MENTAL HEALTH FIRST AID Australia

How leaders can support employees with mental health problems

WHEN SHOULD YOU BE CONCERNED?

If there is a major change in a person's normal way of thinking, feeling or behaving ›

If these changes affects the person's ability to perform at work ›

If the changes do not go away quickly and last

DECIDING WHETHER TO TALK TO THE PERSON

It's important to approach a person about concerns, whether or not work may be a contributing factor.
Before you approach, consider the following

1 Do you have the appropriate knowledge and skills to assist a person?

2 Do you have any negative experiences or beliefs towards people with mental health problems?

3 Are you part of a workplace culture that is contributing to the person's problem?

If you are the person's manager, also consider if there is a conflict between your management and first aider roles. If you do not feel it is appropriate for you to approach the person, talk with someone who may be in a better position to help.

Ensure you maintain the person's privacy and confidentiality.

! If the person's mental health problem is posing a risk to the health and safety of themselves or others in the workplace, document your concerns, including time, date and location of the concerning behaviours. Talk to an appropriate manager or HR.

PLANNING YOUR APPROACH

It's important to approach the person directly and privately about your concerns.

Before approaching the person:

? Consider the expected outcomes and plan the structure and aims of the discussion in advance

+ Be clear in your own mind about concerning behaviours you have noticed

www Find out what resources are available to support people with mental health problems

Be familiar with relevant laws and organisational policies and procedures http://bit.ly/MHFAlaws

Be familiar with the guidelines on how to help someone who is suicidal http://bit.ly/MHFASuicide

Think about a time and place to meet that best suits you and the person, allowing for sufficient time for discussion. Consider approaching the person by having a casual conversation and asking whether they are okay.

LISTEN AND COMMUNICATE NON-JUDGMENTALLY

Try to create a supportive and trusting environment by doing the following:
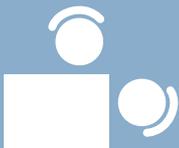
Consider your body language

Ask open-ended questions

Allow the person time to talk

Listen non-judgmentally

Demonstrate empathy and respect.

Confidentiality
It's important to maintain the person's confidentiality and privacy except where there is a concern for the safety of the person or others. Be clear with the person about confidentiality from the start.

HOW TO HAVE THE CONVERSATION

Some suggestions include:

Describe your specific observations and reasons for concern

State changes you have observed in a positive way, e.g. "I have noticed that you are not your usual cheery self" or "you seem less energetic"

Ensure you first talk about the person's strengths and how they are valued

'Keep the focus of the discussion on the person's wellbeing rather than their performance'

Ask if they would like to continue the conversation in the presence of a support person

Ask the person whether any workplace stressors or other issues are contributing to their mental health problem

WHAT IF THEY DON'T WANT TO TALK?

Be aware that there may be pros and cons for the person in disclosing any mental health problems at work. If the person chooses not to talk, tell them that you are available to talk in the future if they wish to and encourage them to talk to someone else they trust instead. You could also provide information for the person to take away and look at later, and try to touch base later to see if they are more willing to talk.

PROVIDING SUPPORT AND INFORMATION AS A MANAGER

It's important to ask the person what support they feel they need right now, and assist them to explore the available options. Focus on providing appropriate support for the person's mental health problem, before you address any performance issues.

Be aware that behaviours that breach the workplace's rules or regulations may require both performance management and mental health first aid. If there are any performance or behaviour issues, explain clearly what is expected of the person in terms of work performance and behaviour. If you are required to initiate performance management processes, be specific about the purpose of any meeting and ask if they would like a support person present.

Make it clear that you will not tolerate any discrimination towards or harassment of the person at work due to their mental health problem.

Consider having regular discussions with the person to monitor how they are coping with their workload and workplace accommodations. Try to adapt the way you manage the person in order to reduce any work-related stress, e.g. some people may function better with more direction from their manager.

REASONABLE ADJUSTMENTS

Be aware of relevant guidelines on how to carry out reasonable adjustments for the person. Consider the best way to accommodate the person in their role. Seek advice from an appropriate manager or HR.

Ask the person what support they need in order to fulfil the inherent requirements of their job. Discuss what adjustments are possible if the person does not wish to disclose their mental health problem to co-workers.

Alternatively, discuss with the person what they would like you to tell other staff members if they need to be made aware of the adjustments.

'Some examples of reasonable adjustments include temporary reduction in workload, time off for medical appointments and flexibility to work from home.'