



WISCONSIN  
CHEESE MAKERS  
ASSOCIATION

EST. 1891

***Mental Health Resources for  
Dairy Processing Employees***

May 22, 2025

# ***Agenda***

- Welcome & Introductions
- Fostering Worker Wellness in Dairy Processing
  - Dr. Kate McCoy, Wisconsin  
Department of Health Services
- Q&A



**WISCONSIN DEPARTMENT**  
*of* **HEALTH SERVICES**

# **Mental Health Practices and Resources for Dairy Processors**

Kate McCoy, PhD

Director, DHS Occupational Health and Safety Program

Wisconsin Cheese Makers Association Webinar

May 22, 2025

To protect and promote the health and safety of the people of Wisconsin

# Outline

- What are job-related mental health risk factors and why do they matter?
- How much risk do dairy processing workers face?
- What helps?
  - Workplace practices
  - Mental health resources



# Work and Stress

**4 IN 5**

WORKERS REPORT THAT  
WORKPLACE STRESS  
AFFECTS THEIR RELATIONSHIPS  
WITH FRIENDS, FAMILY,  
AND COWORKERS.<sup>1</sup>

**4 IN 5**

WORKERS FEEL  
EMOTIONALLY DRAINED  
FROM THEIR WORK, AN EARLY  
SIGN OF BURNOUT.<sup>2</sup>

**1 IN 4**

WORKERS ARE EXPERIENCING  
THE MORE SEVERE SIGNS OF  
BURNOUT, INCLUDING  
REDUCED PERSONAL EFFICACY  
AND CYNICISM TOWARDS  
PEERS AND THEIR JOBS.<sup>3</sup>  
CHRONIC WORKPLACE STRESS  
AND BURNOUT CAN LEAD TO  
MENTAL HEALTH CONCERNS  
IF LEFT UNTREATED.

# Job and Financial Problems Contribute to Suicide Risks

## Problems that contributed to death: 2022

The following problems can contribute to stress, mental health concerns, and death by suicide. The boxes below indicate the percentage of decedents who experienced these contributing problems. The problems displayed below are not mutually exclusive; in other words, the decedent may have experienced more than one of these problems. These data were obtained from coroners, medical examiners, and law enforcement reports (WVDRS; see Technical Notes).

Total

Age

Hover over boxes/bars for details.

Intimate  
partner  
problem  
25.5%

Financial  
problem  
8.7%

Family  
problem  
7.2%

Physical  
health  
problem  
28.7%

Job or  
employment  
problem  
10.7%

School  
problem  
1.6%

# What “Job Problems” Might Contribute?

- *Put your answer in the chat or raise your hands to come off mute.*

# Workplace Psychosocial Stressors

## Low

- Job security
- Pay
- Flexibility/ time off
- Social support
- Control or autonomy
- Sense of meaning
- Understanding of role or job demands (low training, poorly defined role)

## High

- Employer control over workers (micro-managing)
- Workload, long hours
- Speed/pace of work
- Sense of abusive, toxic or unfair work environment



