

## EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

# HOW TO BECOME A MENTAL HEALTH ALLY

### *You can play a role in supporting the well-being of an organization*

There are few experiences more isolating than suffering with a mental health condition. People who have never felt more than some occasional blues or anxiety won't likely understand the depth of distress that a serious mental health problem can cause. They may observe you routinely going through the motions of your day, while internally, you're miserable.

Plus, you're worried about telling anyone how you feel for fear of being ridiculed. Some people's inconsiderate use of language about mental health — such as referring to others as "crazy" — can quickly cause a person to clam up to avoid becoming a topic of office conversation.

**Mental health allies** are people who create safe spaces where others can feel comfortable discussing their mental state and seeking treatment. Allies share their own mental health stories, and they encourage struggling individuals to seek help.

- To be a mental health ally, educate yourself and your colleagues about behavioral health issues. Prepare to talk one-on-one with teammates who might be struggling, use supportive language, and encourage your work group to be sensitive to others' mental health challenges.
- Sometimes an informal conversation with someone is all that's needed; other times, particularly when a person is in crisis, a next step for safety is indicated. Mental health allies are attuned to listen for the differences, knowing where their own role begins and ends.
- When someone is struggling with a mental health problem, it's usually difficult for them to request help. Eliminate one barrier by starting the conversation yourself. Ask simple questions like, "I noticed you've been having trouble with things lately; what can I do to help?" This creates a safe space for someone to talk about their problem and move toward assistance without needing to seek it out.
- Having a workplace culture where colleagues demonstrate understanding and empathy helps people feel more comfortable seeking mental health support.
- By sharing your own mental health experience, whether it's with a serious lifelong mental illness or your daily struggles with anxiety, you open the door for people to see themselves in your story and feel less alone.

