Mental Health & Wellness
in the Workplace
Action Steps for Employers & Employees

FACILITATOR GUIDE
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Overview

About 63% of Americans are part of the US labor force. The workplace can be a key location for activities designed to improve well-being among adults. Workplace wellness programs can identify those at risk and connect them to treatment and put in place supports to help people reduce and manage stress. By addressing mental health issues in the workplace, both employers and employees can experience success.

To improve the health of their employees, businesses can create a wellness culture that is employee-centered; provides supportive environments where safety is ensured, and health can emerge; and provides access and opportunities for their employers to engage in a variety of workplace health programs.

This course is designed to assist both employers and employees to thrive in a workplace that supports mental health and wellness.

[This training recognizes that facilitators and attendees may represent any DQA-regulated health or residential care provider and may use different terms to refer to their provider type; to the individuals receiving care, treatment, or services; and to the individuals providing care, treatment, or services.

- *For this training, the term "provider" or "provider type" is used to refer to any DQA-regulated provider, entity, or facility.*
- *The terms "client" or "resident" are used to represent any person receiving care, treatment and/or services from any provider.*
- *The terms "caregiver," "employee," or "staff" are used to represent any individual employed by or under contract with the provider.*

Facilitators may wish to change the language to be appropriate to the setting in which they are presenting this information.]

Mental Health & Wellness Learning Points

As a result of this workshop, participants will:

- Understand what is meant by workplace mental health and wellness
- Recognize the five essentials for good mental health
- Identify action steps for employers and employees
- Develop strategies to build resilience

Introduction to Workplace Wellness

Mental health and wellness in the workplace refer to employees' psychological, emotional, and social well-being within a shared work environment.

Work is one of the most vital parts of life, powerfully shaping our health, wealth, and well-being. At its best, work affords us the ability to support ourselves and our loved ones and can also provide us with a sense of meaning, opportunities for growth, and a community. When people thrive at work, they are more likely to feel physically and mentally healthy overall and to contribute positively to their workplace.

Mental health in the workplace: It's not a nice-to-have, it's a must-have.

Risks to Mental Health in the Workplace

Risks to mental health at work may be different for each person. The following is a list of common reasons for poor mental health in the workplace:

- Under-use of skills or being under-skilled for work

- Excessive workloads or work pace, understaffing

- Long, unsocial, or inflexible hours

- Lack of control over job design or workload

- Unsafe or poor physical working conditions

- Organizational culture that enables negative behaviors

- Limited support from colleagues or authoritarian supervision

- Violence, harassment or bullying

- Discrimination and exclusion

- Unclear job role

- Under- or over-promotion

- Job insecurity, inadequate pay, or poor investment in career development

- Conflicting home/work demands

[Have you witnessed or experienced any of these risks during your career? Circle those you have witnessed or experienced. Less than 6? More than 6? Which of these risks do you think happens most often? Ask for voluntary responses.]

Psychosocial Risks in the Workplace

The term, *psychosocial*, refers to the influence of social factors on a person's mind or behavior and how behavior and social factors are related. Examples of psychosocial factors include social support, loneliness, relationship status, social disruption, bereavement, work environment, social status, and social integration.

Although psychosocial risks can be found in all jobs, some workers are more likely to be exposed to them than others, because of what they do or where and how they work. Healthcare workers often have jobs that carry a higher risk of exposure to difficult events, which can negatively impact mental health.

Economic recessions or humanitarian and public health emergencies may cause risks such as job loss, financial instability, reduced employment opportunities or increased unemployment.

Work can be a setting which magnifies wider issues that negatively affect mental health, including discrimination and inequality based on factors such as, race, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, disability, social origin, migrant status, religion, or age.

People with severe mental health conditions are more likely to be excluded from employment, and when in employment, they are more likely to experience inequality at work. Being out of work also poses a risk to mental health.

Effects of Wellness in the Workplace

We've explored the risks and reasons for poor mental health in the workplace. Next, let's move on to some signs of wellness in a healthy workplace.

On average, Americans working full-time spend more than one-third of their day, five days per week at the workplace. While employers have a responsibility to provide a safe and hazard-free workplace, they also have opportunities to promote individual health and foster a healthy work environment.

