

Federal Exchange on Employment and Disability (FEED) Meeting

September 9, 2026

Today's Agenda

Introduction (1:00-1:05 p.m.)

- Akinyemi Banjo, Senior Policy Advisor, Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP), U.S. Department of Labor (DOL)

Welcome (1:05-1:10 p.m.)

- Jennifer Sheehy, Deputy Assistant Secretary, Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP), U.S. Department of Labor (DOL)

National Disability Employment Awareness Month (1:10-1:15 p.m.)

- Michelle Barfield, Business Development Specialist, Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP), U.S. Department of Labor (DOL)

Workplace Mental Health and Suicide Prevention (1:15-2:00 p.m.)

- Suzi Craig, Vice President of Workplace Mental Health, Mental Health America (MHA)

Optimizing Your Emergency Preparedness Plans for All Workers (2:00-2:20 p.m.)

- Louis Orslene, Program Lead for Integrated Projects, Job Accommodation Network (JAN)

FY2027 EARN Federal Research: Developing Accessible and Usable Accommodation Websites (2:20-2:30 p.m.)

- Sarah von Schrader, Research Lead, Employer Assistance and Resource Network on Disability (EARN)

Chat with U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) (2:30-2:55 p.m.)

- Elyssa Santos-Abrams, Senior Attorney-Advisor, Training and Outreach Division, Office of Communication and Legislative Affairs, U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC)
- Candace Clark, Management and Program Analyst, U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC)

Wrap-up and Closing (2:55-3:00 p.m.)

- Akinyemi Banjo, Senior Policy Advisor, Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP), U.S. Department of Labor (DOL)

Introduction

Akinyemi Banjo, Senior Policy Advisor, Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP), U.S. Department of Labor (DOL)

Welcome

Jennifer Sheehy, Deputy Assistant Secretary, Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP), U.S. Department of Labor (DOL)

Our Panelists



Michelle Barfield
Business Development
Specialist,
Office of Disability
Employment Policy (ODEP),
U.S. Department of Labor
(DOL)



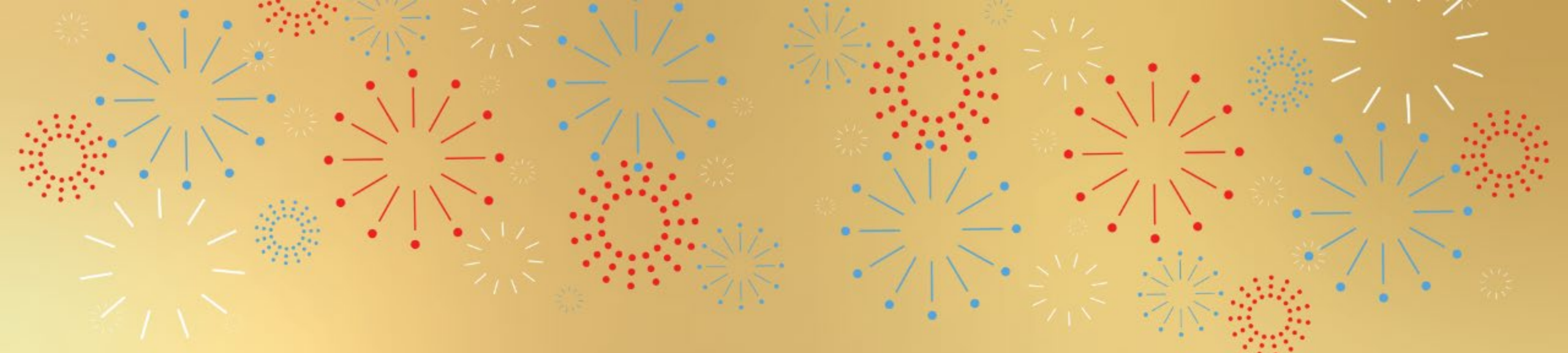
Suzi Craig
Vice President of
Workplace Mental Health,
Mental Health America
(MHA)



Louis Orslene
Program Lead for
Integrated Projects,
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Network (JAN)

National Disability Employment Awareness Month

Michelle Barfield, Business Development Specialist, Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP), U.S. Department of Labor (DOL)



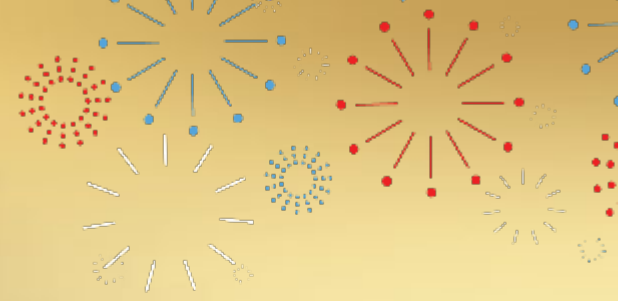
Celebrating Value and Talent

National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM)



