

January 17, 2025: Mental Health and Well-being Roundtable

The term “member” applies to those who attended the Roundtable and contributed by speaking or in the chat. Individual names and library names are not used to keep information anonymous.

A brief overview of mental health and first aid training started the discussion. Highlights:

- Updating/revising policy to state that sick days can be used for mental health days.
- This training helped with reducing the stigma of taking mental health days. Helped employees understand that, without a doubt, they’re welcome to take mental health days.
- One member took this training with a fellow employee who deals with the library public rather than the staff. They were pleased with how the training went through examples such as a patron going through a mental decline. It was interesting to see other people’s (attendees in the training) thoughts and thought processes for the situations.
 - The trainers emphasized that you don’t need to know everything about mental health. Rather, knowing how to begin the process and how to assist is what’s important.
 - Reminder to keep in mind your own safety (physical and mental) in such situations. There may be a situation that’s a trigger for you or that’s dangerous.
 - The training was long but felt that it was important and well-done so well worth the time.
 - Materials were available afterwards which is great because the training covered A LOT. Took out the materials not too ago to read through/look something up.

Resources for mental health & first aid training:

- National Council for Wellbeing - <https://www.mentalhealthfirstaid.org/>
- University of Illinois Extension serving Coles, Cumberland, Douglas, Moultrie and Shelby Counties - <http://web.extension.illinois.edu/ccdms/>
 - **Cheri Burcham**
Extension Educator, Family Life
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 - **Arthur Office**
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Arthur, IL 61911
Phone 217-543-3755

The discussion then moved into mental health services available in libraries, including EAPs (Employee Assistance Programs). Highlights:

- One member had an employee taking several days off for mental health. The department manager or director approached HR about the situation. The manager or director wasn't aware this is covered by FMLA (Family & Medical Leave of Absence).
 - It can be easy to forget what's right in front of us and available for staff since our focus can often be on the patrons and community.
- EAPs can help as well. They're typically reasonably priced and they'll let you know how much the staff are using the resources.
- Using EAPs should be normalized.
 - A member had a conversation with an employee who was feeling like they've failed. This is a great example of when having EAP business cards available is helpful. The business cards have all the EAP info.
 - EAP business cards are great to give out after having counseling sessions, one-on-one meetings, performance discussions, etc.
 - "If there are personal or work related issues that are negatively impacting your performance, we suggest you utilizing your EAP benefit.
- EAPs are available for ALL employees, not just full-time, medically-covered employees. As one member stated, these are the best kind of resources since they're truly for all employees.
- EAP resources can often be used by/for family members of employees (may depend on the EAP)
- Work/Life balance is important as is our own mental health. Have resources readily available and know what's available for yourself and your staff.
 - Promote these resources as much and as often as possible to staff so everyone is aware.
- One member mentioned how 2024 was a chaotic year for their library. They had a renovation going on while also joining a consortium. This meant all staff had to learn a new ILS (Integrated Library System). A system of "Take What You Need" was introduced where staff could take up to an hour of PTO per week for mental health purposes.
 - Scheduling the hour in advance was appreciated but not required and could be taken in the moment.
 - Department managers were concerned that everyone would be asking off but for roughly 140 employees in a 3-month period, less than 30 hours were used.
 - One employee did seem to take advantage and took an hour each week.
 - HR did not address with said person. Left to Dept. Managers to determine if any action should be taken (idea that if they're taking advantage of this, there's a good possibility their manager is aware of other issues.)
 - While this benefit wasn't utilized as much as hoped, just by offering such a benefit can say a lot about the concerns the library has for the wellbeing of staff.
 - Knows this isn't a possible option for all libraries but it was a big win for this library.

EAP Resources:

- All One Health (formerly Perspectives)
- <https://metroeap.com/>

- Employee Assistance Program (EAP)

When you need a helping hand, the Employee Assistance Program (EAP), through **The Hartford Ability Assist and ComPsych**, offers value-added programs and services for free. This confidential service is available to you and your family members to help with many life challenges including grief, stress, depression, marital or family challenges, and more. The EAP gives you access to: Unlimited 24/7 phone counseling consultations, 3 in-person counseling sessions, child and elder care resources, financial and legal resources, addiction and recovery, and more

- Contact the EAP anytime, day or night, by calling 800-964-3577 or by visiting www.guidanceresources.com

Next, the conversation moved to two questions asked in the chat with several providing their opinions:

Can you reduce an employee's pay based upon their reduced performance? How do you proceed with terminating an employee?

