

Gen X, Millennials, Gen Z, and Boomers, Oh My! When Collective Trauma is in the Workplace



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MemberAccess



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State Employee Assistance Program

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BHS customizes services to meet the needs of State of Alabama's team

Discussion Topics


- ▶ Identify the Different Generations in the Workplace
- ▶ Look at the Values and the Potential Outcomes of Generational Interaction
- ▶ Develop Intergenerational Communication Skills
- ▶ Offer Strategies for Effective Cross Generational Communication and Conflict Management
- ▶ Review EAP Benefits Available to Employees and Family Members

Disclaimer

There are exceptions to every rule. Today, we will generalize characteristics shared by groups of individuals. It is important to remember not to make assumptions based on generalizations about a group.

Why Learn About Generational Differences?

- ▶ The workforce continues to represent many different ages, spanning from people in their 20s to people in their 80s
- ▶ Managers and supervisors are challenged to manage the different sets of work values and styles that are represented in each generational bracket
- ▶ Employees and managers need to find new ways of working together to accomplish common goals



Different Generations in the Workplace

Traditionalists

Born: 1925-1945



- ▶ Also known as the Silent Generation
- ▶ The oldest working generation in today's workforce
- ▶ This group not only survived the Great Depression but was instrumental in shaping the United States as an economic and military power
- ▶ They are responsible for developing today's space program, creating vaccines for polio, tuberculosis, tetanus and laying the foundation for today's technological environment

Baby Boomers

Born: 1946-1964



- ▶ Considered the wealthiest and most influential generation in the world
- ▶ Often portrayed as the generation of optimism, exploration and achievement
- ▶ Compared with previous generations, more young adults pursued higher education or relocated away from family to pursue career and educational interests
- ▶ This generation came of age in a period when the country was torn by differing views on politics, war and social justice

Generation X

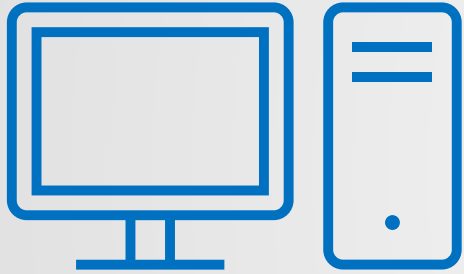
Born: 1965-1980



- ▶ Sometimes referred to as the “middle child” or “in-betweenener” generation
- ▶ Grew up in an era of emerging technology and political and institutional incompetence
- ▶ This generation learned independence early in life by being pushed towards adulthood at an age earlier than any other recent generation

Millennials

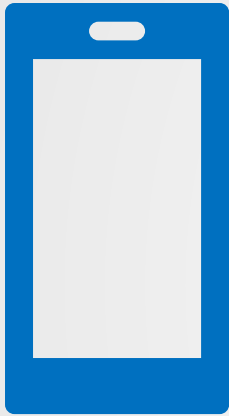
Born: 1981-1996



- ▶ Referred to as Generation Y prior to being coined Millennials, range in age from 25 to 40
- ▶ The most populated group in modern history
- ▶ Collectively a more diverse and socially liberal group than prior generations
- ▶ First generation to truly witness the advent of technology like the internet, virtual reality and artificial intelligence

Generation Z

Born: 1997-2012



- ▶ Born and raised as digital natives, they are typically greatly dependent on smartphones and other modern devices
- ▶ Focused on people and their personalities, rather than demographics
- ▶ Currently on track to be the best-educated generation yet



Generational Values and Views on Work

Traditionalist Values

- ▶ Believe in Conformity, Authority and Rules
- ▶ Believe in Logic
- ▶ Very Defined Sense of Right and Wrong
- ▶ Loyalty and Respect for Authority
- ▶ Disciplined
- ▶ Dislike Conflict
- ▶ Detail Oriented
- ▶ Duty Before Pleasure
- ▶ Tend to Respond Well to Directive Leadership

Traditionalists at Work

- ▶ Though aware of modern technology, most are not comfortable using it
- ▶ To create a positive work environment for a member of this group, you should try to provide offline options for completing tasks and project management
- ▶ Personal interaction is appreciated as they are likely to thrive on face-on-face communication
- ▶ Will be dropping to less than 2% of the workforce by 2025