OFFICE OF DISABILITY EMPLOYMENT POLICY
UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF LABOR

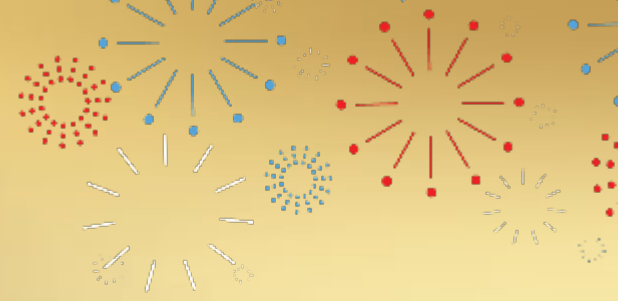
Poll Question



What anniversary is ODEP celebrating this year?

- a) 81 years
- b) 50 years
- c) 30 years
- d) 25 years

Answer



d) ODEP is celebrating its 25th anniversary this year.



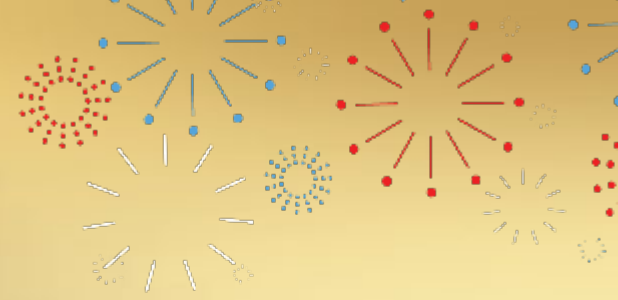
ODEP
Office of Disability
Employment Policy

EARN



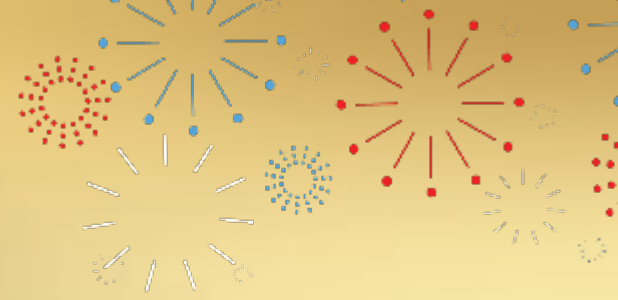
OFFICE OF DISABILITY EMPLOYMENT POLICY
UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF LABOR

National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM)



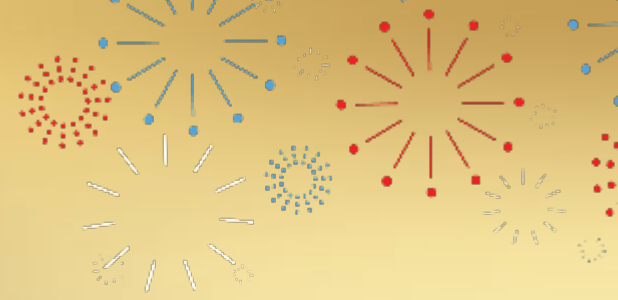
- Held each October.
- Celebrates the contributions of America's disabled workers including those with mental health conditions and other nonobvious disabilities.
- Showcases workplace practices employers across the country use to support their employees with disabilities.

NDEAM History



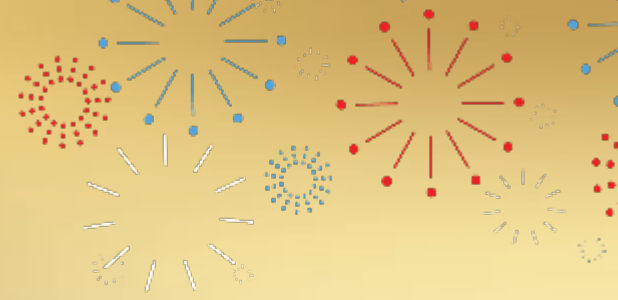
- **1945:** Congress passed a law establishing the first week in October to enlist support for the employment of people who were physically disabled.
- **1988:** Congress expanded the week to a month and changed its name to “National Disability Employment Awareness Month.”
- **2001:** Congress authorized the establishment of the Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP), and ODEP assumed responsibility for coordinating NDEAM, including developing a new theme and resources each year.