# Psychosocial Hazards and Health

Exposure to work-related psychosocial hazards

**Stress Response**

*(when prolonged or extreme)*



**Reduced mental health  
and poor health  
behaviors**

- Unhealthy eating
- Less exercise
- More alcohol
- Sleep effects



**Psychological Injury**

- Depression
- Anxiety
- Burnout
- Suicide



**Physical Injury/Illness**

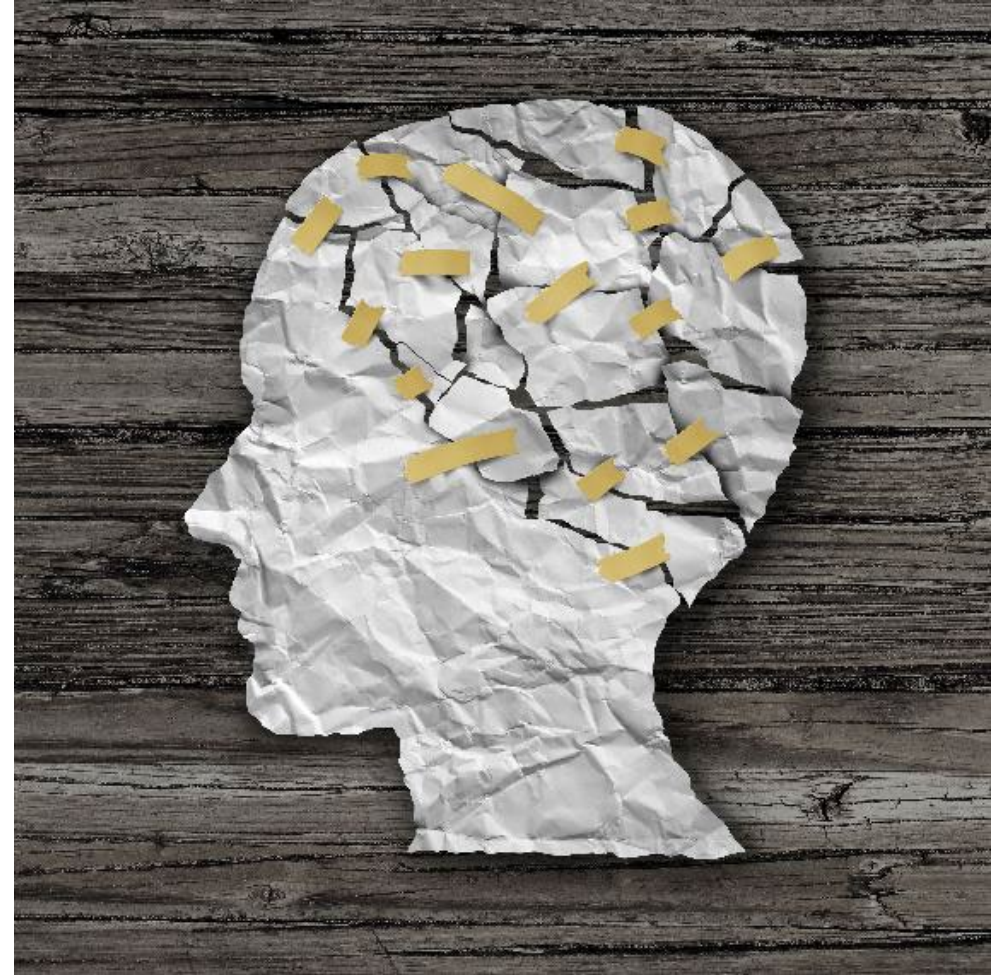
- Cardiovascular
- Musculoskeletal
- Gastrointestinal
- Immune deficiencies

