A Manager's Guide to Mental Health Literacy

An actionable toolkit for strengthening employees' mental well-being

Calm Business

Introduction

Does your organization have the right culture to fully support your employees' mental health needs?

You're not alone if it doesn't.

Your managers should be at the front lines of building a culture that supports your employees' mental well-being. They can proactively look for signs of distress, have mental health check-ins, and refer employees to the appropriate internal and external resources. Your managers should help employees build a solid foundation for their overall well-being because when they thrive, the whole organization thrives.

We understand that knowing where to begin can feel overwhelming, especially because employees have diverse mental health needs. The key is to have managers help employees connect the dots and proactively manage their mental health needs both at work and at home.

To help your managers get started, we've curated an actionable manager toolkit that includes a mental health literacy checklist and tips on building a psychologically safe environment.

It's time to think first of your employees as human beings—they want to work in a positive, healthy workplace with managers who genuinely care about their overall physical and mental well-being, not just their performance.

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How Managers Can Build Mental Health Literacy

People leave their managers, not their jobs. You've probably heard this said before.

Managers are at the frontline of creating psychological safety for your employees whether it's virtually or at the office. In the absence of psychological safety, employees hide problems as an effort to protect themselves. Unfortunately, when this happens, issues don't go away—they just get worse.

> **When it comes to mental health challenges, managers have the opportunity to be the first responders and address them before they escalate.**

On the next page, see which mental health literacy level your managers fall under by reviewing the different levels. We've also included a Mental Health Literacy Assessment Scorecard that you can use for your managers.

Which Mental Health Literacy Level do Your Managers Fall Into?[1]

Level 1 Undermining

Undermining can come in the form of unhelpful manager beliefs such as "your problems are your own, and you shouldn't be bringing them to work." This contributes to fear and stigma. Managers may also be contributing to your employees' stress with unreasonable work demands, unrealistic time pressures, lack of inclusion, or lack of resources and support.

Level 2 Avoiding

An employee may be stressed or overwhelmed. Their performance is deteriorating or they have mental health challenges that the manager passes on to HR to take primary responsibility. This can be isolating, exacerbate stigma, and disconnect the employee from their team's support.

Level 3 Caring

The manager is caring, considerate, and supportive of the employee, providing psychological safety and inclusion. They work together with, and invest time in supporting, the employee but may be struggling to balance employee care and business productivity needs.

Level 4 Capable

They regularly check in with each employee, support workflow, and develop their capabilities. When employees experience challenges, the manager provides appropriate levels of care, support, structure, and flexibility.

Level 5 Advocating

They are visible in their support for the employee's mental health and well-being.

1	Undermining
2	Avoiding
3	Caring
4	Capable
5	Advocating

1. Stages of Mental Health Literacy (2020). https://blueberryinstitute.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/mental-health_whitepaper_web_v2.pdf

Mental Health Literacy Assessment Scorecard for Your Managers

Instructions: You can use the assessment scorecard template as part of performance reviews and record where your managers fall on their mental health literacy support.

Consider including their managers and direct reports in the assessment process by having them mark an X where they think their manager lies. Then total their score at the end.

💡 **Actionable Next Steps**

If the manager mostly falls under Level 1 (Undermining) or Level 2 (Avoiding), you can consider providing monthly 1:1 coaching to help them better support their teams' mental health needs.
Also, you can share internal and external resources that they can use to bolster their mental health knowledge.

	1 Undermining	2 Avoiding	3 Caring	4 Capable	5 Advocating
Direct Manager					
Self					
Direct Report #1					
Direct Report #2					
Direct Report #3					
Direct Report #4					
Direct Report #5					
Direct Report #6					
Total Score / Number of Reviewers					

How Managers Can Establish Psychological Safety

Psychological safety is a key indicator of workplace well-being. It's the shared belief that employees can bring up problems, share ideas, and take risks. They should feel comfortable showing up fully and bringing their whole selves to work.

Managers can create psychological safety by leading with empathy, humility, vulnerability, and collaboration. Here are some tips they can use right away:

- **Listen to their team(s) first**
- **Elicit an employee's motivation to improve their well-being and partner with them to do so**
- **Show their understanding through reflective statements:**

Employee: *I am feeling like I have way too much on my plate right now, both professionally and personally.*

Manager: *You want to find a better balance and you are hoping we can figure that out together.*

A psychologically safe workplace can also strengthen your DEI initiatives, as research has repeatedly shown that organizations benefit from diversity of thought. But what if some team members still don't feel comfortable speaking up? Unfortunately, many people feel this way about their workplace.