Baby Boomer Values

- ▶ Optimistic
- ▶ Driven
- ▶ Team Oriented
- ▶ Personal Gratification
- ▶ Health and Wellness
- ▶ Will go the Extra Mile
- ▶ Service Oriented
- ▶ Uncomfortable with Conflict
- ▶ Can be Judgmental of Those Who See Things Differently

Baby Boomers at Work

- ▶ Job security is a top priority
- ▶ Like the silent generation, this group thrives on formal and structured work settings
- ▶ They tend to be loyal to the team, adding value by going the extra mile
- ▶ See career as translating into self-worth
- ▶ Nearly 70 million workers from the Baby Boom generation are estimated to retire by 2025, moving them to under 25% of the workforce by 2025

Generation X Values

- ▶ Independent
- ▶ Flexible
- ▶ Informal
- ▶ Skeptical
- ▶ Multitaskers
- ▶ Direct Communicators
- ▶ Outcome Oriented
- ▶ Output Focused
- ▶ Welcome Feedback
- ▶ Focused on Work-Life Balance

Generation X at Work

- ▶ The majority prefer a work environment that puts emphasis on individuality
- ▶ Many believe they were the ones to coin the phrase work-life balance
- ▶ Generation X often are loyal to their manager and may exceed expectations and deliver results but perceive career as just one part of who they are
- ▶ Second largest group in the labor force, holding steady at 33% through the 2020s

Millennial Values

- ▶ Ambitious
- ▶ Competitive
- ▶ Civic-minded
- ▶ Open-minded
- ▶ Tenacious
- ▶ Tech Savvy
- ▶ Optimistic
- ▶ Confident
- ▶ Have Difficulty Dealing with Difficult People

Millennials at Work

- ▶ For most Millennials, understanding their company's vision and doing a job that helps make the world a better place is the dream work setting
- ▶ Expect equitable treatment and see their careers as an opportunity to add value and contribute
- ▶ They are the first generation to fully embrace remote and hybrid work
- ▶ Millennials will represent 75% of the global workforce by 2025

Generation Z Values

- ▶ Social
- ▶ Multi-Taskers
- ▶ Educated
- ▶ Inclusive
- ▶ Multicultural
- ▶ Interactive
- ▶ Entrepreneurial
- ▶ Independent
- ▶ Project Oriented
- ▶ Transparent in Working Relationships

Generation Z at Work

- ▶ They are focused on “working to live” versus “living to work” and look for employers that support this
- ▶ When looking for a job, they mostly focus on stable and long-term opportunities – they will stay with the same company for a few years before moving on
- ▶ The ideal workplace would be flexible, allowing them to complete tasks as they see fit and includes them in process improvements
- ▶ Percent of labor force will be over 27% by 2025

Generational Interaction

- ▶ Traditionalists and Boomers may have a tendency NOT to question or challenge authority or the status quo. This may cause confusion among the X, Millennial and Z generations who have been taught to speak up
- ▶ X, Millennial and Z members who have had different experiences and communicate with people differently, may fail to actively listen to Traditionalists and Boomers, thereby missing valuable information and guidance



Collective Trauma in the Workplace

What is Collective Trauma?

- ▶ Collective trauma refers to the psychological impact of a shared traumatic event that affects a group, community, or society
- ▶ Unlike individual trauma, it is experienced simultaneously and has cultural, generational, and systemic effects
- ▶ In the workplace, this trauma can shape how teams function, how individuals interact, and how safety and trust are perceived

What is Collective Trauma?



- ▶ Examples of Collective Trauma:
 - Pandemics (e.g., COVID-19)
 - Economic collapses
 - Mass violence or war
 - Racial injustice and systemic oppression
 - Climate-related disasters

Generational Layers of Collective Trauma

Generation	Defining Collective Traumas	Impact in the Workplace
Boomers	Vietnam War, Civil Rights Movement, Cold War	Distrust of institutions, resilience, structured loyalty
Gen X	Economic uncertainty, AIDS crisis, 9/11	Independence, skepticism of authority
Millennials	9/11, 2008 recession, climate crisis	Anxiety, values-based work, desire for purpose
Gen Z	COVID-19, school shootings, racial reckoning	Mental health focus, demand for justice and equity

- ▶ These traumas influence generational communication styles, emotional resilience, and expectations of safety and leadership

How Collective Trauma Shows Up in the Workplace

- ▶ Signs & Symptoms:
 - High turnover or "quiet quitting"
 - Hypervigilance or low morale
 - Conflict avoidance or increased tension
 - Lack of trust in leadership
 - Difficulty with change or uncertainty
 - Generational misunderstandings or resentment
- ▶ Example: After COVID-19, employees across generations reported burnout, a loss of identity, and a deep questioning of work-life balance.

