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## 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 increase stress during this time of year.

However, for others, the holidays can bring other, 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 among these employees.

No matter 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 both how to identify and address issues stemming from employees' holiday stress in the workplace.

### ***Identifying Potential Issues***

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

- Change in "normal" (predictable) behavior, such as becoming uncharacteristically irritable or withdrawn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 problem and guide an employee toward helpful resources, the sooner that employee can get the help they need.

### ***Helping Employees Manage Holiday Stress***

Compassion, flexibility and creativity are key to help boost morale and reduce stress among the entire team during this time of year. For HR and benefits professionals, managers and supervisors, it is important to be understanding of what employees are experiencing in their personal lives right now. Have realistic expectations and encourage your teams to do the same for their colleagues and direct reports. Establish policies, whether formal or informal, that let employees know you have their back, including:

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- Remind and encourage employees to take their earned time off, even if they are not traveling this year. Everyone needs a break to avoid burnout
- Provide access to fitness and mental health apps, programs and other resources
- Remember that some employees may have their kids home over the holidays with no childcare support – try to offer flexible hours over the holidays to work with their schedules
- Avoid scheduling too many calls/meetings that eat up employees' productive time
- Ask that managers, supervisors and employees curtail after-hours emails whenever possible
- Help employees prioritize projects to manage pending deadlines that may be creating additional stress
- 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
- Let employees know about financial wellness or other related programs that can help them budget and plan ahead for holiday expenses

Providing additional resources can also help support employees facing challenges or experiencing additional stress or anxiety. Consider offering trainings focused on resiliency, stress management, or managing expectations to give employees strategies to not only cope but thrive. Connect employees with the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) or other similar support systems offered by the employer or available in the local community. If your organization partners with an EAP, they can be a great resource to provide expert suggestions, trainings, support and more, now and throughout the year. Collaborating with internal and external resources can provide information, resources and support to help us ride the wave instead of getting knocked over by it.

While the holidays can create extra stress for employees, employers can play a critical role in ensuring they have support and are aware of resources that can provide assistance during this time and throughout the year. Planning ahead provides employers an opportunity to help their workforce adapt, cope and manage expectations in the weeks and months ahead, leading to a calmer and more joyful holiday season for all.

## ***How Health Advocate Can Help***

LVBCH has partnered with Health Advocate to provide special rates and terms for coalition members to offer the Employee Assistance+Work/Life program to their employees. Health Advocate's EAP+Work/Life program provides support for employees as well as managers/supervisors and human resources staff, helping them cope with a wide range of challenges all year round, including during the holidays.

To learn more about how Health Advocate can support you and your organization, visit [www.HealthAdvocate.com](http://www.HealthAdvocate.com) or contact Suzanne Starker at 215-880-6364 or [ssarker@healthadvocate.com](mailto:ssarker@healthadvocate.com).