# Why Poor Mental Health Matters for Business



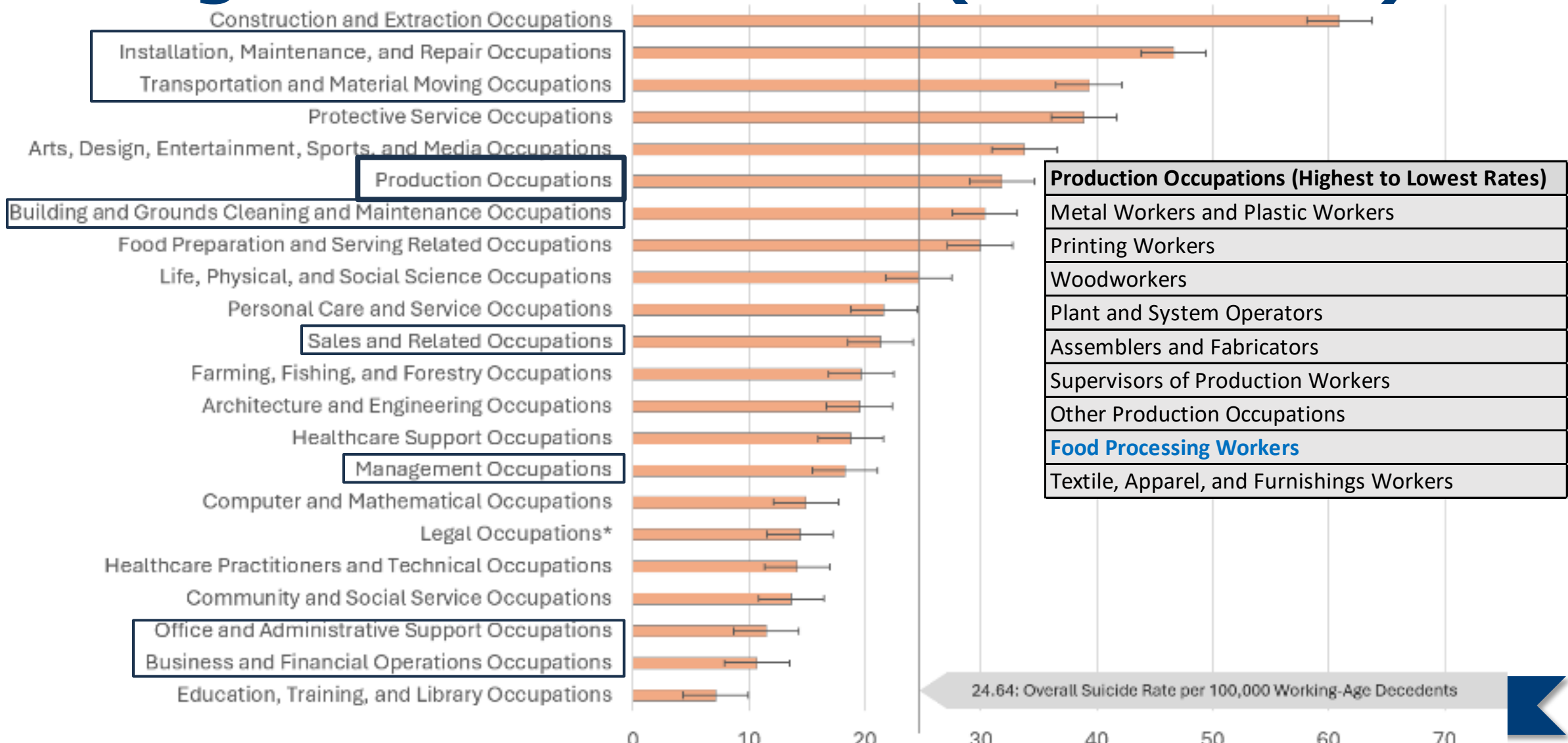
# Why Poor Mental Health Matters for Business

- Increased absenteeism
- Lower productivity
- Greater injury risks
- Higher health costs
- Higher turnover
- Low morale
- Reputational risks



# **How Much Risk Might Dairy Processing Workers Face?**

# Wisconsin Occupations With The Highest Suicide Rates (2016-2023)





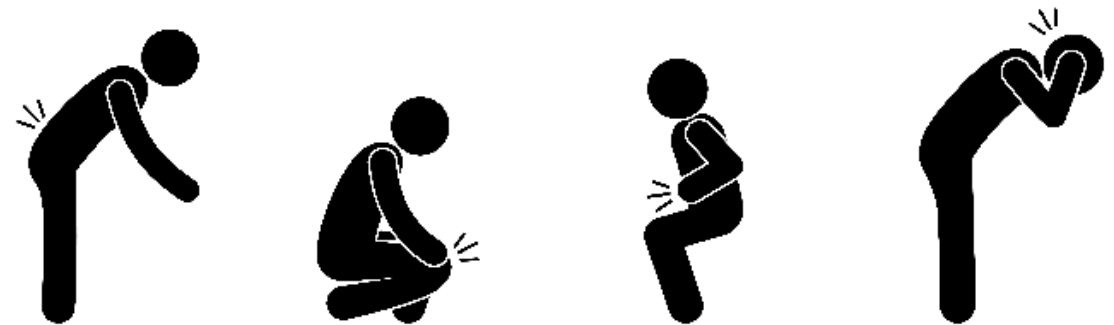
# Manufacturing and Mental Health

- Generally considered high-risk sector
  - Job stress, fear of job loss, isolation, physical health
- Nearly **7** in **10** employees who worked on their feet in a set location had **negative** work health scores (69% vs. 47% of remote desk workers).
- Quotes from Wisconsin workers

# Line Speeds, Pain and Stress

“What is happening is a lot of people are getting hurt, are hurting their arms, their shoulders. Because there are lots of heavy things and the machines, the packing machines, that used to run at 65 are now running 80-85. It’s too fast...”

