Supporting Mental Health

A guide for managers

Follow the 8 for healthier minds

Use your mouse to jump to the topic you wish to explore

You make a difference to how your team feels inside and outside of work.

1. What's that mean?

A glossary of commonly used terms.

Mental Health

A state of well-being in which every individual realises his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to her or his community.

World Health Organisation, 2014.

Duty of Care

As a manager you must ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, the health and safety of yourself and your team.

Model WHS Act, 2016.

Reasonable Adjustment

A reasonable adjustment is an amendment to one or more of an employee's duties to ensure they may work more safely and productively.

Inherent Requirement

An essential task or routine of a role.

Mental Health Condition

A condition that significantly affects how a person feels, thinks, behaves and interacts with other people, that is diagnosed according to standardised criteria.

Department of Health, 2007.

Psychological Safety

A team climate characterised by interpersonal trust and the absence of judgment when speaking up with ideas, questions, concerns or mistakes. It is when people are comfortable being and expressing themselves.

Edmondson, 2003.

Reasonably Practicable

Duties that are, or were at a particular time, reasonably able to be done in relation to ensuring health and safety.

2. What is Mental Health?

Mental health explained and the current state in Australia and New Zealand.

As life presents us with changing circumstances or unexpected hardships, our mental health and resilience can be challenged. It's important to recognise that mental health is not fixed and our state of wellbeing can change as we encounter these experiences.

Mental health is best described as a spectrum along which people can move throughout their life, depending on their life experiences and responses to challenging events. This spectrum ranges from psychologically thriving to mental health crisis, and as we move along the spectrum, our ability to function in everyday life can change.

Thriving	Crisis

When we are psychologically thriving, we:

Can manage occasional or ongoing demands and bounce back from stressful situations

Accept ourselves for who we are

Are confident & have high self-esteem

Maintain positive relationships with others & hold a sense of belonging

Are motivated to grow personally & professionally

Are engaged & satisfied with our lives

Have a sense of purpose

Proactively reach out for support

Experience healthy day to day functioning

When we experience mental health crisis, we:

May not have a sense of purpose and have a sense of hopelessness

Feel burnt out, unsatisfied with our lives and more unproductive than usual

May be suicidal or display self-harming behaviour

May have very low self-esteem

Experience severe impacts on our day to day functioning

It is important to recognise and understand, that many individuals who experience a mental health condition can recover with the right support and enjoy a happy, healthy life with minimal symptoms, or perhaps none at all. For others, recovery may involve management of symptoms to ensure they can function at their best each day.

Mental health conditions do not discriminate. They can affect anyone, of any age, gender, job, socio-economic status or cultural background.

Currently, 45% of Australians and 47% of New Zealanders will experience a mental health condition at some point in their life. Many people need mental health support without having a formal diagnosis. This could be due to particular life events and increased stress. An important step as a manager is to recognise that there's a reasonable chance that someone you already manage, or will manage in the future, will experience a mental health condition.

3. Supporting Mental Health

Responsibilities

Under the Model Work Health and Safety Act (2016) in Australia, and the Health and Safety at Work Act (2015) in New Zealand, Bupa has an obligation to prevent harm (physical and psychological) to the health and safety of its people.

Firstly, all Bupa employees have a responsibility to take care of themselves and others, and cooperate with Bupa in matters of health and safety. In Australia, under the Disability Discrimination Act 1992, employers are required to ensure employees can work safely in any job.

Important: If a mental health condition does not affect how an employee undertakes their job, there is no legal obligation to disclose it to your business.

Circumstances when an employee needs to disclose a mental health condition to your business include:

- If it affects how the employee carries out the inherent requirements of their job. This ensures your business is enabled to identify reasonable adjustments that may assist an employee to perform their role safely.

- If it affects the health and safety of the employee, or those around them.

- If it is affected, or could be affected, by the nature of the employee's work.

Employees should be encouraged to consult

their treating medical practitioner if they believe their job requirements may aggravate their mental health condition or if it impacts on their ability to work safely. Encourage the team member to discuss the medical advice with you as their manager if they feel comfortable to do so. Explain that this will enable you to implement appropriate support and adjustments as is reasonably practicable.

As a manager, you have an obligation to:

- Identify possible workplace practices, actions or incidents which may cause, or contribute to, the mental illness of employees

- Take actions to eliminate or minimise these risks, as you would with health and safety obligations.