Workplace wellness programs can:

- Influence social norms (unwritten rules that help us have a good relationship with others)

- Establish health-promoting policies

- Increase healthy behaviors such as dietary and physical activity changes

- Improve employees' health knowledge and skills

- Help employees get necessary health screenings, immunizations, and follow-up care

- Help employees avoid food insecurity with information about community and government resources

- Reduce employees' on-the-job exposure to substances and hazards that can cause diseases and injury

- Create a "wellness culture" that:

    o Is employee-centered

    o Provides safe and supportive environments

    o Offers access to employee health programs

[Are there other ideas that workplace wellness programs can support? Possible answers:
-Develop and enforce a policy against bullying, harassment, etc.
-Offer cultural training to improve interactions among staff and clients.
-Make an effort to accommodate employee's home and family responsibilities through flexible scheduling.]

Signs of Wellness in the Workplace

There are many signs of employer efforts that signify a healthy workplace. Here are a few examples:

- Workers are well-trained at orientation

- Staff skill sets are recognized

- Staff shortages are addressed through ongoing recruitment, visible to current staff

- Workloads are explained and balanced across staff when possible

- Innovation and creativity are welcomed by management

- Connection and support are encouraged between co-workers

- Communication between staff and managers is evident

- Good job performance is recognized and appreciated through words and actions

- Balance between home and work life is acknowledged and supported

- Managers and staff demonstrate inclusiveness

- Clients are well-cared for physically

- Clients' emotional needs are being met

- Families feel confident about their loved one's care

Which are the most important to you?

[Circle the 3 most important steps to them personally and share their thoughts.]

Five Essentials for Workplace Mental Health & Well-Being

Workplace mental health and well-being is a priority for public health. As such, the Surgeon General's Framework for Workplace Mental Health and Well-Being is a starting point for organizations to best support their employees. Let's review the Five Essentials identified in the plan and how the key components can be incorporated into a workplace.

[Watch the video at https://youtu.be/2_iftFuTGDk then discuss the five elements in more detail. As you discuss each of the elements, be prepared to share information specific to your organization; share any relevant brochures or flyers; refer to your employee handbook or other resources as appropriate.]
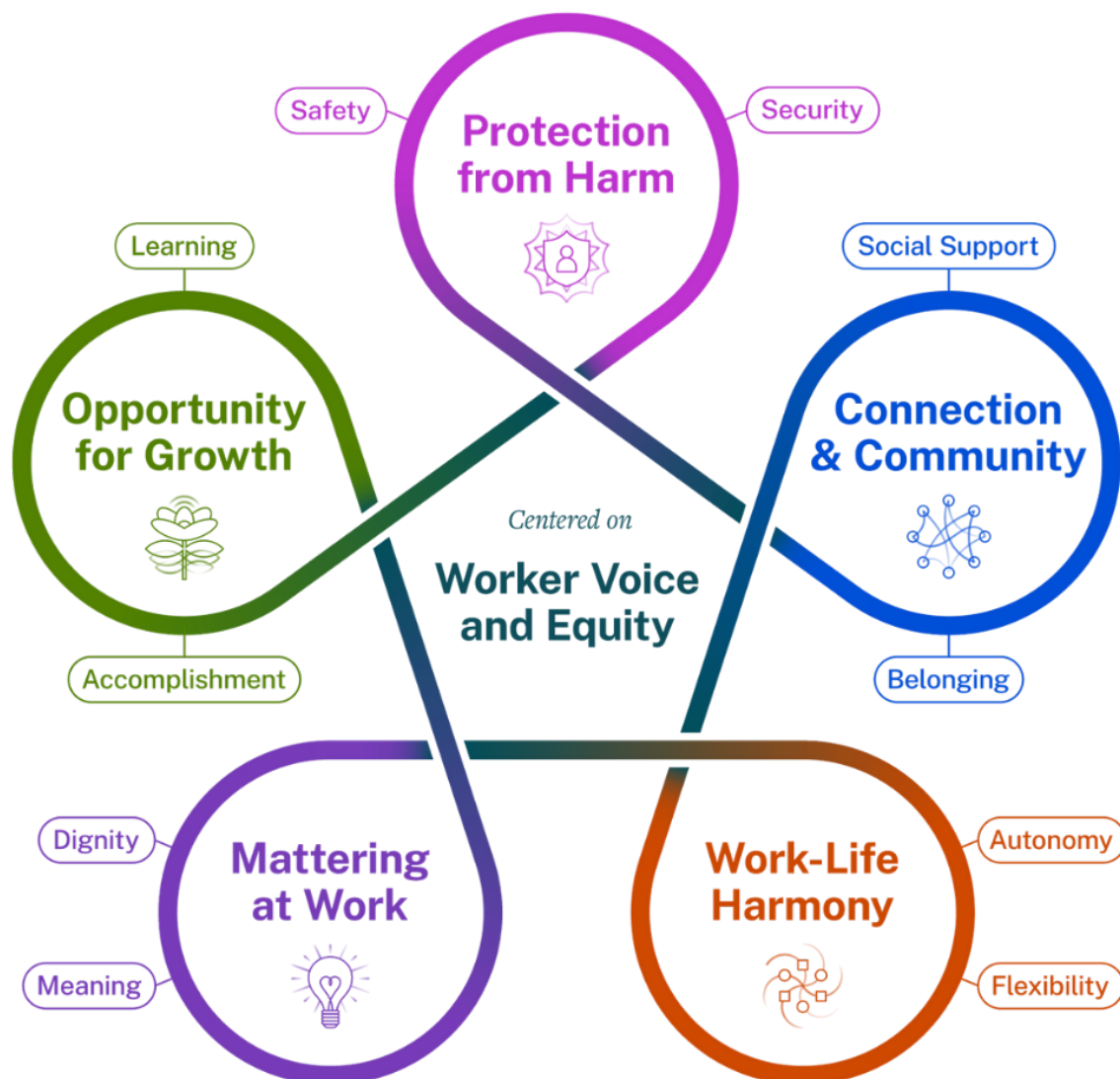
Protection from Harm

