anything from a mark on the wall to something outside of the window.
2. Notice four things you can *feel*. Use what’s around you. Maybe it’s the texture of your shirt, the temperature of your desk, or the ground beneath your feet.
3. Notice three things you can *hear*. Maybe it’s the traffic outside or the hum of the air conditioner.
4. Notice two things you can *smell*. They may be pleasant or unpleasant, like a nearby candle or the hand sanitizer you used earlier.
5. Notice one thing you can *taste*. Maybe take a sip of water, chew some gum, or just notice the taste in your mouth.

Take a deep breath. And come back to the meeting.

Why It Works

It promotes mindfulness! Studies show that tapping into your five senses is a proven way to relax & soothe anxiety.²⁶

²⁶ [Journal of Oriental Neuropsychology, 2014](#)

Chocolate Exercise

Good news: chocolate can promote mindfulness *and* brighten your team's morale! (Tip: This exercise works best in person.)

How to Practice with Your Team

1. Find a sweet treat, like M&Ms or Hershey's Kisses.
2. Pass one out to each person.
3. Ask them to hold the chocolate in their hand and pay attention to how it feels in their fingers.
4. Ask them what it looks like or what the colors remind them of.
5. Have them turn the chocolate over in their fingers, noticing how it feels. Maybe have them close their eyes.
6. Ask everyone to smell their chocolate. Ask them to notice how the aroma makes them feel, and if it makes their mouths or stomachs tingle.
7. Next, have everyone place the chocolate in their mouth, but be sure to tell them not to chew or swallow yet. Have them notice how it feels and what they taste.
8. Have them chew the chocolate and notice the sensations. What it feels like, what it tastes like, and how that changes over time.
9. Finally, see if they can feel it move down into their stomach or recognize how they feel as a whole after the experience.

Why It Works

Mindfulness expert Jon Kabat-Zinn said it best: "When we taste with attention, even the simplest foods provide a universe of sensory experience." As described above, tapping into our senses can help relax our minds!²⁷

²⁷ University of Minnesota, 2016

About Samata Health

Samata Health is the first premium employee mental health benefit built specifically for small and midsize businesses. We make it easy for employers of all sizes to support their teams and build happier, healthier workforces with our premium benefit at affordable, usage-based rates.

On our digital platform, employees can instantly schedule therapy sessions with our expert, licensed therapists. Our matching algorithm accounts for employee preferences in their therapist's racial or ethnic background, sexual orientation, clinical specialties, cultural competencies and more.

On average, over 20% of our clients' employees schedule therapy sessions on our platform with their Samata Health benefit.

Along with our employee mental health benefit, we strengthen teams through supportive content and programming, including tailored Mental Health Master Classes led by our expert therapists.

Learn more on [our website](#) or connect with us directly at team@samatahealth.com!

“

Samata Health has been a fantastic partner. We've been supported from implementation and onwards, and their offerings are well utilized by our team. They are thoughtful partners and we're so glad to be working together!

KIM NGUYEN
DIRECTOR OF PEOPLE OPERATIONS AT ALLOY



“

We're working with Samata Health today to provide our employees the option to leverage one-on-one therapist sessions and team talk therapy sessions. With Samata, we've been able to support our employees and create a more inclusive space where mental healthcare is normalized.

SARAH BRAVER
VP OF PEOPLE AT GRAPHIKA



Peer Support Resources for HR Personnel & Leadership

HR professionals wear many hats, and the pandemic has only heightened the demands on HR teams. HR professionals everywhere must continue making difficult decisions affecting employees' health, finances and families amidst a global pandemic and economic uncertainty. Persistently caring for the needs of your team and organization can take a big toll, often leading to burnout. This is known as “compassion fatigue,” and before the pandemic, it was most often associated with healthcare workers.²⁸

Below are some resources where HR professionals can find community and opportunities to share their experiences with peers.

1. [Academy of Human Resources Development](#)
2. [SHRM Executive Network](#)
3. [International Association of Administrative Professionals](#)
4. [National Association of African Americans in Human Resources](#)

²⁸ [American Psychological Association, 2020](#)

Your Partner in Building a Happier, Healthier Workforce