- *Wisconsin food processing worker*




# No Quality Control for Worker Stress

"I was in quality control. We started with 28 machines, then it was 32, and then 42...So there was a moment I couldn't do it anymore. I had to work seven days, twelve hours per night. And it comes a moment in which you feel too much stress."

*-Wisconsin manufacturing worker*





A photograph of a person sitting on a wooden bench in a park. The person is silhouetted against a bright, hazy background, possibly a sunset or sunrise. They are sitting with their head down and one hand on their forehead, suggesting a state of stress, contemplation, or exhaustion. The bench is made of wooden planks and is in the foreground, leading the eye towards the person in the middle ground. The background shows trees and a bright light source.

**What concerns do  
you have for your  
workforce?**

# The Power Of A Healthy Workplace

(Good) work can be a strong **protective factor** for physical and mental health.



What good things do we  
get from a good job or  
workplace?

# What Helps?

Workplace wellbeing practices and mental health resources

# Foundational Work Practices

Hire enough people that the work can be done safely, sustainably and well by real human beings.

- Adequate staffing and training
- Safety culture
- Reasonable and sustainable demands
- High-quality managers



# Good Management Practices

- Offer training and professional development
- Have clear pathways for advancement
- Offer mentorship
- Provide relevant, strengths-based feedback
- Create opportunities for employee input
- Create spaces for connection
- Respect boundaries between work and non-work time





