

POPULATION HEALTH & WELL-BEING

Five Tips for Employers to Help Their Staff Avoid the Summertime Blues

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The beginning of summer is a great time for employers to focus on employee self-care and well-being. June can be a fun and exciting time, but it can also bring unique emotional challenges for your workforce. While many of your employees think of summertime as the season of vacations and cookouts, others may be managing anxiety due to travel, schedule changes, increased family commitments and more.

Given this dynamic, here are five tips for employers to help employees enjoy the summer season:

1 Promote Wellness Activities that Prioritize Employee Self-Care

Support your employees in prioritizing activities that help them to relax and recharge as self-care is important for mental and emotional well-being. In the workplace, take time to do things that allow employees to feel relaxed, whether it's promoting a chair massage, meditation strategies, fitness breaks or sharing nutritional information on healthy summer eating.

2 Ask Your Employee Resource Group(s), Carriers and/or Vendors to Host Webinars on Mental and Emotional Well-Being

Promoting a webinar about mental and emotional well-being is always a great idea and focusing on summer health is a great place to start. Some specific topics could include outdoor yoga and mindfulness, the wellness power of laughter and fun, and setting commitment boundaries with friends and family. These topics, and many others, will also show that you appreciate your employees' work/life balance and their lives outside of work.

3 Establish Summer-Specific Groups or Challenges

Summer equals outdoors for many people, including your employees. Consider creating some outdoor-focused groups and challenges that align with this reality. An example might be a lunch break or after-work walking group. Another idea would be a "hydration challenge," given how quickly dehydration can occur during high summer temperatures. You should also ensure leadership participation and promotion in these programs to show their importance to the organization.



4

Offer Flexible Work Arrangements to Accommodate Changes to Employee Summer Schedules

While this may not be feasible for every organization, offering “summer hours” and other flexible work schedules is a proven and popular way to reduce stress and anxiety among your employees. If this isn’t practical, promoting the use of paid time off to ‘relax and recharge’ is another way to help your employees. Various studies have shown the positive physical and mental benefits of time away from work, especially for employees who tend to consistently work a lot of hours. Work-life balance is top-of-mind in the summer months, and it is important to ensure that employees set boundaries to help protect their emotional well-being.

5

Foster a Positive Work Environment

Creating a workplace that recognizes, supports and acknowledges the importance of positive mental health is one of the most important things an employer can do to help improve their organization. This is especially true during high-stress times of the year. Providing an employee assistance program (EAP) allows your employees to seek help for mental health concerns. Normalizing conversations about mental health within the workplace is a great way to help reduce the stigma often associated with mental health topics.



These tips are examples of how mental health topics in June can be combined to promote a more comprehensive approach to mental health throughout the year. It is important to remember that mental health is a complex and multifaceted issue that requires ongoing attention and support. No matter what approach you choose, the overarching message should always be that your employees can ask for help inside and/or outside of your organization.





Communicating to Your Employees

When communicating with employees about summer-related stress and wellness challenges, here is some action-oriented language you can use:

Practice Self-Care. Prioritize activities that help you relax and recharge. Self-care is important for your mental and emotional well-being. Take time to do things that make you feel relaxed, whether it's getting a massage, connecting with family/friends or physical activity.

Stay Hydrated. Drinking plenty of water is important for your physical and mental health, especially if you take medications that cause dehydration. Dehydration can lead to headaches, fatigue and other negative symptoms. Carry a water bottle with you, and drink plenty of fluids throughout the day.

Manage Stress. Summer can be a busy time with travel, family gatherings and other social events. Be mindful of your stress levels and take steps to manage stress when it arises. Allow yourself to have fun. If you tend to work a lot, schedule some time off. This might include taking a break from social events, practicing relaxation techniques, taking a walk, going for a bike ride or trying a new outdoor activity.

Cultivate Laughter. A good laugh can do more than lighten a mood. It can also help lower cortisol, the body's stress hormone. Letting out a giggle can help boost feel-good brain chemicals called endorphins. A deep chuckle can help relax your muscles and lower stress hormones. Families can find ways to laugh together by watching comedies or finding humor in life's simplest things.

Set Boundaries. It's important to set boundaries to help protect your emotional wellbeing. Say "no" to commitments you are not interested in or don't have the energy for. Also, consider setting boundaries with family or friends who may have different expectations or needs during the summer.

Practice Mindfulness. Mindfulness can be a powerful tool for helping to manage emotions and reduce stress. Take time to be present in the moment and notice your thoughts and feelings without judgment. You might try meditating, taking a mindful walk or simply taking a few deep breaths throughout the day.

Seek Support. Don't hesitate to seek support if you're struggling with your emotions. Talk to a trusted friend or family member or consider speaking with a mental health professional. They can help you develop coping strategies and provide guidance for managing difficult emotions.



About the Author

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Dr. Axler is a board-certified child, adolescent and adult psychiatrist with more than 30 years of experience in academic, private practice and insurance settings. He is a Fellow of the American Psychiatric Association. He serves on several executive committees and organizations, including the Georgia Psychiatric Physicians Association and the Georgia Council on Child and Adolescent Psychiatry.



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