

How to help a depressed employee



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Depression is a serious medical condition that impacts 264 million people worldwide.¹ It can touch every part of people's lives, including how they perform at work.

- Each year, depression affects more than 19 million American adults.²
- At any one time, 1 employee in 20 is experiencing depression.²
- In 2015, the costs related to depression were estimated at \$210.5 billion.³

In the workplace, signs of depression can look like:

- Looking or sounding sad
- Making more errors, getting less done
- Being moody or having conflict with peers
- Being sleepy or having problems concentrating
- Arriving late or missing work
- Talking about wanting to die, that life isn't worth living or thoughts of suicide

Here are some steps to help an employee who seems depressed:

- **Reach out in private.** This can be as easy as saying, "Is this a good time to talk? I'm genuinely concerned about you."
- **Focus on the changes in their behavior.** "You've been late to work and seem sad. That's not like you."
- **Offer support.** "If there's something you want to talk about, I'm here for you."
- **Listen.** You cannot solve their problems, but you can provide a caring presence.

• **Assess for risk.** If the employee is having suicidal thoughts or making statements about ending his or her life, here are some tips for lending support:

- Ask the person if he or she is suicidal. This does not plant the idea of suicide and it allows for a conversation.
- Take all threats seriously
- Call a suicide hotline to get advice. National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: **1-800-273-TALK** En Español: **1-888-628-9454**
- Don't leave a suicidal person alone
- Call 911

• **Encourage them to get help.** If there is not a safety concern, give the number to their Employee Assistance Program and encourage them to reach out to their health care provider.

• **Provide work solutions.** Ask how you can help get them back on track at work. They may need some temporary help, time off work or reduced hours.

• **Follow up.** Check in and repeat the steps above.

Many people suffer with depression because they feel embarrassed or fear seeking help. And it can affect productivity, morale and success. It's important to be aware, reach out in an empathetic way and provide support. It can make all the difference in the life of an employee.

¹Ritchie, Hannah and Roser, Max. [Our world in data](#). Accessed January 5, 2021.

²Croft, Harry. [What to do when an employee is depressed: A guide for supervisors](#). Accessed January 5, 2021.

³Kuhl, Emily A. [Quantifying the cost of depression](#). Accessed January 5, 2021.

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