The first Essential of the framework is *Protection from Harm* which addresses the human needs of safety and security. Workplace safety means that all workers are in an environment where they are protected from harm, injury, illness, and death. In this context, safety is also protecting employees from discrimination, bullying, and harassment. Security is ensuring everyone feels secure financially and in their job future. So, how does an employer ensure safety and security in the workplace? The Surgeon General recommends the following:

Prioritize workplace physical and psychological safety – People can't perform well at work if they feel unsafe, either physically or psychologically. Employers should ensure compliance with occupational health and safety standards at all times.

Enable adequate rest – Insufficient rest can put your physical, emotional, and mental health at risk.

Normalize and support mental health – It is critical for organizations to promote services, ensure confidentiality and encourage time off for mental health care.

Operationalize DEIA* norms, policies, and programs – All workers from all racial and socioeconomic backgrounds need to feel safe to be authentic and express their feelings. Employers can prioritize diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility (DEIA) norms by putting policies and programs in place to ensure all team members feel valued and represented.

[What are some ways that your employer prioritizes safety and security? Do you have suggestions for other ways to do so? Share information about your employer's workplace safety plans and DEIA programs here.]

Connection & Community

The second Essential of the Framework is *Connection and Community*. Fostering positive social interactions and relationships in the workplace supports worker well-being and addresses the two human needs of social support and belonging. Social support is having relationships that offer help to mitigate loneliness and isolation; belonging is feeling accepted as part of a group.

Cultivate trusted relationships – Supportive work relationships between leaders and staff, between staff on teams, and between staff and clients are important in building trust.

Foster collaboration and teamwork – Leaders in organizations can communicate the importance of teamwork by encouraging communication, providing collaboration tools, and including time for non-work connection.

[Share information about how your employer supports collaboration and teamwork here.]

Work-Life Harmony
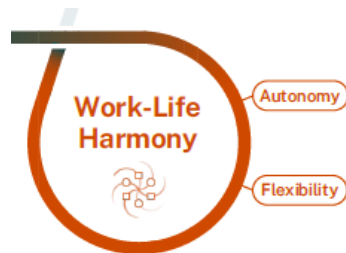
The third Essential is *Work-Life Harmony*, often referred to as work-life balance. The ability to integrate work and non-work demands requires autonomy and flexibility; autonomy to control some aspects of work, as well as the flexibility of when and where to do so.

Provide more autonomy over how work is done – Employers who increase employee control over how, when and where work is done build more trust in workplaces.

