

# Talking about Mental Health at Work

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**Putting tasks off, missing deadlines or feeling indecisive. If you notice these signs in a co-worker and it just doesn't seem right, be courageous and act.**

Depression can be lonely and scary but starting a conversation can help a person feel supported. Here are some ways to start the conversation ...

**How to start the conversation.** Talking about feelings and emotions may be uncomfortable for some people. So start by finding a private place to talk and asking, "are you okay?" or "what's going on, you don't seem like yourself?" Describe what you're seeing and how it seems out of character for that person.

**Ask twice.** A person may deflect the conversation if the topic feels uncomfortable. Talking about an issue that makes a person feel vulnerable is often not easy. For many, hearing someone ask "how are you doing," it makes them think the person asking really does not want to hear anything negative. We often say that we're fine when we may not be feeling that way at all.

To get past this natural response, consider asking twice:

"How are you?"

"Fine."

"Hey... is everything okay?"

Try extra hard to show sincerity and compassion (through changes in vocal tone and body language) when you ask the second time. This can really demonstrate your genuine concern for the other person's wellbeing.

**Listen.** Take a minute to pause and just listen. When people share their feelings, they are vulnerable. Try to listen non-judgmentally and resist jumping in with a proposed solution. The person will benefit just from talking and having a good listener. If the person is defensive, it may be their feelings and emotions responding, so be patient. Try responding with "I just wanted to make sure that you're okay and to let you know that I'm here if you ever want to talk."

**Ask for more context, don't answer.** Instead of a quick response or offering solutions, ask follow-up questions. You might ask why the person thinks that he or she feels this way or what is needed to feel better. Ask if the way the person is feeling is impacting his or her daily life. You may also ask whether the person has considered talking with someone who can help. It is easier for someone to seek help if they find the answer themselves, rather than being told how to fix it.

**Provide support.** It is common to sometimes feel stressed, lonely, overwhelmed, frustrated, sad, and depressed. Let your co-worker know that it is okay to feel that way and it is a natural part of the human experience. It's when it interferes with daily life that it's time to consider getting help. Express your willingness to help with supportive statements like:

"I want to support you. Let's talk about how I can help."

"What can I do to help?" or "How can I help?"

**Follow up.** Be sure to check back in whether the person accepted your offer of support or not. This sends the clear message that you care and are there for support. Also, keep conversations and information shared with you confidential unless you're worried a person may pose a danger to him or herself or others. In those cases, talk to HR, a manager or someone you trust immediately. Self-harm or potential harm to others require immediate attention.

Remember, a person may not be ready to talk or seek help. Remind him or her that you're here to help when it is needed.

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