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Kentucky Small Business Toolkit for Retaining Employees in Recovery









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As the Rural Communities Opioid Response Program (RCORP) Rural Center of Excellence on SUD Recovery, Fletcher Group, Inc. provides access to a wide range of resources on relevant topics. Inclusion in this document does not imply endorsement of, or agreement with, the contents by the Fletcher Group or the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA).

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Introduction



The Kentucky Small Business Toolkit for Retaining Employees in Recovery is designed to assist small business owners in cultivating a workplace environment that supports retention of employees in recovery from substance use disorders (SUDs). By implementing recovery-friendly and trauma-informed practices, small businesses can enhance employee well-being, reduce turnover, and contribute to improved health outcomes for their employees.

Common Workplace Challenges for Employees in Recovery

Employees in recovery from SUDs often face several obstacles in the workplace that can hinder their success and well-being:

1. Shame and isolation: Despite progress in mental health awareness, shame surrounding SUDs persists. This can lead to social isolation and reluctance to seek necessary SUD recovery support or accommodations.[1]

2. Rigid scheduling: Traditional work schedules may not accommodate the needs of employees attending therapy sessions, recovery support groups, or medical appointments that are essential for their recovery.[2]

3. Lack of accommodations: Employees may be unaware of their rights to reasonable accommodations under laws like the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), or they may fear negative repercussions for requesting them. This can result in unmet needs and increased stress.[2]

4. Fear of disclosure: Concerns about confidentiality and potential job loss may prevent employees from disclosing their recovery status, limiting access to recovery support services and accommodations.[3]

How Small Businesses Benefit

1. Access to appropriate resources: The National Safety Council noted that 75% of surveyed employers indicate that their companies have been impacted by opioids, yet only half are very confident that they have the appropriate policies and resources in place to help their employees impacted by SUD.[4]

2. Increased productivity and workplace morale: Recovery-ready workplaces foster a culture of support, leading to enhanced morale and productivity. The U.S. Department of Labor notes that recovery-ready workplaces experience increased worker well-being and decreased turnover.[5]

> The National Safety Council determined that for every person with an SUD who enters recovery, the savings to the employer can be up to $8,500 annually in productivity, reduced turnover, and lower healthcare costs.[7]

3. Compliance with employment laws while fostering employee support: Supporting employees in recovery aligns with compliance requirements under laws such as the ADA. Recovery-ready workplaces ensure that employees are informed about their rights to reasonable accommodations and protections that can help them maintain employment.[5]

4. Healthier communities and a stronger economy: By supporting recovery, small businesses contribute to healthier communities with lower unemployment rates and reduced substance use. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) emphasize that workplace-supported recovery can prevent substance use, reduce isolation, and encourage treatment and recovery, thereby strengthening the overall economy.[6]

Retaining employees in recovery requires intentional strategies that support not only their health and stability but also foster a thriving workplace. The approaches discussed in this toolkit, grounded in recovery-friendly and trauma-informed principles, offer guidance.

Who This Toolkit Is For

This toolkit is intended for small business owners, managers, and human resources professionals seeking to:

- Support employees in recovery from SUDs,

- Implement trauma-informed workplace practices,
- Enhance employee retention and productivity,
- Reduce costs related to employee turnover,
- Improve employee well-being and overall health, and
- Contribute to community health and economic resilience.

[1]Yang, L. H., Wong, L. Y., Grivel, M. M., & Hasin, D. S. (2017, September). Stigma and substance use disorders: An international phenomenon. Current Opinion in Psychiatry. https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC5854406/

[2]Mental Health America. (2024, December). I need accommodations at work in recovery. https://mhanational.org/learning-hub/i-need-accommodations-at-work-in-recovery/

[3]Mental Health America. (2025, March 1). Workplace mental health resources for employees. https://mhanational.org/resources/workplace-mental-health-employees/

[4]National Safety Council. (2019, February). National Employer Survey 2019: Opioid Usage in the Workplace. www.nsc.org/getmedia/d7221a2a-a6a5-4348-a092-02ed41e9d251/ppw-survey-methodology.pdf

[5]Department of Labor. (n.d.-b). Recovery-ready workplace. www.dol.gov/agencies/eta/RRW-hub/Recovery-ready-workplace

[6]Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2023, December). Workplace supported recovery. www.cdc.gov/niosh/substance-use/workplace-supported-recovery/

[7]National Safety Council. Supporting Employees into Recovery Leads to Positive Results. Accessed March 3, 2025. www.nsc.org/workplace/safety-topics/drugs-at-work/supporting-employees-into-recovery?srsltid=AfmBOopYd-7MLGMiaBZ4YkXi0WTDTQL31XJ-BM6FEahsWv7xA4Lu2FuWF

Section 1

Key Strategies to Retain Employees in Recovery



Build a Supportive Business Atmosphere

A recovery-friendly workplace begins with the workplace environment. Employees are more likely to remain in workplaces where they feel respected, understood, and supported in their recovery journey. Employees feeling these impacts can increase their productivity and reduce nonattendance, which will provide you, as a business owner, with increased profits and lower costs.