Make schedules as flexible and predictable as possible – Unpredictable scheduling can degrade physical and mental health, so it is important for employers to implement policies that make schedules as predictable as possible. This can be difficult to do in a healthcare environment, but employers should strive for employee input as much as possible.

[Share information about your employer's scheduling process here.]

Mattering at Work

The fourth Essential of the Framework is *Mattering at Work*. Most of us want to know that we matter to those around us and that our work matters. Dignity is the sense of being respected and valued; meaning in the workplace refers to our sense of purpose. As a caregiver, what you do every day truly matters to those in your care.

Engage workers in workplace decisions – Employee engagement helps improve workplaces by providing staff with an opportunity for input.

Build a culture of gratitude and recognition – Regardless of their position, when people feel appreciated, recognized, and engaged by their supervisors and co-workers, their sense of value and meaning increases, as well as their ability to manage stress.

Connect individual work with organizational mission – Shared purpose is a collective sense of working toward a common goal. For example, the mission of the

Wisconsin Department of Health Services is to protect and promote the health and safety of the people of Wisconsin. What is our mission?

[Share information about your organization's mission; how employees are recognized; and how they can provide input here.]

Opportunity for Growth

The final Essential of the Surgeon General's Frameworks is *Opportunity for Growth*. Staff become more optimistic about their abilities and about contributing to their employer when they are learning new skills and knowledge and accomplishing their goals.

Offer quality training, education, and mentoring – Training to increase skills as well as opportunities for work-related and personal education encourage personal and professional growth.

Foster clear, equitable pathways for career advancement – Opportunities might include professional training programs, career navigation support, English language courses, and promotional opportunities.

Ensure relevant, reciprocal feedback – Leaders and managers can provide guidance by considering employees' strengths and growth opportunities.

[Share information about your organization's opportunities for training and feedback here.]

In summary, the Surgeon General's Framework for Workplace Mental Health and Well-Being emphasizes the connection between the well-being of workers and the health of organizations. It offers a foundation and resources that can be used by workplaces of any size, across any industry. The most important asset in any organization is its people.

Supporting Mental Health & Well-Being

Both employers and employees can support mental health and well-being in the workplace. Let's start with employers. As we have just discussed, mental health at work has become a top priority; in part, due to the pandemic, inflation, political unrest, and numerous other stressors. So, what can employers and employees do?

Action Steps Employers Can Take

Possible action steps that employers can take to improve mental health and wellness in the workplace include:

Make mental health self-assessment tools available to all employees. (Ensure that tools/questionnaires are validated by a qualified mental health professional.)

Offer free or subsidized clinical screenings for depression from a qualified mental health professional, followed by directed feedback and clinical referral when appropriate.

Offer health insurance with no or low out-of-pocket costs for depression medications and mental health counseling if possible.

Provide free or subsidized lifestyle coaching, counseling, or self-management programs.

Distribute materials, such as brochures, fliers, and videos, to all employees about the signs and symptoms of poor mental health and opportunities for treatment.

Host seminars or workshops that address depression and stress management techniques, like mindfulness, breathing exercises, and meditation, to help employees reduce anxiety and stress and improve focus and motivation.

Create and maintain dedicated, quiet spaces for relaxation activities.

Provide managers with training to help them recognize the signs and symptoms of stress and depression in team members and encourage them to seek help from qualified mental health professionals.

Give employees opportunities to participate in decisions about issues that affect job stress.

[Ask the following:
-If you are a manager or owner of a facility, check the box next to a suggestion(s) you could adapt or already have in place. Ask managers to share their thoughts.
-If you are an employee, check the box next to a suggestion(s) that would benefit you most. Ask staff to share their thoughts.]

Action Steps Employees Can Take

Employees can also take steps to improve their mental health and wellness at work.

Begin your day with mindfulness
Studies show that by checking your phone right after waking up, you are priming your brain for distraction. Think of it this way. Looking at your cell phone first thing in the morning is the equivalent of having a hundred people in your bedroom screaming at you.

That's not the best way to start the day! Instead, improve your mental health at work by beginning your morning with a yoga or meditation practice so you can healthily ease into the day.