NDEAM Theme



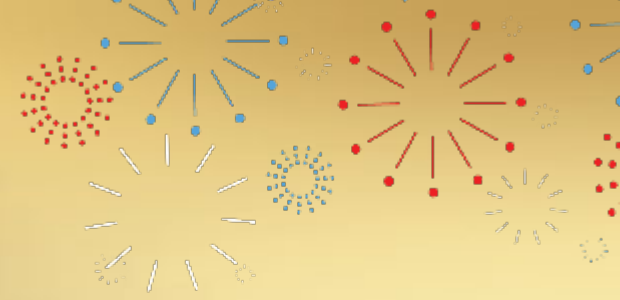
- This year's NDEAM theme and graphics honor America's 250th anniversary and were designed to be included in the Freedom 250 celebrations throughout the year.
- NDEAM 2026 will recognize the value and talent American workers with disabilities add to our workplaces and economy and highlight their achievements both past and present.
- That's the spirit behind this year's official theme: "Celebrating Value and Talent."

Plan, Observe, Celebrate!



- Plan NDEAM Observances:
 - Ideas grouped by user: employer, educator, disability-related organizations
- Key Messages:
 - Grab and go items: NDEAM messaging, graphics, social stickers
- 31 Days of NDEAM:
 - Put up the NDEAM poster
 - Promote your NDEAM activities through social media

Visit our NDEAM Page



dol.gov/ndeam

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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF LABOR

Workplace Mental Health and Suicide Prevention

Suzi Craig, Vice President of Workplace Mental Health, Mental Health America (MHA)



About Us

Mental Health America is the nation's leading nonprofit dedicated to promoting the mental health and well-being of all people living in the U.S.

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About Us Continued

With a network of 130+ affiliates across the country, we work at both the national and local levels to advance our mission through public education, research, advocacy and public policy, and direct service.





**Our work is informed, designed,
and led by the lived experience
of those most affected.**

Mental Health America Screening

MHA's free, anonymous, and clinically validated screenings help people explore their mental health and connect with personalized information and resources. Take a screen at screening.mhanational.org

DEPRESSION TEST

+

ADHD TEST

+

ANXIETY TEST

+

OCD TEST

+

BIPOLAR TEST

+

PSYCHOSIS & SCHIZOPHRENIA TEST

+

EATING DISORDER TEST

+

PTSD TEST

+

ADDICTION TEST

+

GAMBLING ADDICTION TEST

+

SOCIAL ANXIETY TEST

+

POSTPARTUM DEPRESSION TEST (NEW & EXPECTING PARENTS)

+

PARENT TEST: YOUR CHILD'S MENTAL HEALTH

+

YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH TEST

+

TEST DE DEPRESIÓN

+

TEST DE ANSIEDAD

+

SURVEY: WHAT MAKES A GOOD DAY?