To foster a friendly workplace for employees in recovery:

1. Encourage peer support within small teams. Peer support is a powerful resource for individuals in recovery. Small businesses can promote this by allowing space for voluntary, confidential peer support meetings or check-ins. This could include hosting an optional after-hours recovery meeting on-site, designating a quiet room for personal wellness breaks, or facilitating introductions to external peer-led resources. While participation should never be mandatory, offering these options shows that the workplace values employee recovery from SUD.

2. Promote recovery-friendly language in the workplace. Language shapes culture. Encourage the use of person-first, non-isolating language when discussing substance use. For example, say "employee in recovery" instead of "former addict" or "person with a substance use disorder" rather than "drug abuser." Provide a language guide to staff and lead by example in everyday communication (see appendix for sample language and policies).

Establish Flexible Workplace Policies to Support Retention

Establishing employee retention policies in the workplace can make the difference between an employee maintaining their job or falling out of the workforce. The following workplace flexibility efforts show trust and promote long-term employee retention[1]:

1. Implement flexible scheduling to accommodate SUD treatment or recovery meetings. Employees in recovery may need to attend therapy, recovery support groups, or medical appointments during regular work hours. Offering work schedule flexibility—such as early start/early leave options, condensed work weeks, or shift swaps—helps employees stay compliant with their recovery management plans while remaining productive. Workplace flexibility reduces stress and demonstrates that the employer values the employee's health (sample policy in appendix).

2. Allow job modifications that support well-being. Reasonable accommodations might include temporarily modifying job duties during early recovery, providing extended breaks, or offering a hybrid work model. For employees disclosing a diagnosis under the ADA[2], these accommodations are legally mandated. Even when not required, voluntary workplace flexibility fosters employee loyalty and retention. Employers should engage in a good-faith, collaborative process to find workable solutions. This flexibility can in turn reduce overall absence and contribute to lower costs when experiencing employee turnover.

Cultivate an Environment of Safety and Trust

Psychological and physical safety are fundamental to recovery.[3] A predictable, respectful workplace makes it easier for employees to manage stress and thrive in their job roles.

1. Ensure psychological and physical safety for all employees. Promote a zero-tolerance policy for harassment and retaliatory behavior against individuals in SUD recovery. Supervisors should be trained to respond to employee SUD recovery disclosure with empathy and discretion. Providing wellness spaces, mental health resources, and regular check-ins can support overall employee safety and reduce the likelihood of substance use resumption.

2. Provide clear expectations and consistency in policies. SUD recovery often requires structure, especially early in someone's recovery.[4] Inconsistent rules or communication can trigger anxiety or feelings of instability for someone in recovery. Maintain transparent, clearly written policies about work expectations, leave procedures, and disciplinary processes. Ensure that all employees understand the policies equally and apply them fairly. When changes do occur, communicate them as early as possible to preserve trust.

These strategies are not only practical for small businesses to implement—they are transformative. A workplace that supports employee SUD recovery is more than just legally compliant; it is resilient, productive, and deeply human. When businesses invest in the well-being of employees in recovery, they often gain dedicated, loyal team members in return, which contributes to business success and growth.

[1]Ray, T. K., & Pana-Cryan, R. (2021). Work flexibility and work-related well-being. International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health, 18(6), 3254. https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph18063254

[2]U.S. Department of Labor. Accommodations. www.dol.gov/agencies/odep/program-areas/employers/accommodations. Accessed June 5, 2025.

[3]Theodorakis, Y., Hassandra, M., & Panagiotounis, F. (2024). Enhancing substance use disorder recovery through integrated physical activity and behavioral interventions: A comprehensive approach to treatment and prevention. Brain Sciences, 14(6), 534. https://doi.org/10.3390/brainsci14060534

[4]Kitzinger, R. H., Jr, Gardner, J. A., Moran, M., Celkos, C., Fasano, N., Linares, E., Muthee, J., & Royzner, G. (2023). Habits and routines of adults in early recovery from substance use disorder: Clinical and research implications from a mixed methodology exploratory study. Substance Abuse: Research and Treatment, 17, 11782218231153843. https://doi.org/10.1177/11782218231153843



Section 2

Trauma-Informed Practices for Small Businesses

Trauma-informed care is a framework that recognizes the widespread impact of psychological trauma and integrates this understanding into policies, procedures, and interactions.[1] For small businesses, applying trauma-informed principles doesn't require clinical expertise or large budgets—it requires empathy, consistency, and a commitment to psychological safety.