***Disclaimer:** ILA and the HRAF are not legal professionals and cannot offer legal advice. Please consult with the appropriate legal professional before taking any legal action.*

- Do you have an employment lawyer on hand? It's ALWAYS important to talk with them and make sure you're following the letter of the law and receiving guidance on how to proceed.
- Do you have a progressive discipline process in place? Are the performance expectations clearly stated and is the employee fully aware of these expectations? If the employee is aware and is *not* meeting these expectations, then it needs to be addressed according to the process.
- What processes are in place to deal with infractions? Processes need to be in writing.
 - Document, document, document! Conversations can be verbal but there needs to be a written follow-up. If infractions continue, use discretion to go ahead with termination or continue with the steps in the process.
 - Follow up a verbal conversation with an email stating something akin to "Good meeting, it was beneficial to talk with you about x, y, z."
- Illinois is an at-will state so technically, an employee can be let go for any reason. It's always a good idea to provide an employee every chance to improve before termination. Things can also get a little tricky if it does turn into a lawsuit.
- No – can't reduce pay based on performance. However, there are exemptions though there are very few exemptions in which pay can be withheld and/or reduced.
 - Nonexempt are paid for the hours worked but exempt staff are paid for the "job" they do.

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- If choosing to proceed to termination, do it w/ dignity and respect.
 - You may not have a choice but to move forward with an immediate termination.

- “Let them know you appreciate their service but unfortunately due to the events that led up to this, we wish you well.”
- If at the point of terminating, sit down with someone and go over the conversation so you’re prepared.
- Letting someone go never gets easier.
- Technically, termination should never be a surprise to the employee.
 - What have you done to minimize the surprise? All the progressive steps are in part, meant to help minimize this surprise as termination is the end result if expectations aren’t met, if behavior doesn’t change, etc.
- Make sure all decisions are fact-based and backed up, not opinion-based.
- Make sure you’re having or have had the following conversations with the employee.
 - “I’ve noticed this...”
 - “What’s going on...”
 - “What can we do to help ensure you’re meeting expectations...”
 - etc.
- Communication is key.
- One member brought up their own experience of having to fire an employee based on a decline in performance. The employee was on a PIP (performance improvement plan) and weren’t meeting the steps. The PIP did state that termination was a possibility within the given time frame. Unfortunately, it has to come to termination sometimes.
 - "Failure to improve and sustain your performance may result in further discipline up to and including termination of your employment."
- Acknowledge this doesn’t feel good to do and that the goal is to get to the other side.
 - You’re gonna go through the mud and we’re going to support you.
 - There’s no magic wand and things won’t change overnight. It will be difficult and time-consuming but is typically time well spent.
 - One way or another, you’ll get a new employee – existing employee will improve or you’ll eventually hire a new employee.

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- Reducing pay
 - On the PIP, pay wasn’t reduced but when it came time for merit increases, this library’s policy states that employees on PIPs are not eligible for merit increases.
 - It’s not a decrease but they’re not receiving a raise either.

The discussion went back to mental health and well-being while still discussing employee performance.

Highlights:

- When we make sure employees are taking care of their mental health and well-being and have access to these resources, performance will increase.
- It’s important to make sure staff feel supported and welcome. Sometimes a decline in performance is saying something.

- A good time to bring in the EAP is during the performance review stages.
- We can't serve our community if we aren't in a great place ourselves.

Other things members have in their libraries/organizations for the mental health and well-being of staff:

- One member mentioned they have a wellness room in the library.
- Many health insurance companies have "free" EAP for all staff.
- RAILS (Reaching Across Illinois Library System) has Zoom channels created to have a sense of belonging, decompress, and discuss things they enjoy. They also have a walking group, a tea time group, etc.
- One member mentioned that their library offers corporate membership to their park district's fitness studio. It's \$70 per year per person. It's nicely located across from the library.
- Some members send out mental health tips and what's going on. Finding commonalities has helped increase morale, staff engagement, and success.
- One member's library celebrates every birthday.
 - Something as simple as balloons in the library, cookies in the staff room, a goofy Facebook video saying Happy Birthday
 - Makes sure to have a card signed by *all* employees.
- One member's library celebrates every work anniversary. Their credit card company has free gift cards which make great small gifts.
- On nice days, one member's library encourage staff to take a short walk (without having to clock out) when things have gotten overwhelming.
- Morale Committee
 - Funded by the Friends group. If you don't have a Friends group, possibly check in with employees if they would be willing to support
 - Recently the Morale Committee had a Starbucks Day and bought all staff their favorite Starbucks drink.
- "My Favorites" form that's filled out and given to all employees so everyone has this information. The intent is if someone is having a bad day, week, etc., their fellow employees could do something to help based on their favorites. Someone loves chocolate? Gift them a chocolate bar. You've noticed a fellow staffer has been stressed lately, maybe bring in a small bouquet of their favorite flower.
 - It can be a great way to show the team supports the team.

On slide 10 is a great graphic of the Five Essentials for Workplace Mental Health & Well-Being

<https://www.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/workplace-mental-health-well-being.pdf>