Focus on your strengths
Rather than focusing on your weaknesses, concentrate on being more of who you already are. Capitalize on your strengths and seek out projects that give you satisfaction. Because when we use our strengths, the activity feels natural to us, and we are more likely to experience accomplishment.

Stop comparing yourself to others
Teddy Roosevelt asserted that "comparison is the thief of joy." When we compare ourselves to others, it leads to low self-esteem and unhappiness. Instead, compare yourself to who you were yesterday. Concentrate on healthy improvements, like measuring yourself against specific goals. That way, you're focused on who you are versus who you aren't.

Start a gratitude culture
Studies of gratitude at work link it to less stress, fewer sick days, and higher satisfaction with our jobs and coworkers. One way to start a gratitude practice is by writing down one thing that went well that day and why. Another idea is simply writing a note (or email) to someone you are grateful for. You can even start your team meetings by going around the room and having each person share one thing for which they are thankful.

Talk it out
The late Maya Angelou once said, "there is no greater agony than bearing an untold story inside of you." One of the best ways to improve mental health is to know you aren't alone. First, find someone you can trust, like a friend, family member, therapist, or coach. Then share your story. You can also go on social media platforms like Facebook and search for groups that focus on mental health at work. By joining in the conversation, you will also be able to help others.

Accept rather than judge feelings
Fluctuating emotions are part of life. But what causes us angst isn't the emotion itself. It's the judgment of the emotion. When we feel fear, sadness, or shame, our first reaction is to reject that feeling. Instead, accept them. That simply means being aware of your emotions and accepting them for what they are right now, knowing that they won't last.

Get outdoors
One estimate is that the average American spends over seven hours looking at a screen each day. Unfortunately, that means we spend more time indoors than we should. So instead, make it a point to get outdoors each day, even if it's just for a few minutes. Research shows that nature has benefits for both physical and psychological wellbeing. For example, [a University of Chicago study](#) found that being exposed to nature improves attention, memory, and cognitive flexibility, while exposure to urban environments is linked to attention deficits.

Do things for others
There are so many ways to do things for others at work. For example, you can volunteer to help with a special project, take on a mentee, or offer to train a new hire. In addition, evidence shows that helping others can also benefit our own mental health. For instance, it can reduce stress and improve mood, self-esteem, and happiness. And the best part is that an act of kindness usually doesn't require a considerable investment of time or money.

Find the humor
You've heard that saying that laughter is the best medicine? Well, it's no joke. [According to the Mayo Clinic](#), laughter has short-term benefits like stimulating organs, enhancing your oxygen intake, and increasing the endorphins released by your brain. It also has long-term effects like strengthening your immune system, relieving pain, and improving your mood.

Learn something new
Many times, we feel depressed or anxious when we are unchallenged. That's why learning new skills can improve your mental health at work. By learning something new, you build a sense of purpose, raise self-esteem and boost self-confidence. Some things you could try include signing up for a course, getting certified in a new skill or shadowing a senior staff member.

Slow down
Overall, slowing down will help you make better decisions and connect deeper with people. Make time for self-reflection. Some helpful methods include journaling, meditation, and simply taking breaks. Remember, while you may go slower, you will go further.

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Career and Leadership Coach
Corporate Escape Artist
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Whether you are a manager or employee, the individual strategies above offer a proactive approach to improve your mental health at work and pave the way for others to do the same!

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**"You can't always control what goes on outside.
But you can always control what goes on inside." —Wayne Dyer**

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Developing Resilience

We all experience loss, worry, stress, trauma, and disasters in life. People can survive the most challenging situations; sometimes without even understanding how we managed to get through a particular challenge. Resilience is an important resource that appears to be the secret to success and the basis for good mental health in many instances.

What is Resilience?

So, what is resilience? One definition of resilience is the ability of an object to spring back into shape. If you have resilience, you have ability to adapt and bounce back from adversity. The good news is that we can build resilience in ourselves, our relationships, and in our workplaces.

Per Mayo Clinic, "resilience can help protect you from various mental health conditions, such as depression and anxiety. Resilience can also help offset factors that increase the risk of mental health conditions, such as being bullied or previous trauma. If you have an existing mental health condition, being resilient can improve your coping ability."