Create a Safe and Trustworthy Work Environment

Workplaces can unintentionally recreate power dynamics, unpredictability, or stressors that echo past trauma—especially for employees in recovery. To minimize this risk, small businesses can:

1. Offer predictable schedules and clear communication. Consistency builds trust. When changes are necessary, provide advance notice and context to help employees prepare.

2. Provide choices when possible. Offering employees control over minor decisions—such as how to structure their break time or which tasks to prioritize—can be empowering and help reduce feelings of helplessness.

3. Design spaces with safety in mind. Ensure workspaces are free from unnecessary noise and aggression and avoid overly confined areas. If possible, offer a quiet area for decompression or wellness breaks.

4. Avoid punitive management styles. Trauma survivors may respond negatively to fear-based approaches. Instead, use collaborative problem-solving and feedback that emphasizes growth and learning.



Encourage Open Communication without Forcing Disclosure

Trauma-informed workplaces foster environments where employees feel safe to speak up—but never obligated to share more than they are comfortable with.

1. Make support visible and voluntary. Post signs or digital reminders that allow access to resources like employment assistance programs, peer support, or recovery-friendly policies.

2. Normalize mental health challenges. Train all staff to use non-shaming language and share company values that support mental health well-being and nonjudgmental listening.

3. Avoid assumptions. Just because an employee is struggling doesn't mean they want to discuss personal trauma. Offer space, not pressure.

4. Respond to needs, not stories. Focus on what accommodations or adjustments can support the employee's performance and well-being, without requiring details about their history.

Train Managers to Respond Appropriately when an Employee Shares Past Trauma

Managers and small business owners are often the first point of contact for employees in distress. A trauma-informed response can help build trust, reduce harm, and connect the employee with appropriate support.[2]

1. Listen without judgment or interruption. Do not offer comparisons, solutions, or personal anecdotes. Allow the employee to feel heard and respected.

2. Gently redirect if distress increases. If the employee becomes visibly agitated while sharing, it's okay to pause and ask if they'd like to take a break, change the subject, or return to the conversation later.

3. Know your boundaries. Trauma processing should be left to qualified professionals. Managers should never act as counselors. Instead, they can validate the employee's experience and provide information about professional resources.

4. Follow up discreetly. If appropriate, check in later with a simple message like, "I'm here if you need anything" or "Would you like me to help connect you to an outside resource?"

By applying trauma-informed practices on a small scale, businesses can foster workplaces where employees—especially those in recovery—feel secure, valued, and empowered to succeed. These strategies also promote greater team cohesion, resilience, and long-term employee retention.

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[1]Center for Substance Abuse Treatment (US). Trauma-Informed Care in Behavioral Health Services. Rockville (MD): Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (US); 2014. (Treatment Improvement Protocol Series, No. 57.) Chapter 1, Trauma-Informed Care: A Sociocultural Perspective. Available from: www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK207195/

[2]Marris, W. (2025, February 27). Toolkit: Trauma-informed workplaces. The Campaign for Trauma-Informed Policy and Practice. www.ctipp.org/post/toolkit-trauma-informed-workplaces

Section 3

Education for Small Business Owners and Managers

Managers in small businesses play a uniquely influential role. Often directly involved in day-to-day operations, their leadership sets the tone for workplace culture and employee retention—especially for employees in recovery. The following guidance equips owners and managers with essential tools to recognize, support, and communicate with employees in a recovery-friendly and trauma-informed way.

Recognizing and Supporting Employees in Recovery

Employees in recovery may not disclose their status, and they are not required to. However, some signs—like frequent time-off requests for medical appointments, participation in support groups, or changes in behavior—may suggest an employee is navigating recovery.

Key Principles

1. Focus on support and performance, not speculation or diagnosis.
2. Respect privacy and never press for personal details.
3. Understand that recovery from SUD is a health journey deserving of accommodation and dignity.

How-to Summary

1. Notice changes in behavior or requests that may indicate recovery-related needs (e.g., adjusted schedules).
2. Ask: "Is there anything I can do to help support your work or schedule?" — not "Are you in recovery?"
3. Provide information about accommodations or resources without requiring disclosure.
4. Avoid assumptions—each recovery path is unique.

Developing a Leadership Style that Encourages Employee Retention

Employees are more likely to stay when they feel seen, respected, and valued. Recovery-friendly leadership emphasizes empathy, consistency, and transparency.

