

When you're not in the right headspace, being at work can be difficult.

Whether it's depression, burnout, anxiety or something else, struggling with your mental health while you're waiting tables or sitting behind a desk can disrupt your life *and* your job.

But there's a stigma to taking time off to care for your mental health that's not present with physical health. The mindset is, "Just work, work, work, push through it and get to the other end and deal with it," says Jody Adewale, a Los Angeles-based psychologist and medical advisor for the mental health advocacy foundation, Made of Millions.

Addressing your mental health needs is important — and human. "It's not a character flaw or a character defect or a sign of weakness," says Adewale. "It's something that everyone I think on this planet will experience at one point or another in their life."

Life Kit asked mental health professionals how to spot an issue and what the options are when you do.

While we know there's no such thing as the perfect job, there *are* tools for both employees and managers to make work a better place to be.

---

**Sponsor Message**

---

---

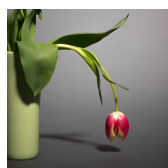
## 1. Look for signs of declining mental health

First, check-in with your body. Are you more tense than usual? Do you lose sleep or not eat as much?

Even if you aren't the person experiencing poor mental health, you can be a good coworker by taking note of the five signs of emotional suffering.

- Personality change in a way that seems drastic
- Agitation or uncharacteristically angry demeanor
- Withdrawn from social interaction
- Poor hygiene (substance abuse or physical hygiene)
- Feelings of hopelessness

These five signs from the national mental health non-profit Give an Hour are clear ways to determine if it's time to check in with your colleague or tend to your own mental health issues, says Hassel Aviles, the co-founder of Not 9 to 5, a global non-profit focusing on mental health advocacy for the foodservice and hospitality sector.



LIFE KIT

**Burnout Isn't Just Exhaustion. Here's How To Deal With It**

And you don't need to mark every item on this list – spotting even one could be a reason to check in with yourself or someone you care about. From there, do some triage and be honest with yourself.

Could it help to switch up some habits? Do you need to vent to a friend, get some more movement or minimize social media time? Or, is it time to raise a concern at the office?

## 2. Have a conversation with a trusted person who can introduce you to resources

After realizing that you need help, reach out to a colleague that you trust.

---

### Sponsor Message

---

A loyal and reliable coworker can help you vent or think things through. If you need more help, a supervisor might be the best person to talk to, given they may be informed about resources that could help with mental health. Human resources can be a good option as well, but be mindful that HR typically has the company's best interest in mind, Adewale says.

If your employer is retaliating against you because of your mental health condition, you can contact the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission to file a claim.

One way to address your needs is to use the DEAR method in a meeting with HR, management or your trusted coworker.

- **D** - Describe the situation using facts.
- **E** - Express how the situation made you feel or how it affected you.
- **A** - Assert your needs.

- **R** - Reinforce the outcome and how it will be a win-win.

Part two of this method follows the acronym MAN, and will help remind you of mindset in these conversations:

- **M** - Be mindful of your words, and stay in the present moment.
- **A** - Be assertive. If you're raising a mental health issue at work, it's important for everyone involved, so stand your ground!
- **N** - Negotiate. Your office might not be able to shift to your ideal hours, but perhaps you could work together to set firmer boundaries for emails or start actually honoring lunch breaks. Work with your manager to find solutions.



LIFE KIT

### How To Start Therapy

And remember, your boss or your coworker is not your therapist in this situation. If you get a burn or a cut at the office, you wouldn't expect your supervisor to know how to treat you, says Aviles. They are there to direct you to help.

One resource your trusted person may point you to is an employee assistance program or EAP. This is a service that many companies have. It provides employees with a handful of therapy sessions at no charge.

---

**Sponsor Message**

---

### 3. Sometimes you need to take a break

If therapy isn't enough, it might help to take time off from work. It could be anywhere from one day to several months, but taking time to process, rest, heal and seek proper treatment can make all the difference.

A good start to pursuing this option is to ask your human resources department about short-term disability leave. Short-term disability leave allows you to take time off for a sickness or injury, including your mental health



LIFE KIT

**You aren't lazy. You just need to slow down**

Vermont journalist Siobhan Neela-Stock took over two months off work to heal from a less-than-ideal work environment. When she tweeted about it, she was flooded with positive responses. Some were from people who want to take time off from work and other notes were from people who had.

Neela-Stock says more and more people are discussing mental health leave as a viable option.

"I guess the good thing about this silver lining is that we're, again, talking about it more and we're realizing that a lot of us are going through this. And, that there is a way out," Neela-Stock said.

### 4. Create a psychologically safe workplace

The quickest path to mentally healthy workers is mentally healthy workspaces.

"Psychological safety" is a term coined by researcher Amy Edmondson. It focuses on the need to create safe environments at work, where people can share how they are actually doing without the threat of losing out on a promotion or big project.

Aviles says employers and employees can create psychological safety anywhere—from an office to a kitchen. It all depends on if you're able to be vulnerable with each other.

---



LIFE KIT

### **Leadership At Work Is An Art Form. Here's How To Practice It.**

Remember that It's also important to engage with your team by centering voices that are most affected by something. Employers don't need to have all of the answers, but they should be transparent and open to feedback.

One last tip: It's okay to make mistakes. In a psychologically safe environment, an employee learns from their mistakes and uses the opportunity to grow. This is the opposite of the top-down approach where the boss chastises an employee for making mistakes.

"And that is what creates innovation. That is what fosters creativity that is with us to really grow, that psychological safety in the workplace," says Aviles.

## **Resources**

Here's a non-exhaustive list of resources for workplace mental health:

- The CDC offers a wealth of resources, including a glossary of terms and suggestions for managers.