



Rhode Island Behavioral Health Training

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Cultivating Cultures of Wellness at Work

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We know that our teams and organizations play essential roles in supporting Rhode Islanders, particularly for individuals and families navigating mental health, substance use, prevention, recovery, housing instability, crisis, and other life challenges. Just as we focus on supporting wellness in our communities, it is also important that we find ways and space to intentionally cultivate wellness in our own workplaces. **Cultivating cultures of wellness is more than just a nice thing to have; it is an essential thing to do.** How well our teams are and how carefully we care for these teams connects directly to staff retention, service quality, trust, morale, and our organizations' abilities to carry out our missions. Recognizing that we are engaged in work that is both deeply meaningful and emotionally demanding, a culture of workplace wellness helps ensure that the people doing this work are supported, valued, and able to sustain their commitments to this work over time.

Workplace wellness is more than a set of individual responsibilities like taking breaks, practicing mindfulness, or calling on team members to manage stress on their own. Instead, **it is an organizational culture, shaped by policies and team supports that sustain psychological safety, leadership practices, team relationships, and opportunities for rest and reflection.** A true culture of wellness moves beyond asking, "How can staff take better care of themselves?" to ask, "How can our organization create conditions where wellness is possible?"

Let's explore some ways to make wellness a part of your team and organizational culture:

Leadership and Supervision

1. Leaders can model wellness by setting realistic expectations, sharing healthy boundaries, and by ensuring consistent and clear communication is the norm.
2. Supervision should include space to discuss workloads, emotional impact, professional growth, and support needs. Instead of asking, "How can I help?" try to get more specific: "Do you feel your current workload is sustainable?" "What could we do to make your daily work smoother or easier?" or "What can I do to better support you in your role?"
3. Ensure leaders are trained to recognize signs of burnout, compassion fatigue, and secondary trauma stress.
4. Teams can integrate wellness into regular team conversations and supervision, rather than addressing it only after a challenge or crisis.

Peers and Lived Experience

1. Include team members with lived and living experience in leadership spaces, program design, strategic planning, and more to offer practical influence in shared decision making.
2. Practice, protect, and normalize boundaries, rest, support-seeking, and recovery-oriented approaches to work that shift team perspectives on constant availability, overextension, or carrying emotional burdens alone.
3. Co-create practical and relational wellness practices such as grounding activities, check-in practices, reflection prompts, team rituals, or peer-developed wellness tools.
4. Create peer-to-peer spaces for sharing and mutual support, where team members can share what helps them stay grounded, navigate difficult work, maintain boundaries, and reconnect with their sense of purpose.

These are only some of the things we can do to build cultures of wellness within our teams and organizations. A key practice is to establish clear lines of communication, such as holding regular staff listening sessions or pulse checks to share the burden of reviewing workloads and productivity expectations for sustainability. Consider how teams may view making use of leave or breaks; if team members express a sense of guilt for any time spent away from their work, think of ways to change the narrative. Find ways to celebrate staff contributions and create opportunities for connection.

Your team does not need to do all these things at once; instead, focus on small, consistent changes. These go a long way to building trust, especially when your team members start to see that their feedback leads to action.

Above all, remember that cultivating cultures of wellness at work is an ongoing practice. It requires listening, humility, leadership commitment, and shared responsibility. Just as the work we do is deeply rooted in concepts of wellness, recovery, and care for the communities we serve, workplace wellness is strongly connected to the values of recovery, dignity, connection, and community. By caring for our teams, we can strengthen our capacity to care with, for, and alongside the individuals and communities we serve!