Key Principles

1. Model clear, calm, and consistent communication.
2. Recognize effort and growth, not just outcomes.
3. Embrace flexibility as a retention strategy—not a risk.

How-to Summary

1. Set clear expectations and stick to them consistently across all employees.
2. Create a workplace culture where asking for help is normalized, not penalized.
3. Celebrate small wins (attendance, teamwork, progress).
4. Offer flexibility when feasible (schedule, workload, time off), particularly during early recovery.

Having Supportive Conversations Without Stigma or Judgment

When employees share something related to their recovery or mental health, how you respond can build trust—or shut it down.

Key Principles

1. Use person-first, non-stigmatizing language.
2. Respond with empathy, not advice.
3. Maintain confidentiality and follow up with support.

How-to Summary

1. Use phrases like "Thanks for trusting me with that" or "You're not alone—let me know what you need."
2. Avoid terms like "clean," "addict," or "sober"—instead, use "in recovery" or "person with a substance use disorder."
3. Offer support, not solutions: "Would it help if we looked at some scheduling options together?"
4. Don't probe for details. Focus on needs and next steps.



Providing Performance Feedback While Being Recovery-Friendly

Feedback is necessary for employee growth but must be delivered in a way that does not shame or trigger defensiveness—especially for employees with a trauma or recovery background.

Key Principles

1. Use constructive, strengths-based language.
2. Link feedback to goals and performance, not personal characteristics.
3. Pair critique with affirmation and problem-solving.

How-to Summary

1. Use the "support-first" model: "I've noticed [behavior]. I want to understand how I can support your success with this."
2. Balance criticism with acknowledgment: "You've made strong progress in [area]; let's work together on [issue]."
3. Be timely and specific—don't let issues accumulate.
4. Keep performance conversations private, professional, and solution-focused.

Section 4

Implementing and Sustaining a Recovery-Friendly Workplace

Creating a recovery-friendly workplace is not a one-time initiative—it's an ongoing commitment. For small businesses, implementation doesn't have to be expensive or complicated. Even modest steps can lead to meaningful, lasting change when guided by intention, consistency, and employee input.

Simple Steps for Small Businesses to Get Started

Small businesses can begin building a recovery-friendly culture with a few focused actions that lay the foundation for long-term success:

Conduct a workplace assessment of current recovery-friendly practices.

Start by evaluating where your business stands. A brief internal audit can help identify strengths and opportunities for growth (see Appendix II, Recovery-Friendly Workplace Self-Assessment).

Suggested checklist questions:

- ✓ Are recovery-friendly or mental health resources visible to employees?
- ✓ Do current policies allow for flexibility or accommodation when needed?
- ✓ Are managers trained to handle employee disclosure or support conversations?
- ✓ Does your culture support safety, or could stigma be present?

> Tip: Use anonymous surveys or informal check-ins to understand employee perceptions about the workplace environment.

Educate employees and managers on stigma reduction.

Stigma is a major barrier to retention for employees in recovery. Training and open dialogue can shift attitudes and foster empathy.

Actionable ideas:

- ✓ Offer short workshops on stigma and language (include the "Stigmatizing Language" sample policy in the appendix of this toolkit).
- ✓ Include SUD education in onboarding materials and annual trainings.
- ✓ Invite a speaker with lived experience to share insights, if appropriate.

Measuring Success and Improving Retention

To ensure that your recovery-friendly efforts are working—and to refine them over time—build methods for measuring effectiveness.

Collect feedback from employees.

Ask employees about how safe, supported, and included they feel at work.

Tools:

1. Short quarterly surveys on well-being and workplace culture.
2. Feedback boxes (physical or digital) for continuous input.
3. One-on-one conversations during reviews to invite honest feedback.

*Sample question: "Do you feel comfortable asking for support if you're facing a personal or recovery-related challenge?"

> Testimony: "One of our employees joined us early on in her recovery. She had had several short-term jobs before, and once she found a supportive place here, she's become a steady employee for four years and counting.
> —A. McCauley

Adjust policies to meet evolving workplace needs.

Feedback should inform action. Use insights from employees and managers to improve your policies.

Ideas:

1. If flexibility is a need, formalize a flexible scheduling policy.
2. If mental health resources are underused, consider more visible promotion or additional supports.
3. Update your employee handbook annually to reflect your evolving values.

Encourage long-term workplace culture change.

Culture change takes time—but with consistency and leadership, it becomes embedded in the business identity.

Keep recovery-friendly policies at the core of business values.

Leadership must model and reinforce these values consistently.