In a 2017 poll, Gallup found that:

3 in 10 employees strongly agreed that their opinions don't count at work.

A culture of inclusivity is imperative to leverage the value that a diverse workforce brings. Complex problems require multiple perspectives. Yet without psychological safety, all viewpoints are not expressed at decision-making tables.

When psychological safety exists, employees who usually lack power and status—and normally get excluded—finally have a voice. As organizations are tasked with moving from diversity to belonging, psychological safety is essential at every level if this is to be achieved.

"If leadership is about motivating, influencing, and advancing your people to excellence, then intersectional inclusion shows us that we're not truly including women of color if we don't seek to empathize with their challenges."

RUCHIKA TULSHYAN

Author of *Inclusion on Purpose: An Intersectional Approach to Creating a Culture of Belonging at Work*

6 Common Barriers Your Managers May Be Facing [2]

If the majority of your managers fall on the lower level of the assessment above, there are six common barriers they might not be sharing with you:

1   Fear of decision-making

There are so many policies these days. I have to be politically correct. I don't want to step over any lines.

Your Next Steps: Proactively share your company's latest policies via your internal communication tool along with standard language that your managers can use to trickle information to their direct teams.

2   Fear of fixing

What if I ask someone if they are ok and they are not? I will then be responsible and I don't want to or know how to fix mental health issues.

Your Next Steps: Provide a training workshop for your managers on how they can appropriately address their team's mental health challenges and the resources they can share as next steps.

3   Fear of guilt

If someone says they are not ok then I will feel obligated to do something about it and I don't want that responsibility. I feel guilty but I just don't have the time to solve someone's mental health issues.

Your Next Steps: Acknowledge the guilty feelings that your managers are having and kindly let them know they don't have to carry the burden by themselves. They can let their team know about health benefits such as the Calm app that they can access anytime, anywhere to help them on their mental health journey.

4   Fear of additional emotional labor

How can I support someone else with their stress and mental health challenges when I am already feeling stressed, overwhelmed, and tired?

Your Next Steps: Clearly outline the internal and external resources that your managers can tap into when they feel this way. Let them know they shouldn't be taking on emotional labor, because their mental health matters too.

5   Fear of boundary challenges

Mental health and resilience is a personal issue. It is up to the employees themselves to manage in their personal lives and they shouldn't bring it to work.

Your Next Steps: Appreciate the difference in opinions and also express how mental health challenges can show up in various ways at work. Managers play a crucial role in ensuring that employees can thrive in a healthy manner.

6   Fear of failing

What if I say the wrong thing and make things worse?

Your Next Steps: Implement manager training on how to have difficult conversations around mental health and how to be open and supportive. Provide them with language to use and role-playing exercises so they feel more comfortable.

2. The 6 Fears for People Managers. (2020). https://blueberryinstitute.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/mental-health_whitepaper_web_v2.pdf

Mental Health Literacy Checklist for Managers

Instructions: Share the following best practices with your managers today.

Psychological Safety

- ☐ Create psychologically safe environments where employees can openly talk about their mental health

- ☐ Incorporate DEI practices when developing a psychologically safe workplace

- ☐ Model mental health best practices yourself and be a role model for your team

Team Meetings

- ☐ Start every team meeting with a short guided meditation from Calm that you can do together

- ☐ Educate your team members on mental health literacy and provide them with Calm resources so everyone can be better equipped to talk about mental health

- ☐ Encourage mindfulness activities like meditations, breathwork, gratitude journals, morning pages, midday walks, etc.

1:1 Meetings

- ☐ Have regular check-ins with employees and feel comfortable having mental health conversations

- ☐ Put a recurring "mental health check-in" agenda item for your 1:1 meetings so you can ensure mental health is a priority

HR Resources

- ☐ Obtain resources from HR to enhance social and emotional skills

- ☐ Consistently attend manager training to enhance your leadership skills and promote high-quality relationships

- ☐ Share mental health offerings with employees who need additional support

- ☐ Check HR internal communications for the latest mental health offerings

Your Next Steps

Check Out Calm's Mindful Manager Program

Leaders who practice mindfulness have employees who consistently experience better well-being, report a better work–life balance, experience less emotional exhaustion, and see an overall improvement in their performance.

Leaders who participate in mindfulness programs also report that they experience a positive shift in how they react in work situations. They slow down to be more mindful, are more engaged with their employees, and note organizational process improvements that make their teams more efficient.

