

People & Culture Leader Guide – Mental Health Awareness

Purpose

We've developed this practical guide to help you ask, "Are you OK?" of any team member or workmate you're worried about and then respond appropriately and safely to anyone who says, "No, I'm not OK."

Included are simple, practical tools to help you:

1. How do I know if someone needs support?
2. Simple steps to talk to a staff member who's not OK
3. How to manage emotional reactions in a conversation
4. Useful contacts for a staff member who's not OK

What are the signs someone might need some extra support?

Over the last fortnight, have you noticed two or more of the below:

Changes in their physical appearance:	Changes in mood:	Changes in behaviour:	Changes in how thoughts are expressed:
Look more tired than usual	Seem more irritable, snappy or fly off the handle when they normally wouldn't	Seem more withdrawn than usual	Struggles to see a positive side e.g. "It's always terrible..."
Seem "flat" or drained of energy	Appear more anxious and worried about everything i.e. work and personal life	Don't seem to enjoy hobbies/interests they once did	Seem to think the worst e.g. they might conclude that two people in a meeting are discussing their performance or future in the workplace
Have had a pattern of illness or being constantly run down	React more emotionally than the situation warrants	Seem to have difficulty concentrating or seem constantly distracted	Personalise situations e.g. "I knew I'd get the toughest roster – they've got it in for me"
Are complaining of physical health issues such as headaches/migraines	Are quick to anger	Are taking on more work to avoid being in social situations with others	Saying things that sound more confused or irrational
Are eating much more or much less than usual	Appear to be overwhelmed by tasks that they had previously found manageable	Are not performing to their usual standards	Complain they have difficulty switching off
Are drinking more alcohol than usual			
Seem more fidgety and nervous than usual			

If you have noticed two or more of these changes, they might need some extra support. It's time to start a conversation

Simple steps to talk to a staff member who's not OK

1. Getting ready to ask

Be ready:

- Are you in a good headspace?
- Are you willing to genuinely listen?
- Can you give as much time as you need?

Be prepared:

- Remember that you won't have all the answers (which is OK)
- Listening is one of the most important things you can do
- If someone is talking about personal struggles this can be difficult and they might get emotional, embarrassed or upset.

Pick your moment:

- Have you chosen somewhere relatively private and informal?
- What time will be good for them to chat? Ideally try to put aside at least an hour so you have ample time to have a meaningful chat.
- If they can't talk when you approach them, ask for a better time to come back.

2. Starting a conversation

Be relaxed:

- Help them open up by asking questions like "How are you going" or "What's been happening" or "I've noticed that you're not quite yourself lately. How are you travelling?"
- Make an observation. Mention specific things that have made you concerned for them, like "I've noticed that you seem really tired recently" or "You seem less chatty than usual. How are you going?"

Listen without judgement:

- Take what they say seriously
- Don't interrupt or rush the conversation
- If they need time to think, try and sit patiently with the silence

Encourage them to explain:

- If they get angry or upset, stay calm and don't take it personally
- Let them know you're asking because you're concerned

Encourage action:

- Ask them: "Where do you think we can go from here?"
- Ask: "What would be a good first step we can take?"
- Ask: "What do you need from me? How can I help?"
- Good options for action might include talking to family, a trusted friend, their doctor or BENESTAR

Check in:

- Remember to check in see how the person is doing in a few days' time
- Ask if they've found a better way to manage the situation
- If they haven't done anything, keep encouraging them and remind them you're always here if they need a chat
- Understand that sometimes it can take a long time before someone is ready to see a professional.
- Try to reinforce the benefits of seeking professional helps and trying different avenues
- You could ask, "Do you think it would be useful if we looked into finding some professional or other support?"

How to manage emotional reactions in the conversation?

From time to time, we can all be faced with strong reactions from our workmates, particularly if we're supporting someone who is struggling.

Here are some things you can do to minimise awkwardness and reduce the pressure in these situations:

- Recognise their reaction may be in response to a range of circumstances - both personal and work related - many of which you might not know about
- Allow the person to express their emotions fully (i.e. let off steam) and show them that you're interested by actively listening to all they say
- Deal with the emotions first, you can then discuss the issues more rationally once emotions have been addressed
- Being a good listener is one of the best things you can do for someone when they are distressed
- Manage your own emotions by staying calm and not taking things personally
- Validate their response but keep the focus on the issue at hand

How do I deal with anger?

- If someone is visibly hostile you can respond with: "I can see that this has upset you. Why don't you start at the beginning and tell me what I need to know...?"
- Allow them to identify all the factors they feel are contributing to their anger
- You might encourage them by adding "Right, I understand that... is also a problem. What else is causing you concern?"
- Be patient and prepared to listen to them itemise all the points
- Use active listening to keep the conversation on track and to reassure them that you are interested in all they say
- If they feel they have been wronged or treated unfairly you are unlikely to persuade them otherwise in this conversation. It's more constructive to listen to all they have to say and provide resources and formal channels for specific complaints to be heard

How do I deal with anxiety?

- Speak in short, concise sentences but still showing concern and care
- If you anticipate an anxious response, use your preparation time to construct your message in clear, brief sentences
- Make sure you appear calm. This is best displayed through deep, slow breathing, a lower tone of voice and evenly paced speech

How do I deal with sadness?

- Sad or tragic stories are often difficult to deal with because we empathise with the person and feel helpless as we cannot take away their sadness or pain
- Use lots of empathetic phrases, such as “It sounds like you’re juggling a few things at the moment” or “I understand this must be challenging for you right now”
- Ensure that the best internal support is available, such as BENESTAR.
- Make sure you’re comfortable with any silence in the conversation
- Know that silence gives them permission to add more and to tell you everything
- If someone begins to cry, sit quietly and allow them to cry. Lowering your eyes can minimise their discomfort. You could add, “I’m going to sit here with you and when you’re ready we can keep talking”
- If you anticipate this response, make sure you have tissues handy

What if they don’t want to talk to me?

- Try not to take it personally. It may take them time to process what you’re saying and respond.
- Focus on the things they’re comfortable talking about like, “I know you’ve had trouble sleeping and concentrating lately. Can we talk about that?”
- Suggest they talk to someone they trust, like a family member or friend. You could say, “You can always call me if you ever want to chat. But is there someone else you’d rather talk to?”

Useful contacts for someone who’s not OK

Encourage them to call on these Australian crisis lines and professionals:

Benestar

1300 360 364 www.benestar.com
company ID: ENDVF, and company
token: ENDVF01.

Lifeline (24/7)

13 11 14
lifeline.org.au

SANE Australia

1800 18 SANE (7263)
sane.org

Suicide Call Back Service (24/7)

1300 659 467
suicidecallbackservice.org.

beyondblue (24/7)

1300 224 636
beyondblue.org.au

More contacts:

ruok.org.au/find help