Strategies for cultural sustainability:

1. Include recovery-friendly language in job postings and recruitment.
2. Publicly communicate your commitment to being a supportive, stigma-free workplace.
3. Recognize and celebrate milestones in recovery or well-being (as appropriate and voluntary).
4. Make recovery-friendly support a regular part of leadership and training.

Section 5

Employee Resources and Support

Creating a recovery-friendly workplace doesn't require a large budget. With the right tools, partnerships, and awareness, small businesses can provide meaningful support to employees in recovery. This section outlines accessible, affordable, and effective resources to promote employee well-being, reduce turnover, and foster a culture of care.

Community-Based Recovery Support Groups

Local peer-led and nonprofit programs can offer ongoing support without cost to the employer. Encourage employees to access:

- 12-Step Programs — Alcoholics Anonymous (AA), Narcotics Anonymous (NA), or Cocaine Anonymous (CA). Meetings are widely available and free. (https://prod-kiprc-media.s3.amazonaws.com/media/learning_materials/learningmaterial/eaae8d80b92e4f759cba62726da02bf3Substance_Use_Resources_with_Directory_Feb2024.pdf)
- SMART Recovery — A science-based alternative to 12-step groups focused on self-management and behavioral tools. (https://smartrecovery.org/)
- Celebrate Recovery — A Christian-based recovery program offering local chapter meetings. (https://celebraterecovery.com/)
- Local recovery community organizations — Often provide job readiness support, peer mentoring, and connection to services. (www.chfs.ky.gov/agencies/dbhdid/Documents/recoverycommunitycentersinfograph.pdf)

Tip: Consider posting a list of nearby meetings on a breakroom bulletin board or HR portal, with a clear message of voluntary participation and confidentiality. A list for these meetings in Kentucky can be found at https://findrecoveryhousingnowky.org/resources. Search for "Meetings" and you will see a pdf document titled Kentucky Area Substance Use Disorder Support Resources that can be downloaded and printed. This resource is updated regularly.

Employment Assistance Programs (EAPs)

Employment assistance programming is a low-cost tool that small businesses can offer to their employees at an average cost of $6–$12 per employee per month. Assuming the employee utilizes the services within the set limits of the program, there is no cost to the employee to utilize these services.

These programs provide short-term counseling, assessments, referrals, and other services to employees and

their families. Issues commonly addressed by EAPs are mental health, behavioral health, grief and loss, financial and legal concerns, and family/relationship issues.

There are restrictions as to how frequently and how long an employee can utilize these services per year, but they can be beneficial in addressing common concerns that arise.[1]

Local Workforce Development Programs for Employees in Recovery

Workforce programs increasingly recognize the importance of supporting individuals in recovery:

- American Job Centers (AJCs) — Offer training, resume support, and job placement assistance. Many centers have specialized services for justice-involved individuals or those with a history of SUD. (www.careeronestop.org/localhelp/americanjobcenters/find-american-job-centers.aspx?location=Kentucky&radius=25)
- Second-chance hiring initiatives — Some local workforce boards or nonprofits run employer-subsidized programs to encourage the hiring and retention of employees in recovery or post-incarceration. (www.kychamber.com/files/whos-hiring-second-chance-69)

> Tip: Start by connecting with your local workforce development board or your local Chamber of Commerce—they often have direct referrals.

National Recovery Resources for Small Businesses

The following vetted, national-level resources offer training, guidance, and employee referrals:

Organization	What They Offer	Website
SAMHSA (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration)	Educational resources, treatment locators, recovery toolkits, and workplace guides	www.samhsa.gov/substance-use/drug-free-workplace
Mental Health America (MHA)	Workplace Mental Health Toolkit, recovery support guidance, and stigma reduction tools	mhanational.org
U.S. Department of Labor – Recovery-Ready Workplace Hub	Employer resources, hiring guidance, and implementation tools	www.dol.gov/agencies/eta/RRW-hub/Recovery-ready-workplace www.dol.gov/agencies/eta/wotc
Shatterproof's "Just Five"	Free 5-minute online modules for employers and staff on addiction, recovery, and stigma	justfive.org
Faces and Voices of Recovery	National recovery advocacy and local recovery center organization directory.	facesandvoicesofrecovery.org

Workplace Self-Care and Mental Health Support Tools

Providing access to mental health tools—especially digital, self-paced ones—is an easy, low-cost way to support employees' overall well-being. Employers can provide a simple resource sheet or mental health folder during onboarding to help normalize and promote usage.

These tools are private, accessible 24/7, and useful for stress management, anxiety, and recovery maintenance:

- Insight Timer — Free app with guided meditations, breathing exercises, and sleep support (free access available).
- Calm or Headspace — Mindfulness and relaxation apps (free versions available).
- 988 Lifeline Chat & Text — Confidential, 24/7 support for anyone in crisis or emotional distress. Text or call 988.

