



MENTAL HEALTH FIRST AID – ADULT

SESSION Q&A

Disclaimer: This material and the information presented in the accompanying **Adult Mental Health First Aid** presentation are general guidelines and recommendations. While backed by research, it does not take into consideration any medical conditions or unique circumstances and is not a substitute for individual care or professional medical advice. The content shared is for informational or educational purposes only.

If you or someone you know is in crisis, contact the Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-TALK (8255), or dial 911 in case of emergency.

A certain percentage of every employer will have workers with substance use disorder. Some Americans suffer from dual diagnoses – substance use disorder and mental illness. Can you please share some thoughts around that?

Yes – this is referred to as co-morbidity. That means that when someone lives with one mental illness, they are at a higher risk of developing a second mental illness. Many people that live with a mental illness will also use substances to self-medicate. They may use drugs and alcohol as a coping mechanism to deal with the pain of the mental illness. The idea would be to get these individuals help so the mental health diagnosis can be assessed and treated effectively, and they can also learn healthy coping mechanisms.

What are some healthy ways of dealing with stress and anxiety? Can we do this naturally without Rx drugs?

If medication is not deemed necessary by a physician, self-care/self-help is the best way to help reduce stress and anxiety without medications. Talk therapy can be a great way to learn what self-care/self-help methods work for each individual. Engaging in self-care every day/week can help build resilience. When you have resilience, you are able to bounce back from stressful situations more quickly.

As a small organization we used to do team outings, yoga, have a massage therapist come in, etc. but my boss expressed that we should limit the amount of these types of activities because it is “one more thing” that we must do and most of our employees are not going to do it. What are other mental well-being wellness alternatives to recommend to someone who thinks this way or what ways would you recommend gaining leadership support?

Offering these things at the workplace is great – and certainly not mandatory – so whoever chooses to partake should be allowed to do so. You can also send weekly/bi-weekly/monthly tips on how to de-stress. This way folks can do it if they want to. I have also heard of some companies having a small “quiet” room and it allows people to decompress during the middle of the workday. This room may have a couch, soft music, waterfall, etc. to set the tone of the space. Other teams may have a standing “walking day” and those that want to enjoy a group walk can participate. As long as it’s not mandatory, usually leadership will support it. EAP can be a great resource to help navigate this conversation. If programs and activities were previously offered, try to get feedback from participants, and share any engagement data to demonstrate how many employees value these offerings. If programs were not previously offered, consider an employee survey to learn what types of activities employees would value and participate in and share this data with leadership.

I know someone who needs counseling for mental illness but cannot afford it. What are your recommended low or no-cost resources for anyone in that situation?

I would first see if they have an EAP (see below) through their employer. If not, see if they have a household member that has an EAP through their employer. EAP is a free service offered to all employees (no matter your medical plan status). This is a great starting point for free counseling services. Each individual will get a certain number of free counseling sessions (the amount varies between employers). Once they have used their free services, the counselor will determine if they need additional counseling sessions and help refer them to counselors that are in network and ones they can afford. If no one has access to EAP, you can go to your local Health Department to find low/no cost recommendations. Another nationwide resource is: [Affordable Counseling | Affordable Therapy | Open Path Collective](#)

What is an EAP?

An employee assistance program (EAP) is an employee benefit program that assists employees with personal problems and/or work-related problems that may impact their job performance, health, mental and emotional well-being. An EAP is more than just “counseling” – some can also help with potential life stressors like retirement planning, financial well-being, or even family counseling. Employers typically provide a certain number of free sessions per year to each employee and household member. Contact your employer to learn more about your EAP resources.

What kind of advice can you give someone who has considered seeking a therapist/doctor for mental health?

Remember when looking for a counselor, it is not “one size fits all.” It may take a few counselors before finding the one you connect with. Continue to give counseling a chance and be open minded to the ideas/thoughts a counselor may present.

Can you explain more about paranoia and psychosis as possible symptoms of mental illness.

Paranoia and psychoses are not the same thing – only a professional can determine if paranoia is a symptom of mental illness. Paranoia and psychosis are not a mental illness itself.

The definition of paranoia is a mental condition characterized by delusions or persecution, unwarranted jealousy, or exaggerated self-importance. Paranoia can be a symptom of psychosis.

Psychosis is defined as a severe mental disorder in which thought and emotions are so impaired that contact is lost with external reality. Psychosis can be a symptom of some mental illnesses (bipolar disorder, psychotic depression, or schizophrenia). Other psychosis symptoms can include delusions, hallucinations, and suspiciousness.

Is there any data on the time frame of a person who decides to commit suicide and them doing it?

There is no time frame – however we do know the sooner someone can get the help they need, the more likely recovery will be. We also know that 3 months after the onset of seeking hospital treatment is when people need to be most vigilant – this is when an individual is at the highest risk of attempting suicide. We also know that if someone appears to have a “quick cure”, it can mean that they have decided to follow through on their suicidal plan and that is a crucial time for the individual to have professional support. All threats of suicide should be taken seriously.

For the poll regarding the number of people affected by suicide – can you please source where you got 135?

A recent study done by Julie Cerel (2019), published in the journal of American Association of Suicidology, shows that each suicide resulted in 135 people being affected. Article: [How Many People Are Exposed to Suicide? Not Six \(losscs.org\)](#)

What factors do you think affect the higher stats for men – specifically middle-aged white males?