As an example, managers who completed Calm's four-week training program made improvements across the following:

Impairment

Managers reported less impairment in their day-to-day activities (55% improved). On average, managers improved by 34%.

Mindfulness

Managers were more mindful (67% increased). On average, managers improved by 11%.

Stress

Managers experienced less stress (56% improved). On average, managers improved by 8%.

Emotional Regulation

Managers were better able to regulate their emotions. Specifically, they were better at not suppressing their emotions (54% improved) and better at reframing their emotions in a productive way (49% improved). On average, managers improved by 19%.

Self–Awareness

Managers were more self-aware as leaders (58% improved) understanding how they made decisions and recognizing their own strengths and weaknesses. On average, managers improved by 9%.

Authentic Leadership

Managers were better at acting in accordance with their values (42% improved).

Check Out the Program Offerings →

Wrapping Up

By this point, you should feel more confident about training your managers and equipping them with the appropriate resources to create a happier and healthier workplace.

As an HR leader, you're at the forefront of implementing positive, sustainable changes in the organization. When you lead by example, your managers and employees will feel more comfortable and be more likely to follow suit.

Here at Calm for Business, one thing we focus on is providing organizations and managers with practical mental health tools to support their employees' mental well-being. With our Sleep Stories, Movement series, Masterclasses, to guided meditations, we offer diverse content that's easily accessible to help employees reduce their stress and anxiety and improve their sleep. They are supported anytime and anywhere, on their own terms, so they feel cared for.

Connect with our Calm specialists today and find out how we can support you in establishing a happier, healthier workplace.
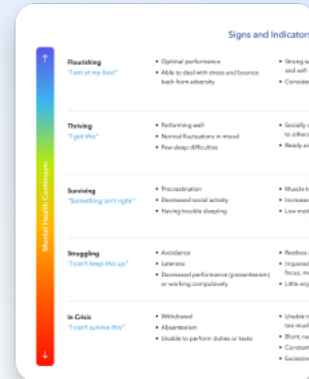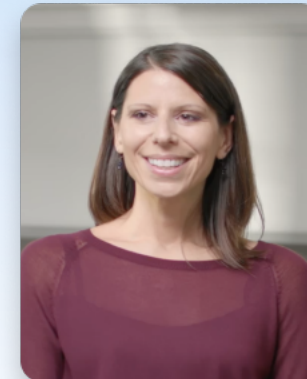
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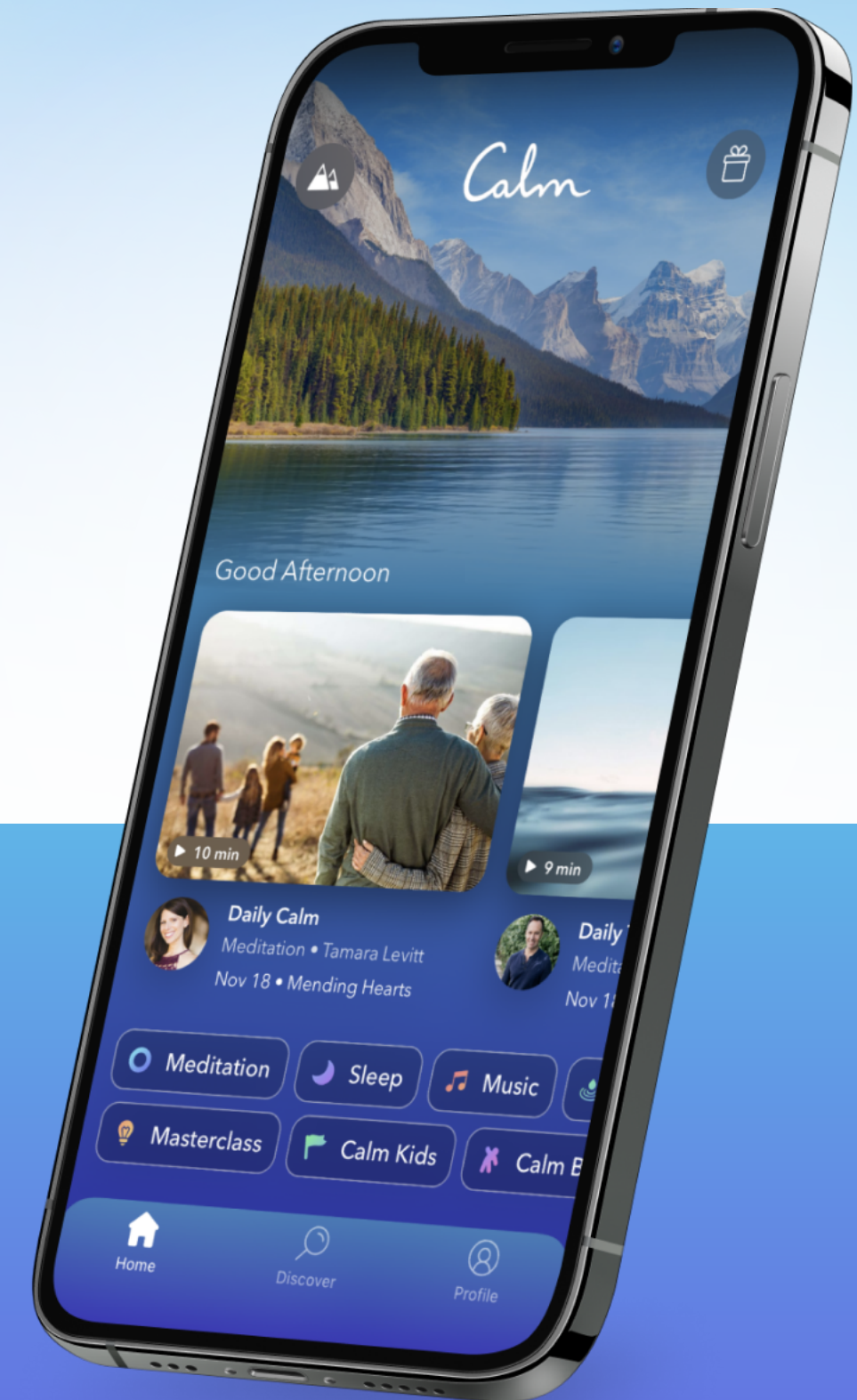
Calm Resources