+

PSYCHEDELICS & MENTAL HEALTH SURVEY

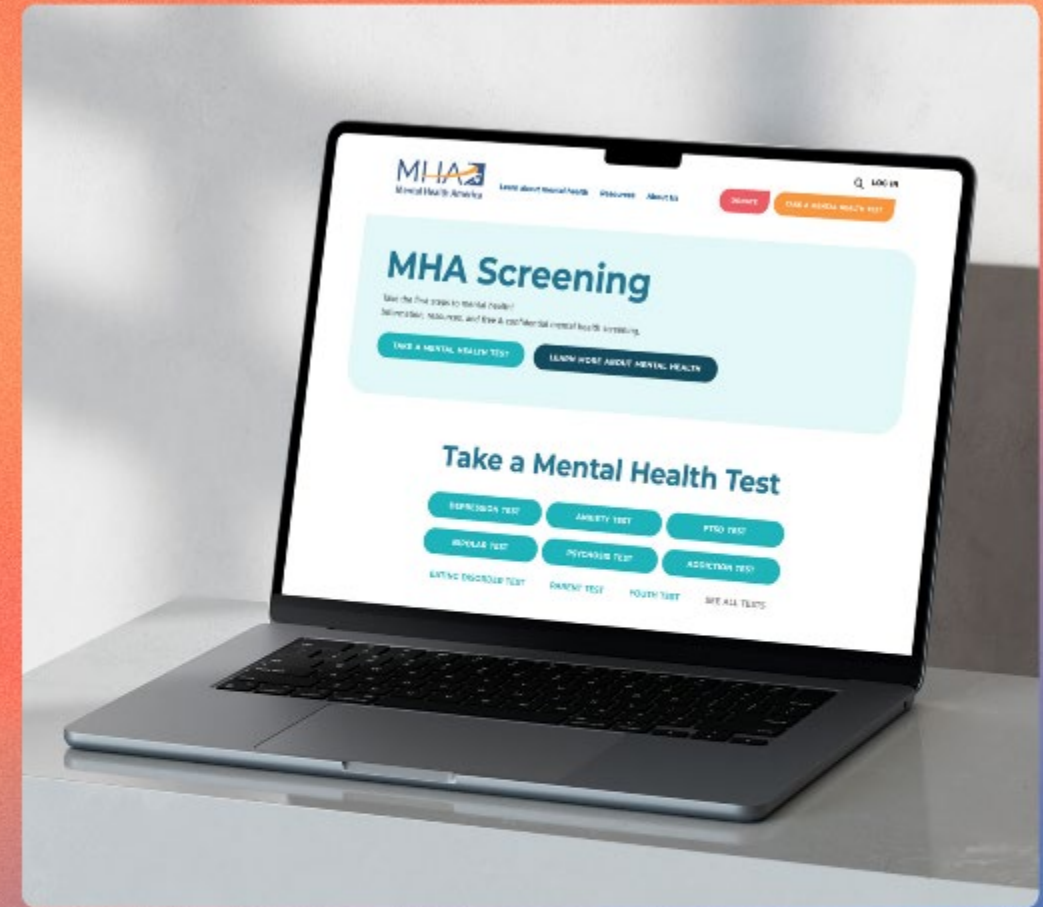
+

AI & MENTAL HEALTH SURVEY

+

SELF-INJURY SURVEY

+



Over a dozen
screens
available

32 million
screens taken
since launch
in 2014

Why Workplace Mental Health Matters

Workplace Program

MHA is the nation's leader in workplace mental health, helping employers integrate well-being into their business strategy. MHA's Bell Seal for Workplace Mental Health recognition program, workplace research, and Workplace Wellness Resource Center provide employers with evidence-based solutions to support employee mental health.

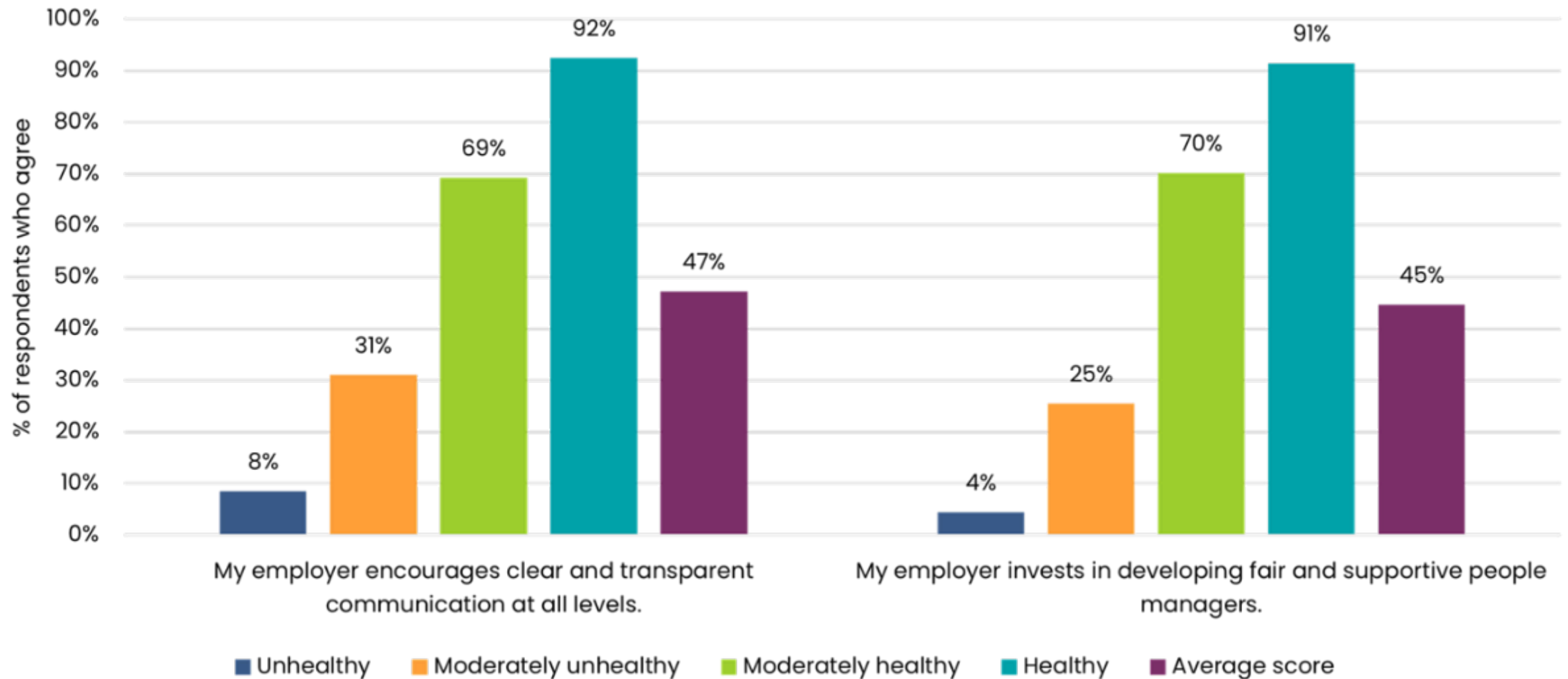
→ Visit MHA's
[Workplace Wellness
Resource Center](#)