[1]Bouzikos, S., Afsharian, A., Dollard, M., & Brecht, O. (2022). Contextualising the effectiveness of an employee assistance program intervention on psychological health: The role of corporate climate. International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health, 19(9), 5067. https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph19095067

Appendix I

Sample Policies

The following sample policies were created using KIPRC's Kentucky Small Business Toolkit for Hiring Employees in Recovery and other resources.

Flexible Scheduling and Workplace Accommodations SAMPLE Policy

Policy Statement

[Company Name] is committed to supporting employees in recovery from substance use disorders (SUDs) by providing reasonable workplace accommodations, including flexible scheduling, in compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and other applicable laws.

Scope

This policy applies to all employees who request accommodations related to their recovery process, including those participating in treatment programs, therapy, or support meetings.

Provisions

- Employees in recovery may request flexible work hours, modified shifts, or remote work (if applicable) to attend medical appointments, court appointments, counseling, or support group meetings.
- Reasonable accommodations will be considered on a case-by-case basis, in compliance with ADA guidelines, provided the accommodations do not cause undue hardship to business operations.
- Employees requesting accommodations must submit a written request to supervisors, along with any necessary supporting documentation from a healthcare provider.
- Confidentiality will be maintained in accordance with HIPAA and other applicable privacy laws.

Procedure

1. Employee submits a written request for accommodation to supervisor.
2. Supervisor will engage in an interactive process to determine reasonable accommodations.
3. A decision will be communicated to the employee within [X] business days.
4. Approved accommodations will be periodically reviewed to ensure effectiveness.

Employee Well-Being and Job Satisfaction SAMPLE Policy

Policy Statement

At [Company Name], we recognize that employee well-being is essential to job satisfaction, productivity, and overall workplace success. We are committed to fostering a supportive work environment that promotes physical, mental, and emotional well-being, ensuring that all employees feel valued, respected, and empowered in their roles.

Scope

This policy applies to all employees, including full-time, part-time, and contract workers. It outlines the company's commitment to well-being initiatives, work-life balance, and professional growth opportunities.

Workplace Well-Being Initiatives

- Flexible work arrangements: Employees may request flexible work hours, remote work, or adjusted schedules to accommodate personal well-being, recovery needs, or family responsibilities.
- Mental health support: [Company Name] may provide access to employee assistance programs and other mental health resources to support employees facing stress, anxiety, or personal challenges.
- Healthy workplace culture: We encourage open communication, mutual respect, and a friendly workplace where employees feel comfortable voicing concerns or requesting support.

Professional Growth and Job Satisfaction

- Career development: Employees are encouraged to pursue training, workshops, and professional development opportunities to enhance their skills and career growth.
- Regular feedback and recognition: We value employee contributions and provide ongoing feedback through performance evaluations, recognition programs, and team appreciation initiatives.
- Fair compensation and benefits: We strive to provide competitive wages, benefits, and opportunities for advancement to ensure that employees feel valued and secure in their roles.

Work-Life Balance and Stress Reduction

- Paid time off and leave policies: Employees are encouraged to use their vacation, sick leave, and personal days to maintain a healthy work-life balance.
- Wellness activities: The company may offer periodic wellness programs, such as mindfulness sessions, team-building activities, and health-related workshops.

Employee Feedback and Continuous Improvement

- Employees are encouraged to provide feedback on workplace well-being initiatives through surveys, meetings, or direct discussions with managers.
- Leadership will review feedback regularly to identify ways to improve job satisfaction and overall workplace culture.

Commitment to a Positive Work Environment

[Company Name] believes that supporting employee well-being leads to higher job satisfaction, improved performance, and a thriving workplace. By prioritizing well-being initiatives, we strive to create a company culture that values employees' personal and professional growth.

Leave of Absence and Job Protection SAMPLE Policy

Policy Statement

[Company Name] recognizes that employees in recovery may need time off for medical treatment, rehabilitation, or other recovery-related needs. We comply with the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) and applicable state laws to provide job-protected leave for eligible employees.

Eligibility

- Employees who have worked for the company for at least [X] months and have completed at least [X] hours within the past year may qualify for up to [X] weeks of unpaid, job-protected leave under FMLA for substance use disorder treatment.
- Employees who do not qualify for FMLA may request a personal leave of absence, which will be evaluated on a case-by-case basis.

Provisions

- Leave may be used for inpatient or outpatient treatment, therapy sessions, or other medically necessary recovery-related services.
- Employees must provide advance notice where possible and submit documentation from a medical provider confirming the necessity of leave.
- During leave, employees may be required to provide periodic updates on their expected return date.
- Employees will be reinstated to the same or an equivalent position upon return, per FMLA guidelines.

