

Conversation Guide for Managers: Employees and Mental Health

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Integrated Health, Safety and Wellness Branch, Public Service Commission

This tool supports supervisors and managers when talking to employees about their mental health. Supervisors and managers are not expected to diagnose or act as healthcare professionals but can have a positive impact on employees by showing compassion, empathy and care, and by sharing available resources.

Actions	This looks/sounds like:
Be familiar with common signs of declining mental health so you can recognize the situation with some confidence. Stay alert to when employees might be reacting or struggling. This may include frequent absences from work, decreased work performance, changes in behavior and recurring complaints of physical symptoms (i.e., fatigue, insomnia, headaches). See below for resources and training.	<p>Seek out development opportunities and training as outlined below for evidence-based information on common mental health problems.</p> <p>Connect with your HR Business Partner to understand the duty to inquire and the medical accommodation process, including Stay at or Return to Work Form 111.</p> <p>Contact the EFAP for a confidential manager consultation with a clinical counsellor. See the EFAP page on Taskroom for more details.</p>
Set up a time to meet privately. It is important to create a safe, respectful and comfortable environment.	"I would like to put aside some time for us to have an informal chat. When would be a good time for you?"
Share your observations. Stick to the facts and remain objective. Use "I" statements to talk about specific behavior(s) you are worried about. Show concern.	<p>"I've noticed that..."</p> <p>"I'm worried about..."</p> <p>"I sense something is bothering you."</p>
Use open-ended questions/statements to encourage more conversation and to help you understand the situation better. Show a genuine interest.	<p>"What changes have you noticed in yourself lately?"</p> <p>"What do you feel comfortable sharing?"</p> <p>"How can I help you?"</p>
Stop what you are doing and listen without judgement. Be present, open and humble. Don't interrupt and let them say everything they need to.	<p><i>Relaxed body posture, eye contact, nodding, and allowing silence and pauses.</i></p> <p>"I see...yes... hmm." and "Okay, I see."</p>
Keep calm and be objective. Be open to what the person has to say. If you feel yourself getting impatient or upset, take a few deep breaths or a break.	<p><i>Calm, even tone of voice.</i></p> <p>"I need some time to think about this. Can we continue this conversation later?"</p>
Acknowledge the person and try to understand it from their point of view and demonstrate empathy. Recap what you've heard and acknowledge that you hear what they are saying and feeling.	<p>"I'm hearing that... Is that correct?"</p> <p>"It sounds like you feel..."</p> <p><i>Avoid insincere reassurance such as 'don't worry' or 'cheer up' as these can be interpreted as being dismissive.</i></p>
Encourage them to find their own solution if it's appropriate. You can help explore available resources such as EFAP , workplace benefits , community resources and healthcare supports . If the employee isn't ready to explore, respect their wishes.	<p>"What do you need right now?"</p> <p>"Is there anyone else you trust that you can talk to about this?"</p> <p>"What resources would help?"</p> <p>"There are great supports available to help when you are ready"</p>
Continue to check in with them to see how they are doing and let them know that you are there to support them.	<p>"I'm here for you if you need to talk."</p> <p>"Let's check back in with each other next week."</p>
If an employee is at risk of imminent harm to self or others, help facilitate connection with a health professional (e.g., 9-1-1, Healthline 8-1-1, family doctor, crisis team where available).	<p>"Thank you for trusting me with this information"</p> <p>"Is there a professional you trust that I can call for help?"</p> <p>"Let's contact <resource> together"</p> <p>"I am going to call for help"</p> <p>"I'm here with you until emergency services arrive"</p>
Resources:	Training:
Workplace Strategies for Mental Health eMentalHealth Information Sheets	Mental Health Crisis Module, My Learning App LivingWorks Education Mental Health Commission of Canada Psychological First Aid - Canadian Red Cross