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**400+ employers
recognized across
20+ industries in
2026**

Hope and Trust Matter



Hope and Trust Matter: Gallup Poll

The Four Leadership Needs of Followers – Distribution

Now, please list three words that best describe what this person contributes to your life.

% of responses



GALLUP®

Taking Action

You can be the bridge

- Certain communities report lower positive work health scores
- Neurodivergency, generational differences, and more affect communication
- Uncertain and divisive times can increase stress for all



“About 83% of U.S. workers suffer from work-related stress.”

- American Institute of Stress

Emotional Intelligence and Active Listening

People Supporting People



Today we will:

- Demystify the idea that this work is “natural for others” but not for me
- Learn the OARSS framework

Not an extrovert? Hard conversations make you uncomfortable? Don't know where to start? We've got your back!

Emotional Intelligence

The ability to manage your own emotions while understanding the emotions of people around you.

Active Listening

The practice of using undivided attention and responsive communication to understand someone else versus passively hearing the words they are sharing.

People Supporting People at Work

Psychological safety:

Def.: “The shared belief within a team that members can take interpersonal risks—such as asking questions, sharing raw ideas, admitting mistakes, or challenging the status quo—without facing embarrassment, rejection, or punishment.”

- Amy Edmondson, Professor of Leadership & Management, Harvard Business School



**Create
hope
and
trust.**



**Become
a
“safety
first”
team.**



**Prevent
harm.**

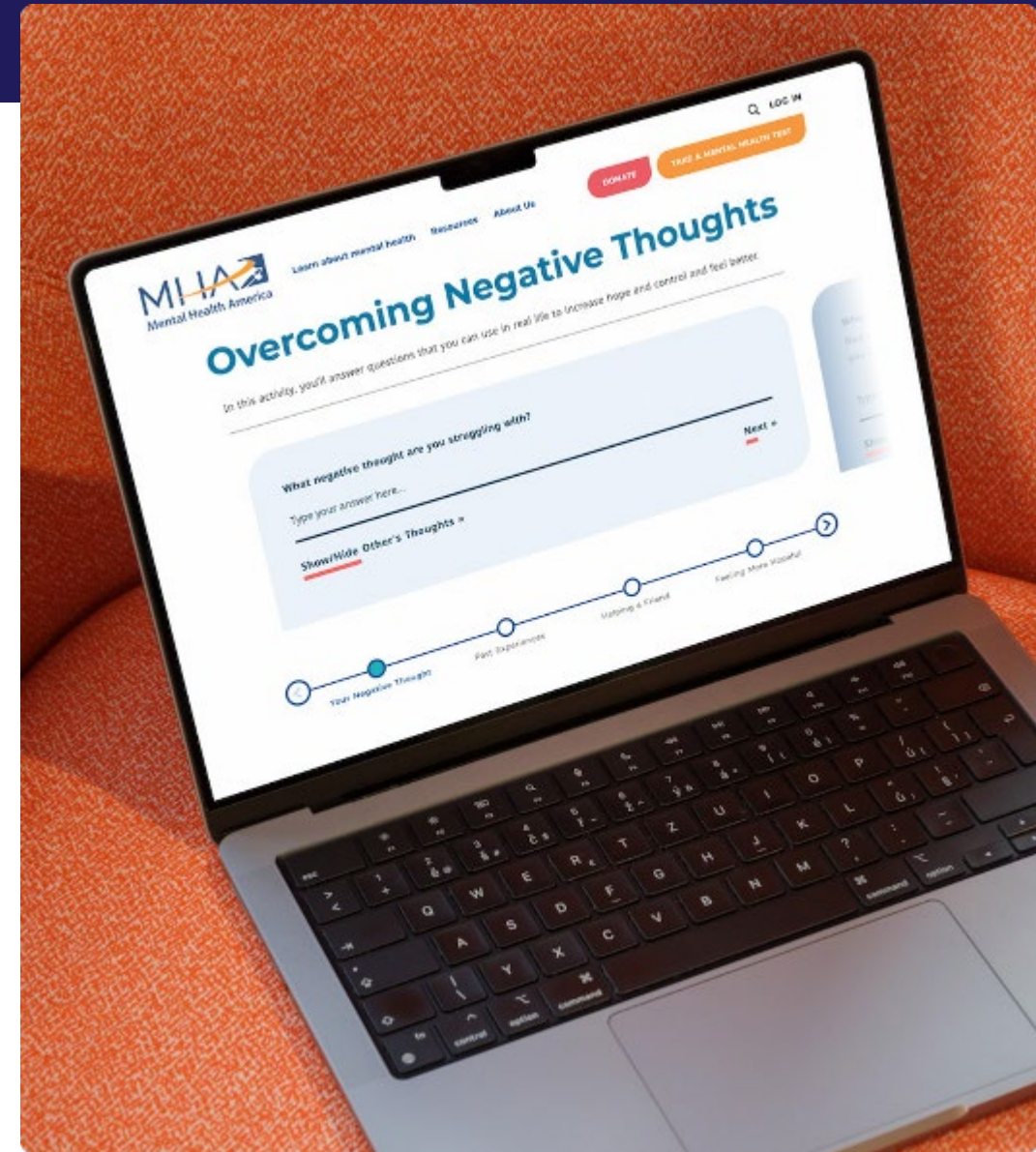


Let's Pause for Context

[“Recognizing Warning Signs and How to Cope”](#)

[Crisis resources at MHA](#)

988lifeline.org



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Group Poll (1)