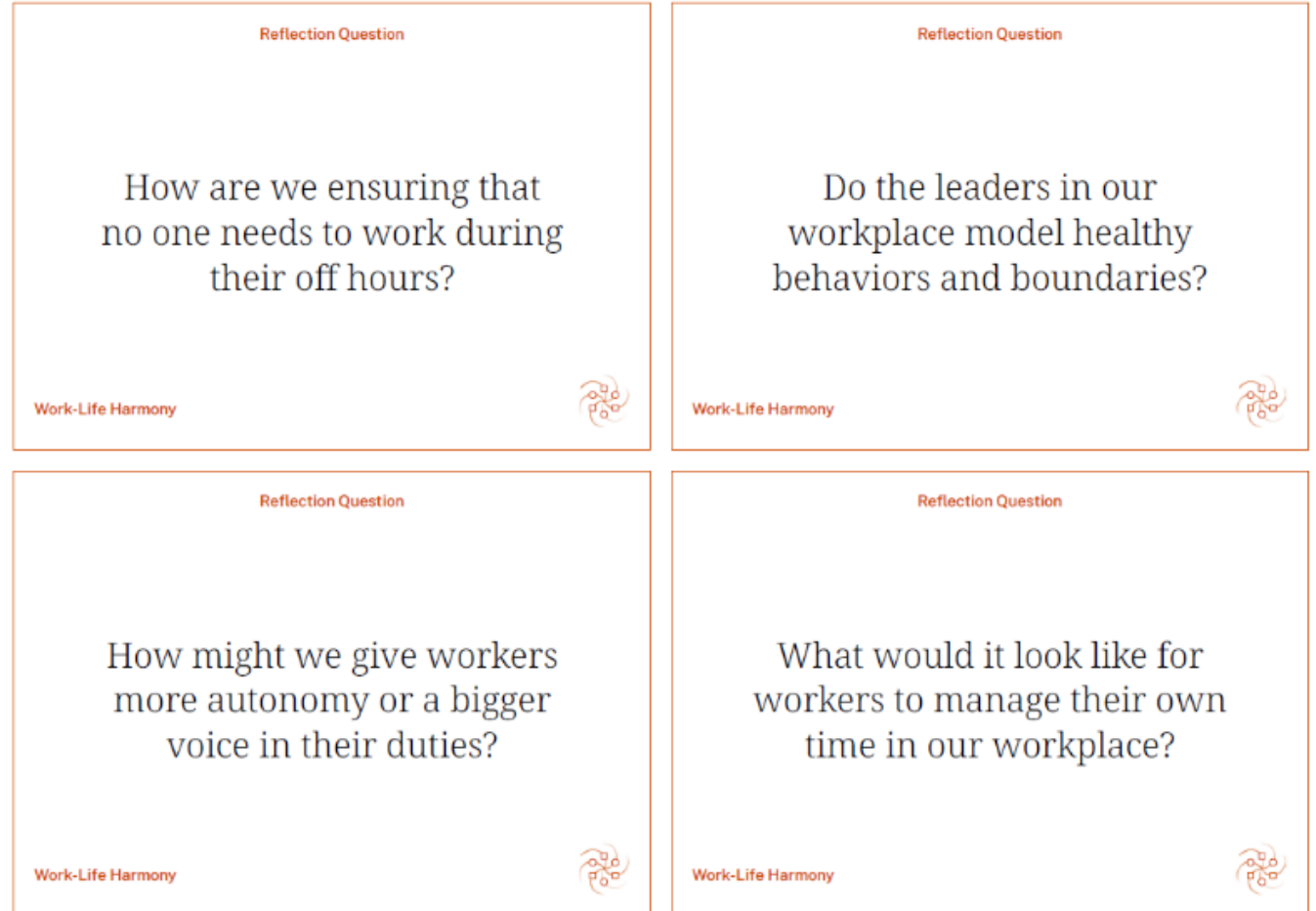
# Ability to Access Care

- Sick leave (and support for using it)
- Other scheduling accommodations
- Health coverage
- EAPs and options that work for your workforce
  - Virtual/on-demand
  - Language/culture



# Tools To Support Best Practices

## Example: Surgeon General's Framework for Workplace Mental Health and Wellbeing



# Tools To Support Best Practices

Example: Mental Health America

Article

**What questions should we ask our Benefits Broker, TPA, or EAP?**

[Learn More](#)

Article

**What professional development opportunities can we offer?**

[Learn More](#)

Article

**What onsite perks can we offer?**

[Learn More](#)

Article

**What is emotional intelligence and how does it apply to the workplace?**

[Learn More](#)

Article

**What are the top five reasons an employee stays and leaves a job?**

[Learn More](#)

Article

**What are some mentally healthy management practices?**

[Learn More](#)



# **Mental Health Resources**

Tools, Trainings, Service Guides

# OSHA's "Good Headspace" Tools

## Supporting Mental Health in the Workplace Getting Started Guide for Front-Line Supervisors



Front-line supervisors can make a difference when it comes to helping workers manage stress. This guide aims to help supervisors feel more comfortable and confident about talking to workers about workplace stress, mental health, and substance use.

- [Background](#)
- [Recommendations for Supervisors](#)
- [What to Say and Ways to Say It](#)
- [References](#)

### Background

There has been a reported rise in the number of individuals experiencing anxiety and depressive

## Supporting Mental Health in the Workplace Checklist for Supervisors



There has been a reported [rise in the number of individuals experiencing symptoms of anxiety and depressive disorders in the United States](#). This checklist provides recommendations for supervisors to help support mental health and alleviate stressors for workers.

### Be a compassionate leader and establish a supportive tone.

- ☐ Raise awareness about stressors and reduce the stigma surrounding mental health issues and substance use by:
  - Talking about the types of specific stressors that relate to your particular workforce and sector, as well as their impact on mental health (e.g., high rates of depression and anxiety disorders, increased substance use).
  - Sharing [national statistics](#) so that workers know they are not alone if they are struggling with mental health or substance use issues.
  - Sharing a story about stress for you and what you are doing to address it to demonstrate empathy, show vulnerability, and communicate that the group is all in this together.
  - Telling workers that it's natural to feel stressed and encourage them to seek help if needed. **It is important to assure workers their jobs will not be negatively impacted if they seek help.**
- ☐ Implement an "open door" policy for workers to express their problems and concerns.
- ☐ Check in with workers periodically to ask them how they are doing and whether there is anything that management can do to support them.