We know that men are at a higher risk than women. Men complete suicide 4x more than women. We also know that people who live in rural areas are also at a higher risk. More white men live in rural areas than any other race. The most at risk states are Wyoming, Montana, Alaska, Utah, Idaho, and New Mexico – this is due in part because of the isolation and weather. Rural areas also tend to have higher rates of gun ownership – and we know men tend to use firearms, and other lethal means, when dying by suicide. Men also tend to define themselves by a social construct of what “success” is and middle age is a time when men are confronted with aging, retirement, or not feeling successful enough.

During the presentation you spoke about your personal experience with your friend. When she expressed her plan for how she would commit suicide, how did you reply to that/deescalate the situation? What steps should be taken once someone has admitted that they have a plan?

The first thing is to not overreact. If you overreact, they could start to shut down the conversation. Speak with them calmly and ask questions in a nonjudgmental way. People who are contemplating suicide are often relieved to be able to talk about it with someone. Once someone admits they have a plan, you need to get them help right away. Never leave a suicidal person alone. Call 911 – you can never get in trouble

for this. Tell the person that you are calling 911 to prepare them that help is arriving. When 911 arrives, they will evaluate the situation and go from there. If you are not physically with them, still call 911 and see if someone can be with them until help arrives. You can also call that [National Suicide Hotline](#) for guidance on this conversation – this is a special crisis hotline that can assist with this in the moment (1-800-273-8255).

What can you do to still make someone feel supported when you have advised them to seek professional help because you know that you do not have all the right answers? Please also provide any guidance on how to get someone help when they simply do not feel like they need it/refuse it

Sometimes, all we can do is continue to listen and suggest self-help and professional help. If we can get them to a counselor a few times, sometime this is all they need to learn a few self-help tips. Also, most people just need a listening ear – they need to feel like they matter, and they are not alone. Being honest with them about your limitations is okay too. For example: “I can see that you are hurting, and I am here to listen. There are also trained professionals that can help you better than I can.” It’s also okay to set boundaries for yourself.

After we ask that hard question and recommend that they get professional help, what do you recommend doing next? Do we alert their friend, family member or HR?

If at work, always follow your processes and procedures – HR should have this for you. If someone is threatening to take their life, always call 911 and never leave a suicidal person by themselves. Always be honest with the person and let them know that you are going to call their support system – let them know that you are concerned and care about them. If not at work, ask them if you might involve someone else who loves and cares for them. Studies show that family/friend support increases treatment success.

If someone tells you their suicide *plan*, does that mean that it is more serious than if they mention that they are *considering* suicide?

Yes, if someone has a plan, this means that have given suicide a lot of thought and it is only a matter of when. Call 911 and let them evaluate the situation. They will typically be taken to a hospital where trained professional can assess and evaluate the individual.

How can we help others understand what anxiety/depression really feels like when some just think it can be easily ignored or overcome?

Talking about mental illness openly can help educate people. This has been such a hidden/taboo topic that many people do not understand. Be the change yourself. Be mindful of your language surrounding mental illness and suicide. The more we talk about it, the more educated others will become. You can also use a physical illness as an example - let’s use hypertension (high blood pressure) as our example. In both cases, there are organ systems that are not working optimally. You would never tell someone that they were imagining high blood pressure, nor would you tell them to simply “lower it.”

What is the confidentiality around using an EAP and your employer?

Through HIPAA (Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act), the information shared with an EAP is confidential and will not be shared with the employer. The employer will only have access to aggregate data such as how many employees are accessing the EAP, how many counseling sessions were had, types of counseling sought (marital, parental, etc.) but they will not share individual data or information. In addition, most EAP's use licensed mental health professionals who are bound to confidentiality laws.

What are some resources that you would recommend to help manage stress if you feel you are always busy?

If your car doesn't have gas in the tank, you can't get from point A to point B. We have to make time to fill our gas tank up. Just like with physical wellness, we have to make our mental health a priority. We go to the gym, eat healthy, and go to the doctor for our annual wellness exam. Our mental health needs to become a priority. Take baby steps. I recommend 15 minutes a day of self-care. 15 minutes is not a long time, and we typically spend more time watching T.V. or surfing the internet, than 15 minutes a day.

Where do we look for reputable providers of Mental Health First Aid Training?

You are welcome to contact me, Kyla Montes, KYLA.Montes@atriumhealth.org or you can reach out to your EAP, medical carrier (some now offer this training), or visit the Mental Health First Aid "find a course or instructor" page [here](#).

Thoughts on burnout and mental health? How does the way we work affect our mental health?

Burnout can absolutely influence your mental health and work production. Burnout can cause de-motivation, lack of energy, neglect of responsibilities, and more. If you think you are suffering from burnout, have an honest conversation with your management. EAP can also be a great resource for burnout and how to approach the conversation and manage the stress you are experiencing. It is crucial that we balance work and leisure for our brains to function optimally.

In a work environment that does not take mental well-being seriously, how do you recommend we handle this/express our needs?

It's okay to voice your concerns/opinions in a respectful way. If you don't speak up for yourself, no one will speak up for you. Be honest with those around you about what you need. If we don't take care of ourselves mentally, we won't be able to give our best at work – our tank will be empty all the time. Have some *reasonable* suggestions ready to share about what you need. Another great resource is EAP – they can also help you manage how to talk about this with management and how to come up with a plan that will work for you.