What is your “challenging conversation” comfort (CCC) level?

- 1) **High:** I fully embrace having or hearing challenging conversations.
- 2) **Moderate:** It depends on the situation, person, or how capable I am feeling to have the conversation.
- 3) **Low:** I will only have a challenging conversation when it’s required.
- 4) **None:** I ensure that I do not have them at all.

What is the OARSS?

Open-ended questions

Affirmations

Reflective listening

Summarization

Support

*The original “OARS” was developed in the 1980s by William R. Miller and Stephen Rollnick to help individuals in recovery

Open-Ended Questions

- Are the opposite of questions that elicit definitive answers (yes/no)
- Create engagement and connection
- Keep the conversation going
- Come from a place of curiosity
- Provide the space someone needs to also be curious
- Helps someone on their terms



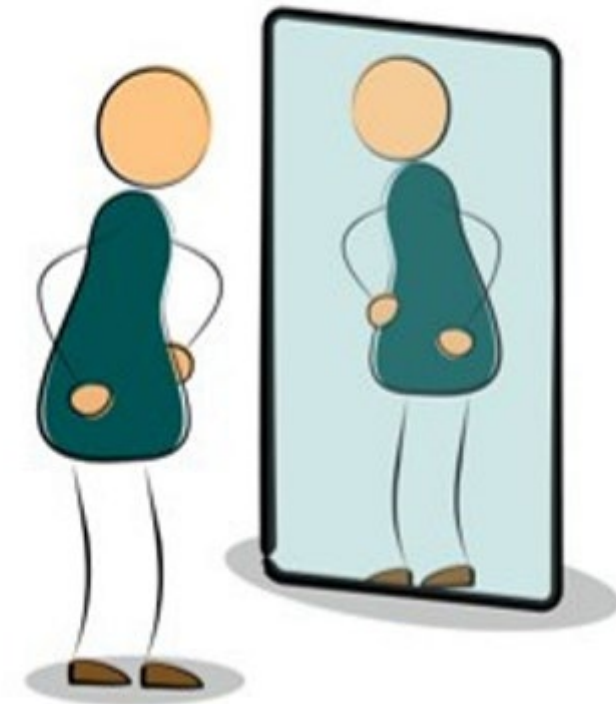
Affirmations

- Acknowledge positive attributes or efforts
- Facilitate resilience
- Not general praise, but specific to what they've shared
- Can build rapport and keep the conversation going in a positive direction
- Are compassionate and genuine



Reflection

- Plays back what you've heard
- Uses their words as much as possible
- Is an effective bridge to discussing next steps
- Helps avoid interpretations or adding color commentary
- Keeps the conversation at the “surface”



Summarization and Support

- Helps you get closure
- Ends the conversation intentionally to make sure nothing was left on the table
- Creates a sense of progress
- For managers: more responsibility for next steps
- For peers: choose your offering of support based on what you can promise



People Managers' Responsibilities

- Be aware of power dynamics
- Create safety and support with intention
- There is a right time and place
- Unpack conversations: performance v. personal
- Know the limitations of screens when working remote
- When in doubt, reach out to your HR team or your supervisor



Group Poll (2)