There are many different types of resilience that we can develop to help us overcome challenges:

- Physical – Helps our bodies overcome physical health challenges so we can bounce back from sickness or accidents.
- Mental – Helps us work through tough times by developing problem-solving skills.
- Emotional – Helps us respond to challenges that bring negative feelings or emotions like anger, fear, vulnerability, or sadness.
- Social – Gives us the ability to connect with those in our lives so we can support each other.

Strategies for Building Resilience

Let's start by watching the video, Resilience: Increase your Inner Strength then we will consider some tips for becoming more resilient.

Get connected. Building strong, positive relationships with loved ones and friends can provide you with needed support, guidance, and acceptance in good and bad times. Establish other important connections by volunteering or joining a faith or spiritual community.

Make every day meaningful. Do something that gives you a sense of accomplishment and purpose every day. Set clear, achievable goals to help you look toward the future with meaning.

Learn from experience. Think of how you've coped with hardships in the past. Consider the skills and strategies that helped you through difficult times. You might

even write about past experiences in a journal to help you identify positive and negative behavior patterns — and guide your future behavior.

Remain hopeful. You can't change the past, but you can always look toward the future. Accepting and even anticipating change makes it easier to adapt and view new challenges with less anxiety.

Take care of yourself. Tend to your own needs and feelings. Participate in activities and hobbies you enjoy. Include physical activity in your daily routine. Get plenty of sleep and create consistent bedtime rituals. Eat a healthy diet. Practice stress management and relaxation techniques, such as yoga, meditation, guided imagery, deep breathing, or prayer.

Be proactive. Don't ignore your problems. Instead, figure out what needs to be done, make a plan and take action. Although it can take time to recover from a major setback, traumatic event, or loss, know that your situation can improve if you work at it.

[Encourage people to share the things they do to build their resilience.]

Asking for Help

Becoming more resilient takes time and practice. If you don't feel you're making progress, or you don't know where to start, consider talking to a mental health professional. Help and support are always within reach and asking for help is a great step towards building resilience. With guidance, you can improve your resiliency and mental well-being. Resilient Wisconsin is a great place to start.

[Show the Resilient Wisconsin webpage: Locate Help and Support https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/resilient/help.htm

Consider printing Coloring Sheets from the Get Resources and Materials webpage: https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/resilient/resources.htm]

Wrap-Up

Workplace mental health and wellness refers to your psychological, emotional, and social well-being within a shared work environment. It is critical for employers and employees alike to actively support efforts to ensure the well-being of everyone in the workplace. In addition, we can all take action to develop our personal inner resilience to face life's challenges.

Review Learning Points

As a result of this workshop, participants:
- Understand what is meant by workplace mental health and wellness
- Recognize the five essentials for good mental health
- Identify action steps for employers and employees
- Develop strategies to build resilience

Mental Health & Wellness Resources

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)
Mental Health in the Workplace
https://www.cdc.gov/workplacehealthpromotion/tools-resources/workplace-health/mental-health/index.html

Mental Health America
Mind the Workplace
https://mhanational.org/workplace-wellness

National Institutes of Health
Emotional Wellness Toolkit
https://www.nih.gov/health-information/emotional-wellness-toolkit

National Institute of Mental Health
Caring for Your Mental Health
https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/caring-for-your-mental-health

University of Wisconsin CCDET
Caregiver Training Project Resources
Responding to Challenging Situations Classroom-Style Training Materials
https://uwosh.edu/ccdet/caregiver-resources/

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
Office of the Surgeon General Current Priorities
https://www.hhs.gov/surgeongeneral/priorities/workplace-well-being/index.html

Wisconsin Department of Health Services
Resilient Wisconsin
https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/resilient/index.htm

World Health Organization (WHO)
Mental Health at Work
https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/mental-health-at-work

[Training Materials Checklist

For this training, you will need:

- *Laptop computer (recommended)*
- *MS PowerPoint (PPT Viewer can be downloaded for free at Microsoft.com)*
- *LCD Projector (recommended)*
- *Screen for viewing the PPT (recommended)*
- *Internet access (highly recommended)*
- *Printed Participant Guides (one for each student recommended)*
- *Pens or pencils*
- *Evaluation (optional)*
- *Attendance certificate (recommended)*

Note: It is strongly recommended that the PPT be viewed using an LCD projector. If that option is not available, the PPT may be downloaded and printed as a handout.]