

POPULATION HEALTH &  
WELL-BEING

## New College Hires Need Employer Mental Health Support – Here’s How

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For many recent graduates, summer is the start of their careers and entrance into the workforce. The mental health state of new hires can vary depending on individual college experiences and circumstances. It is important to acknowledge that the pandemic has significantly impacted mental health across the population, including recent graduates. This is no minor issue; a recent survey found that 69% of graduates entering the workforce think the pandemic’s impact on their mental health has made them less prepared than they would have been.<sup>1</sup>

The good news is that by fostering a supportive work environment and offering resources for mental well-being, employers can contribute to the mental health and overall success of new college hires during this transition.

The following are common aspects of the mental health state of new college hires post-pandemic and what leading employers can do to help:

### Heightened Stress and Anxiety

Transitioning from college to the professional world can be overwhelming and anxiety-filled, especially in the hybrid working environment, many now will enter.

#### What you can do to help address:

- **Clear Expectations:** Set clear and realistic expectations for new hires. Ensure they understand their roles, responsibilities and performance objectives. Uncertainty about what’s expected can increase anxiety and providing a structured and comprehensive orientation can help alleviate stress.
- **Supportive Onboarding:** Design an onboarding program that includes an introduction to the company culture, team members and the available mental health resources. Having a buddy or mentor assigned to the new hire can help them navigate the workplace and build relationships, even (or perhaps especially) in a hybrid or fully remote work environment.
- **Open Communication:** Encourage open communication and provide multiple channels for new hires to seek help or ask questions. An approachable management style will help new employees feel comfortable discussing their concerns.

<sup>1</sup> [New Grads Are Hopeful but Stressed as They Enter the Workforce \(shrm.org\)](https://www.shrm.org)



## Emotional Fatigue

Extended periods of isolation, remote learning and limited social interaction may have contributed to emotional fatigue among college students. Emotional fatigue can arise from various factors, including the stress of adapting to a new work environment or change in city/state, meeting expectations, and building new friendships and relationships. The loss of in-person connections and the challenges of remote education and work can lead to feelings of loneliness, sadness and burnout.

### What you can do to help address:

- **Recognize the Signs:** Train managers and team leaders to recognize the signs of emotional fatigue, such as decreased motivation, mood swings, withdrawal and/or a decline in performance. With the use of webinars and mental health first aid training for leaders, early identification allows for timely intervention.
- **Provide Access to Resources:** Communicate and market targeted referrals to mental health services such as mindfulness programs and Employee Assistance Programs (EAP), as these are often free and valuable resources not just to new college hires but also to employees who have adult college-age children addressing similar issues.
- **Encourage Team Bonding:** Facilitate virtual or in-person team-building activities and social events to help new hires feel more connected and integrated into the workplace culture. Acknowledge and celebrate the accomplishments. This positive reinforcement can boost morale, connection and motivation.

## Mental Health Conditions

The pandemic has exacerbated existing mental health conditions and increased the risk of developing new ones. New college hires may be navigating mental health challenges such as depression, mood disorders or post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) because of the pandemic's impact on their lives and education before they joined your workforce.

### What you can do to help address:

- **Provide Resources:** Offer information about mental health resources available to employees, such as Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs), counseling services and cognitive-based programs. Ensure new hires know how to access these resources confidentially.
- **Mental Health Check-Ins:** Conduct regular check-ins with new hires to gauge their well-being, especially during the early stages of employment. These check-ins provide an opportunity for employees to express concerns and seek support.
- **Peer Support Networks:** Encourage the formation of peer support networks or employee resource groups where employees can connect, share experiences and support each other.
- **Lead by Empathetic Example:** Company leadership should openly discuss the importance of mental health and demonstrate a commitment to supporting employees' well-being.





## Work-Life Balance

Maintaining a healthy work-life balance is essential for new hires and established employees. This was a significant issue during the pandemic, as many found it difficult to detach when working from home.

### What you can do to help enhance:

- **Prioritize Tasks:** Train new hires to complete high-priority tasks first, emphasizing the need to organize workloads to avoid feeling overwhelmed. Point out the pitfalls of excessive multitasking and encourage them to ask for help when needed.
- **Limit Overtime:** Many new hires will want to prove themselves by putting in the 'long hours.' Try to lead by example and set policies that maintain a healthy balance between work and personal life.
- **Unplug:** Encourage setting boundaries for work-related communication outside of working hours. This is very often an issue of company culture, so be transparent about policies and sensitive to new hires' need to fully unwind. Offer resources such as mindfulness programs to recharge both the body and mind.

By prioritizing and actively supporting the mental health of new hires, employers can create a positive and inclusive work environment where employees can thrive, feel supported and contribute to their fullest potential.

## Questions for Employers

Employers tell us that recent college graduates entering the workforce often ask the following questions. Make sure you have honest and factual answers that establish where your firm is and where it is going in support of mental wellness:

- Do you have a mental wellness program?
- Do you offer free therapy?
- What is the company doing to help their employees' mental health?
- Do you offer fully remote positions? How many times per week is it expected to be in the office?
- What type of vacation policy do you have?
- Does the company have a culture of a good work-life balance? Can you explain how you actively promote positive work-life balance?



## About the Author

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Dr. Axler is a board-certified child, adolescent and adult psychiatrist with more than 30 years of experience in academic, private practice and insurance settings. He is a Fellow of the American Psychiatric Association. He serves on several executive committees and organizations, including the Georgia Psychiatric Physicians Association and the Georgia Council on Child and Adolescent Psychiatry.



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