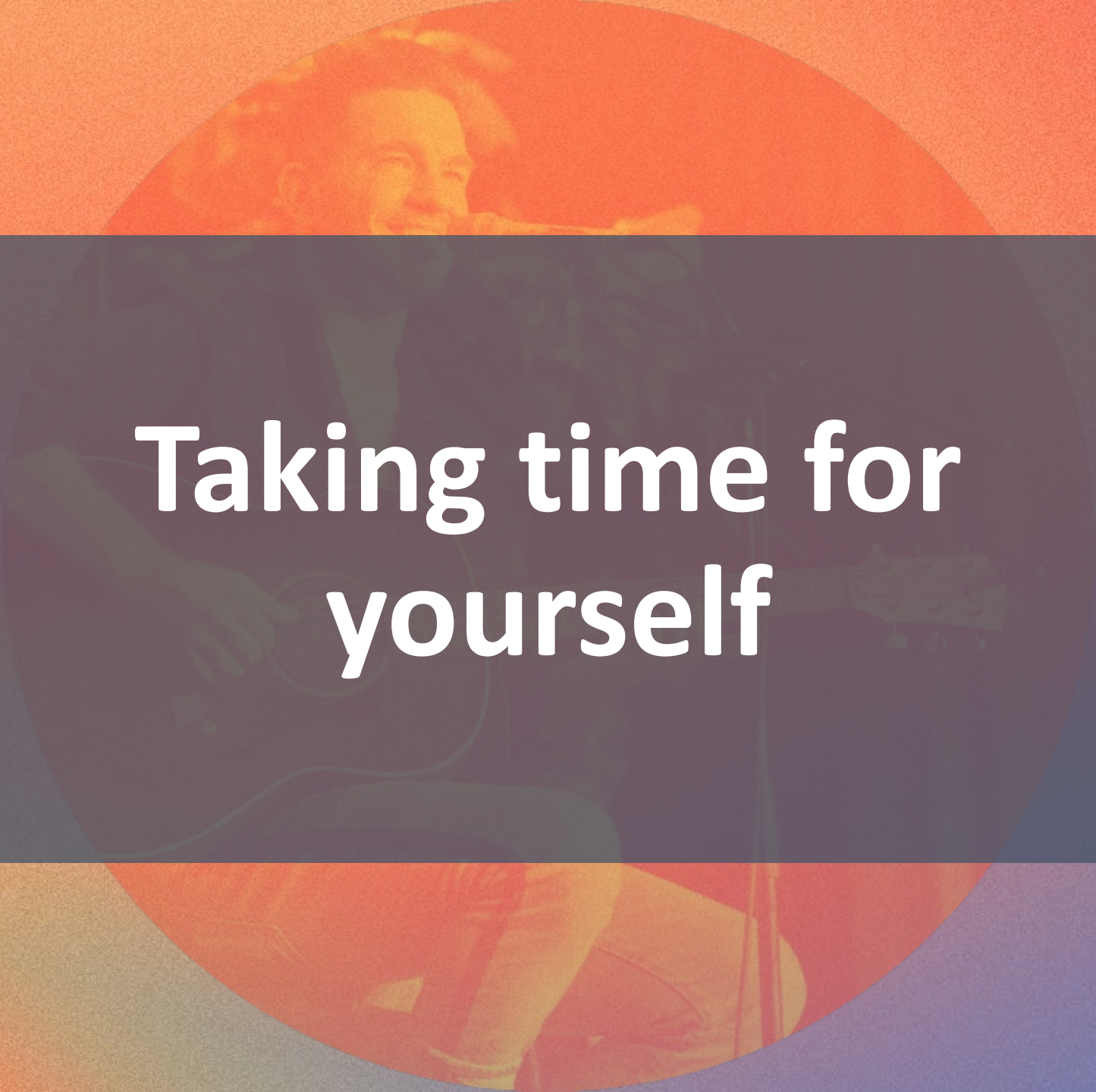
Based on this introduction, how likely are you to start using the OARSS?

- 1) Very Likely:** This looks like it could help our teams increase support.
- 2) Somewhat Likely:** Possibly, but it's too early to tell.
- 3) Not at All:** I don't think this was very useful.
- 4) Other:** There are too many other barriers at our workplace that need to be addressed.
- 5) No Need:** We practice the OARSS or active listening strategies similar to the OARSS.

Pro Tip!

- 1) **Review** the OARSS reference guide
- 2) **Pair up** and practice with a buddy
- 3) **Discuss** as a team

**I UNDERSTAND
THE ASSIGNMENT.**



Taking time for yourself

A Moment for Self-Care

Set a routine with good daily habits.

Prioritize movement to lower stress and improve sleep.