Stigmatizing Language and Communication SAMPLE Policy

Policy Statement

[Company Name] is committed to fostering a respectful and recovery-friendly workplace. We recognize that language plays a critical role in shaping workplace culture and attitudes toward individuals in recovery from substance use disorders. To promote dignity and support employees in recovery, this policy outlines expectations for respectful communication and prohibits stigmatizing language related to addiction and recovery.

Scope

This policy applies to all employees, contractors, and managers in all workplace communications, including verbal interactions, written correspondence, and digital communications (e.g., emails, chats, and social media related to work).

Provisions

- Employees are expected to use person-first, non-stigmatizing language when discussing substance use and recovery. For example:
    - Use "person with a substance use disorder" instead of "addict" or "junkie."
    - Use "person in recovery" instead of "former addict" or "ex-alcoholic."
    - Use "substance use disorder" instead of "drug abuse" or "substance abuse."
- Derogatory remarks, jokes, or negative assumptions about individuals in recovery or those seeking treatment will not be tolerated.
- Supervisors will receive training on recovery-friendly language and communication to ensure compliance with this policy.
- Employees who experience or witness stigmatizing language or behavior are encouraged to report concerns to their manager without fear of retaliation.

Procedure

1. If an employee uses stigmatizing language, a manager may provide coaching on more appropriate terminology.
2. Any complaints regarding repeated or intentional use of stigmatizing language will be reviewed and appropriate corrective action may be taken.
3. Employees are encouraged to participate in ongoing education efforts and discussions about reducing stigma in the workplace.

Commitment to a Recovery-Friendly Workplace

[Company Name] believes that fostering an environment of respect helps all employees thrive. By addressing language that perpetuates stigma, we aim to create a workplace culture that supports employees in recovery and encourages open, judgment-free dialogue.

Trauma-Informed Workplace SAMPLE Policy

Policy Statement

[Company Name] is committed to fostering a trauma-informed workplace that supports employee well-being, safety, and empowerment. Recognizing that past traumatic experiences can impact an individual's work and interactions, we strive to create an environment that prioritizes safety, trust, and collaboration. This policy outlines our approach to ensuring a trauma-informed workplace and preventing re-traumatization.

Scope

This policy applies to all employees, managers, and leadership, and it influences workplace interactions, communication, and decision-making processes. While trauma-informed care is not a substitute for clinical treatment, our approach is designed to create a supportive, understanding, and friendly work environment.

Principles of a Trauma-Informed Workplace

We implement trauma-informed principles in all aspects of workplace culture, policies, and interactions. These principles include:

1. Safety — Ensuring a physically and emotionally safe work environment where employees feel secure.
2. Trustworthiness and transparency — Building trust through consistent, clear communication and policies.
3. Voice and choice — Encouraging employee autonomy and the ability to make choices about their work and well-being.
4. Collaboration and mutuality — Fostering teamwork, shared decision-making, and power-sharing within the organization.
5. Peer support and mutual self-help — Encouraging support networks among employees to reduce isolation and build community.
6. Empowerment and resiliency — Recognizing and reinforcing employees' strengths, providing opportunities for skill-building.
7. Shared purpose — Valuing perspectives and ensuring that all employees feel heard, respected, and included.

Creating a Trauma-Informed Workplace

To support these principles, [Company Name] will implement the following strategies:

1. Create a safe and supportive work environment
    - Maintain physical safety through clear workplace policies and procedures,

- Promote emotional safety by fostering respectful communication and preventing harassment or discrimination,
- Establish predictable and transparent policies to build trust among employees,
- Provide opportunities for employees to voice concerns confidentially without fear of retaliation.

2. Support employees who experience trauma
   - Supervisors and HR personnel will be trained in trauma-informed response strategies.
   - Employees will not be required to disclose trauma histories, and those who choose to share will be met with compassion and respect.
   - When an employee shares a traumatic experience, colleagues should:
     - o Listen without interrupting or sharing their own personal trauma,
     - o Gently guide the conversation if the employee becomes distressed,
     - o Encourage healthy coping strategies and, if appropriate, suggest professional support services.
   - [Company Name] will maintain a list of local and national trauma-support resources available to employees seeking professional help.

3. Trauma-informed leadership and communication
   - Leadership and management will practice transparent, predictable communication to reduce anxiety and uncertainty.
   - Employee feedback on workplace policies and culture will be regularly collected and acted upon to ensure fidelity.
   - Supervisors will receive training on trauma-informed leadership, including strategies to support employees in distress.