Reducing workplace stress benefits **everyone** and can lead to improved morale, increased productivity, fewer sick days, better focus, fewer workplace injuries, an enhanced quality of life, and improved physical health (e.g., better sleep, lower blood pressure, stronger immune system).

# Breakroom Flyers

Available in  
Spanish

## SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF **STRESS**

### BEHAVIOR SIGNS

- ✓ Worrying about things you didn't worry about before
- ✓ Loss of interest in things you used to enjoy (hobbies)
- ✓ Poor concentration, confusion; forgetfulness
- ✓ Uncertainty or trouble making decisions
- ✓ Relationship problems
- ✓ Sad mood
- ✓ Feeling anxious
- ✓ Change in personality, irritability
- ✓ Negative thinking
- ✓ Wanting to withdraw from people and activities

### WHAT CAN YOU DO?

See the back of this card for help and suggestions - for you or someone you know!

### PHYSICAL SIGNS

- ✓ Poor or disturbed sleep
- ✓ Weight loss or gain
- ✓ Changes in appetite
- ✓ Stomach or gastrointestinal problems
- ✓ Clenching or grinding teeth
- ✓ Chest pain



**WHATEVER TIME:** Day. Night. Weekends. Holidays.

### **WHATEVER THE REASON:**

Mental health distress. Substance use crisis. Thoughts of suicide.  
The 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline is here for you.

 **Text 988**  **Call 988**  **Chat 988lifeline.org**

Simply calling or texting 988 or chatting [988lifeline.org](https://988lifeline.org) will connect a person in crisis to compassionate care and support for any mental health or substance use-related distress. Anyone—a person in crisis, or someone supporting a person in crisis—can reach 988 in the United States through any land line, cell phone, and voice-over internet device.

With rising levels of anxiety, depression, emotional distress, and overdose deaths, it is crucial that people have somewhere to turn when they're in crisis. Suicide is a leading cause of death in the United States. The number of people with a substance use disorder continues to increase. The 988 Lifeline is a direct connection to immediate and free support and resources for anyone in crisis.

And it works. About 98 percent of people who call, chat, or text the 988 Lifeline get the crisis support they need and do not require additional services in that moment. The 988 Lifeline is a key part of a broader vision for reimagined crisis care in the United States. Through federal, state, local, and community partnerships, SAMHSA is working towards a vision where everyone has:

**Someone to talk to. Someone to respond. A safe place for help.**



**SAMHSA**  
Substance Abuse and Mental Health  
Services Administration

# Specialized Trainings



## Mental Health First Aid at Work for Manufacturing

[Get Started >](#)

**Mental Health First Aid at Work for Manufacturing provides workers with the skills they need to address the unique challenges of the manufacturing industry.**

- Increase employee productivity, morale and retention by cultivating supportive team cultures.
- Foster open discussions about mental health and substance use challenges and treatments.
- Build employees' resilience in a high-pressure work environment.





# QPR *Online* Gatekeeper Training

Our Gatekeeper course is taught in a clear, concise format using the latest in educational technology and practices. The course takes approximately one hour to complete.

## KEY COMPONENTS COVERED IN TRAINING:

- How to Question, Persuade and Refer someone who may be suicidal
- How to get help for yourself or learn more about preventing suicide
- The common causes of suicidal behavior
- The warning signs of suicide
- How to get help for someone in crisis

ONE TIME COST OF **\$29.95**

**PURCHASE COURSE**

ONLY TAKES



**Minutes**

CERTIFICATE REMAINS  
ACTIVE FOR



**Year**

OVER

**8,000,000**

People trained  
worldwide

# Suicide Risk Screening Tool

- Example: Columbia Suicide Severity Risk Scale (C-SSRS)
- Translated into [many languages](#)
- Free, short online training modules (multiple languages)