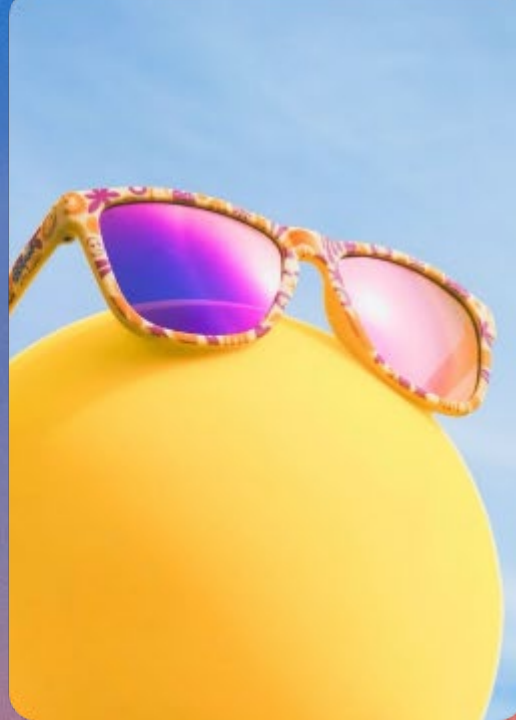
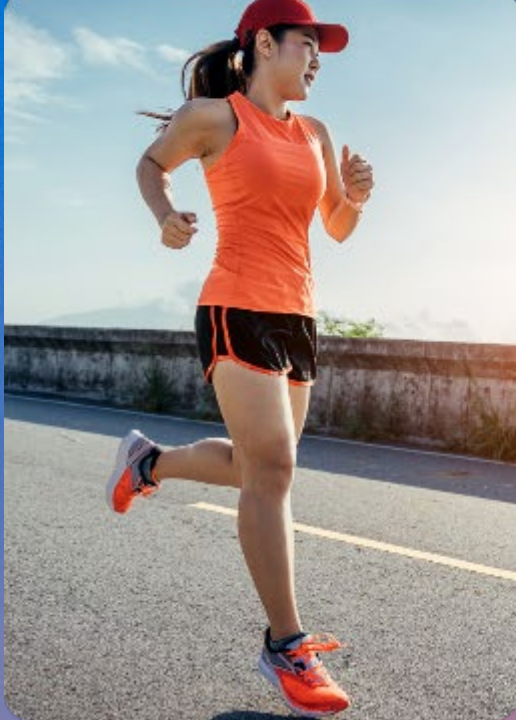
Strengthen solitude. Even 10 minutes of meditation, journaling, or deep breathing lowers cortisol.

Find balance. Set boundaries, prioritize nutrition, and have a consistent sleep schedule.

Find your people. Lean on your peers and spend time with loved ones.

Fire up something new. Introducing new activities creates new neural pathways.





For more resources, including a
free employee wellness survey,
visit:

MHA's Workplace Wellness
Resource Center

Mental Health America Conference

Each year, hundreds of mental health advocates unite in Washington, DC for the Mental Health America Conference, an inspiring week of empowerment and innovation. From peers to providers, government officials to C-suite executives, this dynamic group ignites a collective spark, sharing invaluable knowledge, creating community, and fostering the next wave of advocacy for mental health.

[Register for the Mental Health Conference,](#)
October 8-9



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Thank you for inviting me to FEED!

It was great spending time with you. Feel free to reach out with any questions.

Suzi Craig

VP of Workplace Mental Health
scraig@mhanational.org

Learn more at mhanational.org



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Optimizing Your Emergency Preparedness Plans for All Workers

Louis Orslene, Program Lead for Integrated Projects, Job Accommodation Network (JAN)

FY2027 EARN Federal Research: Developing Accessible and Usable Accommodation Websites

Sarah von Schrader, Research Lead, Employer Assistance and Resource Network on Disability (EARN)

EARN Federal Research: Developing Accessible and Usable Accommodation Websites

Background

Research suggests that having a well-designed reasonable accommodation website is associated with employees with disabilities finding the agency more accessible.

Purpose

- Develop resources to support agencies in the design of websites that effectively communicate the reasonable accommodation process

Approach

- Reviewing literature and other resources on developing accessible, useful accommodation websites
- Conducting and reviewing interviews with federal employees (including supervisors) who have navigated the accommodation process to identify information needs, communication gaps, and opportunities for improvement

Chat with U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC)

Elyssa Santos-Abrams, Senior Attorney-Advisor, Training and Outreach Division, Office of Communication and Legislative Affairs, U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC)

Candace Clark, Management and Program Analyst, U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC)

Wrap-up and Closing

Akinyemi Banjo, Senior Policy Advisor, Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP), U.S. Department of Labor (DOL)

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Thank You!



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