

# Supporting Workplace Mental Health

Mental health in the workplace affects us all. When mental health issues are not addressed, there can be both personal and economic costs. Fortunately, managers can help reduce such costs by understanding and actively supporting workplace mental health.

## Ways to contribute to a psychologically healthy workplace:

- Demystify mental illness (e.g. wellness sessions, mental health week).
- Anti-stigma initiatives (e.g. awareness campaigns, getting involved in local mental health events, mental health champions).
- Instilling a culture of respect.
- Instilling a culture of fairness.
- Appreciation and recognition.
- Honesty and transparency.
- Support for work-life balance.
- Clear and respectful communication.
- Reasonable control or influence for employees regarding how work is done.
- Clarity of roles, job duties, and expectations.
- Support through resources and information required to perform job duties well.
- Opportunities for individual growth and development.
- Support and debrief following intense or unusual workplace stressors.
- Conflict resolution practices.
- Explicit policies around bullying, harassment, violence, and substance use.

## Do:

### Look out for changes in employee behaviours at work.

- Increased sickness absence, changes in productivity, poor concentration, and displays of anger or defensiveness can be signs of stress or mental illness.

### Take all threats seriously.

- Take action if you perceive immediate risk (police, emergency services, hospital). If you are worried about someone's safety, ask directly – it will not increase risk of harm or suicide.

## Practical guidelines for approaching a staff member you believe may have mental health concerns:

### Step 1: Choose your time well

- Away from others.
- Not late on a Friday afternoon.
- Incorporate at end of a scheduled meeting.
- Prepare yourself for the meeting; review what you want to address.
- Have EFAP information on hand in case you decide to refer the employee to EFAP during the meeting.
- Consider calling the EFAP Key Person Advice Line for consultation.

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For more information on mental health in the workplace contact your Homewood Health Account Executive. To access the EFAP Key Person Advice Line for a consultation with a Homewood Health Clinical Manager, please call the EFAP at:

**1.800.663.1142**

**homewoodhealth.com**



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## Step 2: Begin with open-ended questions

- "How are you?"
- "How have things been for you lately?"

## Step 3: Phrase your concerns with behaviour observation

- "I have observed you recently (describe behaviour, e.g., forgetting meetings)..."
- "On (this occasion) I noticed you (describe behaviour, e.g., yelled at Annie for getting paper stuck in the printer)..."
- Be clear about the changes you have observed, and your expectations for performance.

## Step 4: Keep language neutral and supportive

- "I value having you as part of our team. I am always here if you would like to talk about things. I will be a safe ear, but your safety and job safety is important to me, so I need to let you know that if anything you say makes me concerned for either of these, I will need to let someone know."
- If the employee seems to need assistance, refer them to EFAP, or ask if they have thought of using the EFAP to get some help. Let them know it won't cost them anything and it is completely confidential.
- Expect defensiveness but don't take it personally.
- Remain calm, supportive and empathic.
- Share what you value about the employee.
- Ask if there is anything the employee needs from you. This might be a time to look at accommodations.
- Do not try to probe at the problem, diagnose a mental illness, or act as a counsellor.

- Set up a time to meet again to review.
- Do not share personal employee information with others, however, be clear with the employee what you will keep confidential (e.g. employee going through a divorce), and what you will need to disclose (e.g. a substance abuse problem in a safety sensitive position).
- Document all meetings thoroughly.

## Step 5: Follow-up with the individual

- "What thoughts do you have now about the things we talked over the other day?"
- "How are you doing today?"
- Again, do not try to probe at the problem, diagnose a mental illness, or act as a counselor.
- Do not share personal employee information with others, however, be clear with the employee what you will keep confidential.

## Step 6: Inform and enlist the support of your supervisor or HR if you feel it is appropriate (e.g., whenever there is a risk involved, when job safety becomes an issue, when others in the team are impacted, when a performance management plan may be required)

- "I have still noticed these changes in your behaviour and I'm starting to become concerned for your welfare and how our workplace is being affected. I am still here to support you, but I feel in this instance the right thing to do is to involve HR and let them know my concerns. We will work together with them in ensuring you have the right support."

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