

# REDUCING BARRIERS TO HELP

Are there different factors in your workplace that could be contributing to why employees are keeping quiet surrounding mental health issues? Most likely. There has been a dramatic shift in the healthcare system in recent years as it is becoming increasingly evident that physical health and mental health care can no longer be provided in a siloed manner as they are intimately intertwined. In the business world, behavioral and mental health need to be prioritized. It is also important that your company is focusing on preventative measures that enhance protective factors and minimize risk factors. As with most programs and initiatives in the corporate world, this focus and support must start at the top – with your company’s most senior level leaders. It also needs to be infiltrated throughout the entire workforce and, where possible, include external partners and vendors. Without leadership support, your company may actually be inadvertently increasing the barriers to care for your employees. This document is to help your company assess for barriers that may prevent someone from seeking help at work.



## POSSIBLE BARRIERS

There are both internal and external barriers to seeking help in the workplace. The following list is not comprehensive and other areas of pertinence to your workplace should be examined. See examples below and tips to help reduce these barriers:

## RESTRICTIVE AND/OR LIMITED EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS

Employee Assistance Programs are valuable resources for employees; however, as with many resources, not all EAPs are created equally.

**TIPS:** It’s important to do your research prior to securing an EAP vendor. If your company has an internal EAP, it will be essential that they support this focus and initiative on suicide or that may be an additional barrier. See our document, “EAP Fact Sheet” to learn more about EAPs.





## CORPORATE CULTURE

Your company's culture may be a barrier to care if negative stigma and/or a lack of focus on employee wellbeing is the norm. Employees in this type of cultural environment may be less likely to report concerns and may be less likely to ask for help out of fear of embarrassment, or in some industries, fear of losing their job.

**TIPS:** Creating a corporate culture of inclusion, acceptance, and caring is crucial in fostering an environment where employees feel comfortable and safe reaching out for help for themselves or a colleague. Check out our module for C-suite leadership for tips on how to accomplish this.

## EMPLOYEE BENEFITS

Corporate benefit packages may be barriers to care if your company does not include mental health care coverage. It is important to maintain a strong partnership with your Benefits team (if you have one) and to communicate the importance of overall and holistic employee health and well-being. For employers that don't have capacity to provide many resources, it's especially important to create partnerships with community resources where possible and promote those resources to your employees.

**TIPS:** If you offer health insurance, ensure insurance covers mental health services like counseling and therapy and substance abuse treatment. Better insurance coverage includes unlimited access to therapy or treatment services, affordable copays, and reasonably set deductibles that do not inhibit access. If your company doesn't offer health insurance to all employees, you'll need to think of other resources you can connect the uninsured to. This could be free or affordable resources in your community or provide information to access the Health Insurance Marketplace or other streams of accessing health care like through Medicare or Medicaid programs.



## LACK OF PERSONAL FINANCIAL RESOURCES

Co-pays, deductibles, and co-insurance may be financial barriers to seeking care for some individuals.

**TIPS:** Companies can be proactive and survey employees to determine if financial barriers are preventing accessing mental health care. Companies can seek out and disseminate to employees different ways to eliminate or reduce the cost of common treatment like psychotherapy (talk therapy) or visits/consultations with a psychiatrist. Companies can provide employees with referrals to reduced and no-fee providers, as well as sliding scale providers in their community. In addition, companies can share links and information for free online resources.





## LACK OF COMMUNITY RESOURCES

If your employees do not have access to community resources or live in communities with few or no mental health resources in the community due this can result in a barrier to care and may actually increase the cost to the company and/or the individual employee in need. Additionally, if your workplace does not foster good relationships with the resources that are available, this may be another deterrent from help-seeking.

**TIPS:** Create external partnerships with mental health resources, or even medical personnel in the community who have expertise in mental health services and suicide prevention who can provide access to mental health services. Technology is helping close rural disparity. You can connect employees to online therapy services.

## LACK OF OR NEGATIVE RELATIONSHIP WITH LAW ENFORCEMENT



Strained or tense relationships with first responders, namely law enforcement, may also be a barrier to help-seeking for your employees. If your company has a Community Relations team, it is a great idea to take them as partners on this topic to foster a good relationship with the local police department.

**TIPS:** Create an ongoing relationship with local law enforcement that demonstrates a partnership used during a crisis. Have law enforcement information and conversations with key leaders in the business discuss how and when to contact them as well as what procedures will be implemented when needed.

## LACK OF AWARENESS/ EDUCATION



Without knowledge or understanding of mental health, an employee who is struggling may not know what they're experiencing is mental health related and how to get help.

**TIPS:** Promote mental health and wellness publicly in the workplace. This can be as simple as a company-wide email announcing a pledge to support mental health of all employees or a more robust public awareness campaign that includes posters and other collateral that employees can take home.