Mental Health Continuum →

Share this self-assessment tool with your employees so they can identify their current state and take the appropriate next steps.


Calm Events →

Join our monthly webinars where we focus on topics that'll help your employees stress less, sleep better, and build resilience.
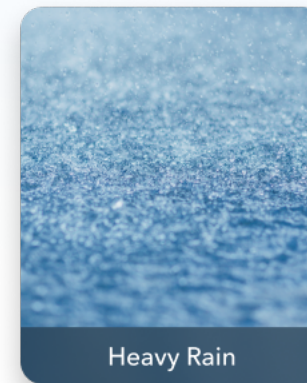

Mindfulness Resources →

You'll find resources such as gratitude journals, grounding exercises, and more.

Soothing Meditations →

Share these short meditation clips with your employees and help them get centered before they start their workday.
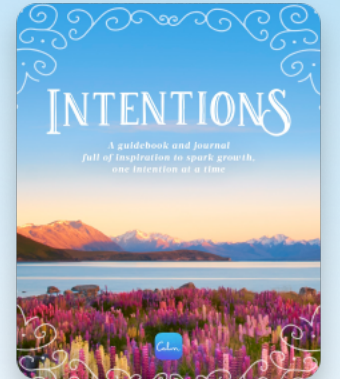

7 Days of Calming Anxiety
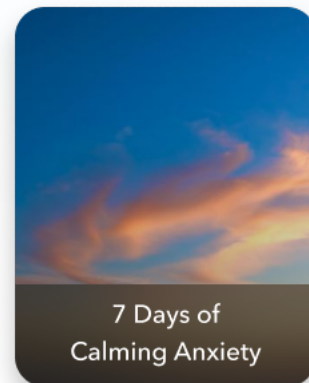
Soothing Soundscapes →

Share soothing soundscapes when your employees need a cozy environment for relaxation or sleep.

Heavy Rain

Sleep Stories →

Provide sleep stories to your employees who need to get better sleep and feel more productive the next day.

Tabitha Brown

For more information on the science supporting Calm's impact on mental wellness, check out **Calm Science**.

Ready to build a happier and healthier workplace?

Let's take that first step, together.

Calm for Business is a global wellness benefits solution that supports mental health and build resilience through clinically proven outcomes, including better sleep, reduced stress and anxiety, and improved mindfulness. Calm's comprehensive, diverse, and highly accessible mental health resources are designed to support the broad spectrum of needs across your workforce. Trusted by more than 4 million paying members, Calm boasts over 100 million downloads to date. With hundreds of hours of original audio content available in seven languages, Calm supports employees in more than 2,500 companies and 190 countries.

Calm Business

Join 2,500+ organizations around the world that trust Calm for their mental wellness needs

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