4. Preventing re-traumatization in the workplace
   - Workplaces can unintentionally re-traumatize individuals through unpredictable changes, lack of support, or insensitive interactions. To prevent this:
     - o Avoid shaming, blaming, or invalidating employees' experiences,
     - o Ensure clear, fair expectations around workload and responsibilities,
     - o Encourage self-care, wellness initiatives, and mental health days without stigma,

- Offer reasonable accommodations for employees who may need adjustments to their schedules or work environment.

5. Implementation and continuous improvement

- Employees and managers will be offered trauma-informed workplace training at least annually.
- HR will provide a confidential, non-punitive process for employees to raise concerns related to workplace trauma.
- The company will review and update policies regularly to ensure alignment with best practices in trauma-informed work environments.

6. Commitment to a trauma-informed culture

At [Company Name], we believe that a trauma-informed workplace fosters resilience, engagement, and overall job satisfaction. By embedding trauma-informed principles into our workplace culture, we create an environment where employees feel valued, supported, and empowered to thrive.

Appendix II

Recovery-Friendly Workplace Self-Assessment

Purpose of the Self-Assessment Tool

This self-assessment was designed to help small business owners and managers evaluate how supportive their workplace is for employees in recovery from substance use disorders. It reflects best practices in recovery support, trauma-informed care, and inclusive workplace culture. The goal is to offer a quick, actionable tool that informs next steps without requiring clinical or HR expertise.

Design Rationale

The worksheet is structured around four key domains:

1. Culture and leadership — Reflects how organizational tone and values influence safety and stigma.
2. Policies and accommodations — Assesses the flexibility and accessibility of workplace supports.
3. Training and education — Evaluates staff readiness to understand and respond to recovery needs.
4. Support and communication — Measures channels for feedback and ongoing dialogue.

Each question corresponds to practical, evidence-based strategies that improve retention and engagement for employees in recovery—while strengthening overall workplace well-being.

Sources

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Workplace Supported Recovery Program. www.cdc.gov/niosh/substance-use/workplace-supported-recovery/index.html
- Mental Health America. Workplace Mental Health Toolkit & 2024 Workplace Wellness Research. www.mhanational.org/workplace
- U.S. Department of Labor. Recovery-Ready Workplace Hub. www.dol.gov/agencies/eta/RRW-hub/recovery-ready-workplace
- New Hampshire Recovery Friendly Workplace Initiative. www.recoveryfriendlyworkplace.com/
- Guarino, K., Soares, P., Konnath, K., Clervil, R., and Bassuk, E. (2009). Trauma-Informed Organizational Toolkit. Center for Mental Health Services, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, and the Daniels Fund, the National Child Traumatic Stress Network, and the W.K. Kellogg Foundation. https://www.air.org/sites/default/files/downloads/report/Trauma-Informed_Organizational_Toolkit_0.pdf
- National Safety Council. A Substance Use Cost Calculator for Employers. www.nsc.org/forms/substance-use-employer-calculator

Recovery-Friendly Workplace Self-Assessment

Culture and Leadership

[ ] Leadership has openly communicated support for mental health and substance use recovery.

[ ] We model inclusive, non-stigmatizing language in our daily communication.

[ ] We have discussed stigma reduction or recovery support in at least one staff meeting or training.

[ ] Employees feel comfortable approaching managers with personal or health-related concerns.

Subtotal: _____

Policies and Accommodations

[ ] Our workplace offers flexible scheduling or modified duties when needed.

[ ] Employees are aware they can request accommodations without penalty or stigma.

[ ] We have a written policy (or informal practice) supporting recovery-friendly approaches.

[ ] We review and update workplace policies regularly to reflect staff needs.

Subtotal: _____

Training and Education

[ ] Managers have received basic training on trauma-informed supervision or mental health support.

[ ] We provide access to education on stigma, substance use disorder recovery, or workplace well-being.

[ ] We have shared resources with staff about mental health or recovery services (e.g., posters, employment assistance program info).

Subtotal: _____

Support and Communication

[ ] There is a clear process for employees to give anonymous feedback or voice concerns.

[ ] We encourage peer support or offer recovery or wellness-related opportunities.

[ ] Employees know where to turn for recovery resources (internal or external).

Subtotal: _____

Recovery-Friendly Workplace Self-Assessment

Total Score: _____ out of 14

Interpreting Your Score:

12 to 14: A strong foundation for a recovery-friendly workplace.

8 to 11: Meaningful progress — Target 1 or 2 areas for improvement.

4 to 7: Opportunity for growth — Start with 1 or 2 achievable actions.

0 to 3: Just starting — Use this toolkit to identify your first steps.


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