	Past Month
1) Have you wished you were dead or wished you could go to sleep and not wake up?	
2) Have you actually had any thoughts about killing yourself?	
If YES to 2, answer questions 3, 4, 5 and 6 If NO to 2, go directly to question 6	
3) Have you thought about how you might do this?	
4) Have you had any intention of acting on these thoughts of killing yourself, as opposed to you have the thoughts but you definitely would not act on them?	High Risk
5) Have you started to work out or worked out the details of how to kill yourself? Do you intend to carry out this plan?	High Risk
Always Ask Question 6	Life-time Past 3 Months
6) Have you done anything, started to do anything, or prepared to do anything to end your life? <i>Examples: Collected pills, obtained a gun, gave away valuables, wrote a will or suicide note, held a gun but changed your mind, cut yourself, tried to hang yourself, etc.</i>	High Risk







Any **YES** indicates that someone should seek a behavioral health referral. However, if the answer to 4, 5 or 6 is **YES**, seek **immediate help**; go to the **ER**, call 1-800-273-8255, text 741741 or call 911. **STAY WITH THEM** until they can be evaluated.



# Consumer Guide: Finding and Choosing Mental Health Care Treatment Programs

In Wisconsin, the state licenses and regulates certain mental health care treatment programs based on these Wis. Admin. Code chapters:

- [Wisconsin Admin. Code ch. DHS 34 Emergency Mental Health Service Programs](#) 
- [Wisconsin Admin. Code ch. DHS 35 Outpatient Mental Health Clinics](#) 
- [Wisconsin Admin. Code ch. DHS 36 Comprehensive Community Services for Persons with Mental Disorders and Substance-Use Disorders](#) 
- [Wisconsin Admin. Code ch. DHS 40 Mental Health Day Treatment for Youth](#) 
- [Wisconsin Admin. Code ch. DHS 61 Community Mental Health and Developmental Disabilities](#) 
- [Wisconsin Admin. Code ch. DHS 63 Community Support Programs for Chronically Mentally Ill Persons](#) 

There's a directory with details about each treatment program in Wisconsin. View the directory in Excel or as a PDF.

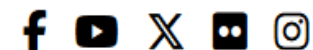
**View community mental health services provider directory as a PDF (PDF)**

**View community mental health services provider directory in Excel (Excel)**



State of Wisconsin

## Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection



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## Mental Health Resources

### Helplines for In-the-Moment Help

#### **24/7 Wisconsin Farmer Wellness Helpline: (888) 901-2558**

Available any time, any day to provide support to farmers struggling who are with suicidal thoughts, depression or anxiety, or who simply need a welcoming voice to talk to.

[Suicide and Crisis Lifeline](#): Call or text 988 OR live chat at [988lifeline.org](https://988lifeline.org)

24/7 lifeline provides free and confidential support and resources to anyone experiencing a crisis situation, or needing assistance helping a loved one in distress.

[Additional Helplines](#)

### Additional Resources

[Wisconsin Farm Center Homepage](#)

### Emotional Wellness Training for You and Your Community

[University of Wisconsin-Madison Extension Courses](#)

Learn how to support family members, friends, and yourself through a variety of course offerings, including virtual/online and in-person options that are all currently free of charge.

### Social Media Toolkits to Support Mental Health

Wisconsin Department of Health Services



# Discussion

- Do you have direct experience with any of these approaches?
- Which approach are you most interested in trying out or learning more about?

# Acknowledgements

- Wisconsin Suicide Statistics: Dr. Paul Creswell, Wisconsin Dept of Health Services
- Funding: National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH)

# Thank You!

- Kate McCoy: [katherinee.mccoy@dhs.wi.gov](mailto:katherinee.mccoy@dhs.wi.gov)
- [DHSOccHealth@dhs.wi.gov](mailto:DHSOccHealth@dhs.wi.gov)

# Questions and Answers

# Q&A

How can a small business like mine, without an HR department and with only a very limited budget, offer some meaningful mental health support?

# Q&A

Do you have any advice for how to show care and concern about an employee's mental health without being nosy or crossing a professional line?



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Join WCMA's next free  
member webinar!

# **Trends in Cheese Sales**

**Thursday, June 12  
1:00 p.m. (CT)**

**Register Now!**  
**[WisCheeseMakers.org/Events](https://WisCheeseMakers.org/Events)**