

BEING A SUPPORTIVE PEER



American Foundation for Suicide Prevention

DeShawn had gotten the sense that Joe wasn't himself lately. He couldn't quite put his finger on what was wrong, but he knew something wasn't quite right. So, he trusted his gut and decided to reach out to Joe. DeShawn asked, "Hey man, everything alright?" Joe said he was fine, but DeShawn added what he had observed in Joe's behavior saying, "I've noticed that you don't seem quite like yourself lately, you know, the company's got that employee assistance program. Free counseling, resources for all kinds of stuff. I used it last year when things got rough at home." DeShawn provided Joe with the number to the EAP and months later, Joe was back to his old self, focused and steady. DeShawn and Joe grab coffee before shifts a few times a week now.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

Step Into the Role: You don't need to be a manager or counselor to be a supportive peer. Sometimes being present, willing to listen and provide resources is all it takes. Trusted coworkers can often connect with each other in beneficial ways that can encourage people to get the help they need.

Reach out if something seems off: If someone's behavior changes or someone seems a little off, don't ignore it. Your awareness might be the only warning sign anyone catches and reaching out could be the first step that gets them the support they need.

Encourage and Guide: Let them know about your company's EAP, wellness options or crisis resources like 988. You don't have to have all the answers, just be someone who helps them take the next step. That alone can make a huge difference.

JOB SITE DISCUSSION STARTERS

1. If you were in the same situation, what resources would you share with a colleague you are concerned about?
2. What are some signs you might observe that would signal that you should reach out to someone?
3. Do you know about local resources?

THE BOTTOM LINE

Formal mental health resources matter—but so do everyday people who care. Supportive peers play an important part of preventing suicide because they can often open up dialog in ways that others can't. When workers trust each other enough to open up, the entire team benefits. Being a supportive peer builds resilience and strengthens the bond between coworkers. You don't need a degree to make a difference—just the heart to listen.

Don't forget to mention your company's mental health resources or local service options.