Creating a Trauma-Informed, Intergenerational Workplace

- ▶ Strategies for Healing and Connection:
 - Acknowledge collective trauma openly — avoid gaslighting or minimizing
 - Build psychological safety — prioritize transparency, support, and choice
 - Train managers on trauma-informed leadership
 - Encourage intergenerational dialogue — bridge values and experiences
 - Normalize mental health care — remind employees of their EAP benefits
- ▶ Healing happens in connection. When organizations honor past wounds and foster empathy across generations, the workplace becomes a site of resilience.

Generational Responses to Trauma in the Workplace

Coping Styles, Communication, and Resilience Patterns

Generation	Common Trauma Responses	Workplace Impact
Boomers (1946–1964)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• "Push through it" mentality• Compartmentalization• Stoicism	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Seen as emotionally detached• May resist change or mental health discourse• Strong loyalty and work ethic as coping mechanism
Gen X (1965-1980)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Self-reliance• Cynicism or withdrawal• Humor as a defense	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Avoids seeking support• May be skeptical of organizational efforts• Strong boundary-setting
Millennials (1981–1996)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Vocal about struggles• Seeks purpose and meaning• Uses digital communities for support	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Open to therapy and vulnerability• May appear emotionally “needy” to older generations• Advocates for change and equity
Gen Z (1997–2012)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• High emotional literacy• Normalize anxiety and depression• Expect mental health support	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Demand transparent leadership• Push for systemic change• May disengage quickly if unsupported



BHS EAP Benefits for State of Alabama

State of Alabama: BHS Benefits

Employees and dependents may receive up to three (3) visits/consults at no charge each plan year.



In-Person

With a doctor,
counselor or advisor



Telehealth

Available via phone
or web-based



Digital

Access to
virtual solutions



Work/Life

Consultation for
Financial

- Ψ Stress & Anxiety
- Ψ Marital / Family
- Ψ Depression
- Ψ Work-Related Problems
- Ψ Substance Abuse
- Ψ Grief & Loss
- Ψ Childhood Disorders including ADHD
- Ψ Life Transitions

Accessing the BHS Benefits

Begins with a call to BHS:
800-245-1150 or

www.behavioralhealthsystems.com

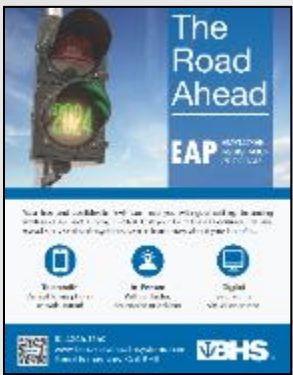
- ▶ Designated BHS Care Coordinator is available Monday-Friday: 7:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m. CT
- ▶ After-hour, weekend and holiday calls answered by mental health professionals – never an automated response system
- ▶ Digital offerings also available via the BHS MemberAccess app and portal
 - To log in, use your Employer ID: **DORM**



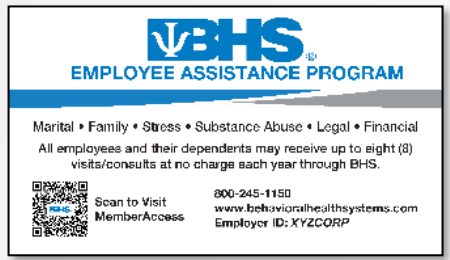
**Designated
BHS Care Coordinator**
Jasmine Burns, DBH, ALC,
CRC

Benefits Communications

Posters



EAP Wallet Card



EAP Newsletters



BHS MemberAccess App



Fact Sheets



Info Graphics



BHS Supervisory Toolkit



In Summary: Key Takeaways



BHS is the EAP for State of Alabama employees and their families



Members should call Jasmine Burns, BHS Care Coordinator, for behavioral health needs including scheduling



Both virtual and in-person care options are available within the BHS network of providers, and the BHS MemberAccess App is available



To make an appointment, call BHS at 800-245-1150 or visit www.behavioralhealthsystems.com



A Personalized Approach
To Behavioral Health



Behavioral Health



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Drug Testing



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