



Addressing Holiday Stress and its Impact at Work



The holidays are supposed to be a time of joy and excitement, but for many employees, it can also be a difficult season for any number of reasons. For some, the extra pressure of facing looming year-end deadlines during a shortened work month, combined with additional personal, financial, and family obligations, can cause holiday stress during this time of year.

However, for others, the holidays can bring forth more long-term issues to the surface. Whether they recently lost a loved one, are experiencing financial issues, or facing any number of other challenges, the holidays can compound these problems and create further stress, anxiety and depression.

No matter what the issue, the holidays have the potential to cause stress and anxiety, which can spill over into the workplace and lead to a reduction in productivity, among other concerns. It's important for managers and supervisors, as well as HR professionals, to understand how to identify and address issues stemming from employees' holiday stress in the workplace.

Identifying Potential Holiday Stress Issues

There are some key signs that can indicate your employees may be experiencing higher-than-normal holiday stress or anxiety, especially during this busy time of year, including:

- Change in normal behavior, such as becoming uncharacteristically irritable or withdrawn
- Change in appearance or hygiene
- Lack of focus or concentration
- Unusual tension with other colleagues
- Change in quality of work performance/reduction in productivity
- Absenteeism/Presenteeism

These signs can all indicate a potential issue, but the earlier managers or HR professionals identify a particular problem and guide these employee toward helpful resources, the sooner that employee can get the help they need.



Helping Employees Manage Holiday Stress

There are a few things managers or HR professionals can do to help boost morale and reduce stress among their entire team during this time of year, including:

- Incorporate wellness breaks to give employees a chance to refocus, such as a walk outside or quick team yoga session
- Help employees prioritize projects to manage pending deadlines that may be creating additional stress
- Encourage employees to stay home when sick helps to avoid spreading illness among the team, and gives the employee the time they need to get healthy
- Motivate employees to work together as a team to share the workload and avoid some employees taking on too much extra work when others take time off
- Educate employees about financial wellness or other related programs that can assist them with budget concerns and enable them to plan ahead for holiday expenses

When individual employees show signs of a more serious problem, it's important to step in quickly when appropriate. While many employees may show some signs of temporary stress, prolonged issues should be addressed as soon as possible for the health and safety of the employee.

As a manager, make sure to loop in HR and document all interactions with the employee about a more serious issue to ensure all appropriate guidelines are followed. These discussions should be held in private out of respect for the employee and should be compassionate and understanding and take into account the root cause of the issue at hand.

When necessary, guide employees to available resources, including HR or an Employee Assistance Program, which can help address or resolve a wide variety of concerns.

Available Resources to Help Holiday Stress

According to a 2014 survey from the Kaiser Family Foundation, 79 percent of all employers with 200 or more employees offer an EAP, yet many employees may not be aware of this service. It is critical that managers, in addition to HR, know about the program in order to recommend it to employees as needed.

To raise awareness, HR teams can provide managers and employees with materials about the EAP, especially during high-stress seasons, so they have the information handy if they want to take advantage of this service. An EAP is generally available to employees at no cost to them, making it a free and available resource to help them address concerns during the holidays and throughout the year.

Programs often offer short-term assistance to address a number of personal or professional concerns, including stress, depression, family issues, substance abuse and more. Services often



include confidential counseling with a licensed, professional counselor by phone and/or in person to help an individual get through a tough time.

For those employees who may need further support, EAP specialists can direct participants to qualified long-term assistance. Many EAPs also offer work/life support, which can be a huge help during the holidays. This service can help employees locate financial counselors, childcare or other support services that they may need to help relieve some of the added holiday stress they are experiencing. HR and management can follow a number of other steps to help employees who experience difficulties during the holidays, such as:

- Encourage employees to keep an eye out for each other and to help one another if they notice a colleague is going through a difficult period. Co-workers are often in closer proximity to other employees on a daily basis and will be the first to notice the key signs of stress, as opposed to Managers and HR professionals.
- Consider expanding schedule flexibility to allow employees to attend holiday events at their children's schools or other family obligations that typically arise during the holidays. For many people, family is the central focus during the holidays, so this can reduce the pressure many employees feel that can impact their performance at work.
- Guide employees toward your company's financial and physical wellness programs as well as the EAP. Having a resource to help manage money can help with stress related to financial concerns, and taking better care of themselves physically can also have an impact on their mental state.

With the holidays officially in full swing, many employees may be feeling the stress of the season weighing upon them. From anxiety over too much to do in too little time to the potential effects of more serious conditions, employees can experience any number of difficulties at this time of year. Employers can play a critical role in ensuring employees have support and are aware of resources that can provide assistance during this time and throughout the year.

Solutions EAP provides free, short-term, and confidential counseling for employees and their families.

Call **1-800-526-3485** for information and a confidential appointment.

www.solutions-eap.com