

HOW TO HELP IN CRISIS SITUATIONS

If a fire alarm goes off at work you typically know what actions to take. On a building site, if someone falls and is hurt, there are procedures to follow to get help and support the individual. But what if you notice a coworker struggling with their mental health? How exactly do you help them? There's no easy one-step solution, but there's still a lot you can do to aid your friend in need.

Depression and anxiety are the two most common mental health struggles people encounter. They can show up in different ways depending on the person and situation. The first step in helping anyone is realizing they need assistance.

HERE ARE SOME SIGNS YOU MAY NOTICE

DEPRESSION

- Loss of interest in activities
- Decreased motivation
- Feeling down and not knowing why
- Irritability, easily angered
- Loss of appetite
- Sleeping too much or too little
- Feeling worthless
- Withdrawing from others
- Fatigue, decreased energy
- Thinking of suicide

ANXIETY

- Feeling nervous, tense, or restless
- Worrying much of the time
- Having a sense of panic
- Long-term or severe fatigue
- Trouble concentrating
- Trouble sleeping
- Increased heart rate, hyperventilating
- Trembling, sweating
- Physical problems: headaches, GI

HOW TO RESPOND

When people are struggling or experiencing a crisis, people may act in ways that are unusual for them. These changes in a person's behaviors and/or mood can be a big sign that something is wrong.

1. **Listen without making judgements** and focus on their needs in that moment
2. **Ask** them what would help them
3. Continue to **listen first** throughout
4. **Do not minimize** what they say or how they feel; their pain is front and center
5. **Avoid confrontation**
6. Ask if there is **someone** they would like you to contact
7. **Offer practical information** like what resources are available.

WHAT NOT TO SAY

"It's not that bad, you'll see."

"Things could be worse!"

"You have a great life and seem so happy!"

"Can't you just snap out of it?"

"Look on the bright side."

We often have good intentions of cheering up co-worker and friends. But when people are struggling, they may feel misunderstood or that you're not taking them seriously.

For example, a person may feel like they don't have a right to feel bad, or that there is something wrong with their experience.

WHAT GETS IN THE WAY OF REACHING OUT FOR HELP

A Culture of Toughness: We can have a culture of self-reliance and feel valued for our toughness, both physically and mentally.

Negative Coping Strategies: Turning to alcohol and drugs can lead to a false sense that “workers are dealing with it ok”.

Stigma: Industry stigma makes it hard to put your hand up and say, “I’ve got a problem.”

WHEN PEOPLE SEEK TREATMENT FOR MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES, IT CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Individuals can experience relief in 3-8 sessions when receiving evidenced based treatment that is recommended for a particular BH issue.

What is evidence based therapy? It is treatment which has been found through research to effectively address the mental health problems for which they are used.

Not everyone knows how to help a person with mental health problems, but everyone can help them get to someone who does.

KNOW YOUR BENEFITS: WHERE CAN YOU GO FOR COUNSELING OR PROFESSIONAL HELP?

Business of all sizes can develop workplace wellness programs to support their employees’ mental health. Whether you are with a company that provides an EAP or part of a trade group, check to see if you have access to EAP or insurance benefits. EAPs are contracted by employers and offer mental health and substance use counseling, typically 4-6 sessions, at no cost to the employee.

As a leader, if your organization doesn’t have an EAP, or if health insurance is not offered to employees, seek out companies you can contract with that can provide EAP services. Let your employees know that it is all right to seek help, provide a list of national and local resources, and let them know you will support their efforts to get the care they need.

When you see a coworker struggling, it’s important to talk to them. They might be in distress but unable to find the words to ask for support. Show you care, listen closely, and let them know that asking for help isn’t a sign of weakness, it’s a display of strength.