Essentially, we need to be aware that our practices and ways of working can influence our people's mental health. As a leader, you must take reasonably practicable steps to ensure our people are not exposed to psychological health and safety risks arising from their duties. We will explore how to do this further later in the guide.

4. The mentally healthy workplace

A mentally healthy workplace is one where people feel safe coming to work and being themselves, are encouraged to be as open as they feel comfortable to be, and where their unique needs and mental health are supported without stigma.

An important part of a mentally healthy workplace is psychological safety. Psychological safety is present when teams feel they can openly and honestly speak up, without any fear of judgement. This open communication between you and your team members, and collectively as a group, supports both team and individual performance, helps team members to feel valued, and increases the likelihood that each team member will reach out for help in times of need.

Some tips to help you build a mentally healthy and psychologically safe workplace include:

· Know your team members as individuals

· Talk openly about mental health

· Make sure your team have role clarity and meaning

· Set a standard of acceptable behaviours

· Be a positive role model

· Recognise and celebrate achievements

· Be open when times are challenging

· Offer support

· Know what not to say or do

The following pages explore different ways you can help to build a mentally healthy and psychologically safe work environment.

Know your team

Knowing your team as individual people, with unique traits, experiences, behaviours, thoughts and feelings, can help you to understand who they are when they are well and what is 'normal' for them. Get to know who they are in the context of the workplace, who they surround themselves with, their ambitions and passions.

A key indicator that someone may not be coping is a change in their behaviour, feelings or thoughts. Knowing your team members well enables you to better recognise when changes may be happening, and provides you with an opportunity to open a conversation and offer support early.

Some conversation starters that might help you to better know your team include:

- "Would you like to share some of your family traditions? What are they?"

- "What do you enjoy doing outside of work?"

- "What are you most proud of?"

- "What do you do to refocus during the day if you feel overwhelmed; how can I help you to do this?"

- "What are you grateful for?"

Respect that some people may differ in comfort levels regarding the sharing of personal details about their lives in a work context, and make it clear that people are welcome to share as much or as little as they are comfortable with.

Keep an open conversation

Talking openly about mental health and the importance of taking care of it helps your team to know that it's okay to talk about and proactively look after their mental health.

All conversations with team members about their mental health should be held in a private, comfortable and quiet place, free from distractions. If you are engaging in a conversation about mental health, ensure you allow as much time as needed for the team member to feel heard, understood and supported. It can help to discuss confidentiality with team members at the start of the conversation, making it clear what you can keep private, and what things may have to be shared and with whom e.g. the People Team.

Talking openly about mental health as a manager can further demonstrate you are confident and comfortable to discuss the topic and increases the chance of your team members speaking openly to you in future. This may be in relation to your own personal experiences (if you're comfortable), campaigns promoting mental health, or experiences of others (such as well-known public figures). Whenever speaking about mental health, ensure confidentiality and demonstrate respect.

More generally, communicating regularly and respectfully with each of your team members is a great way to demonstrate that you value their experiences and genuinely care about their wellbeing.

Be clear and concise

Role clarity means your team members have a clear sense of what their responsibilities are and what is expected of them. This is important for reducing individual stress and team conflict, as well as helping maximise mental health and wellbeing. Many situations may create role confusion for people, including starting a new role, transferring to a different area of the workplace, structural changes, and even getting a new manager.

Making time to discuss your expectations of each team member, clarifying their specific responsibilities and encouraging their questions, can be great ways to enhance role clarity. This is especially important through periods of uncertainty or change.

Help your team members to understand the greater impact of their daily duties and what their contributions mean. Consider asking why they chose to pursue their role, and what makes them come back to work each day. Explain to them why their role is important.

Set a standard of acceptable behaviours

Behaving in an appropriate and acceptable manner within a workplace contributes to a positive workplace culture for your team.

If you witness or hear of any behaviours or conversations that do not meet this standard, you need to intervene promptly. Unacceptable behaviour is not tolerated, and if you require assistance to realign expectations and behaviours, it is best to do so with the support of your local People Partner.

Recognise achievements

Recognition of achievements and tasks that are done well can improve morale and creates a more mentally healthy workplace. People generally need to feel recognised when they have done a good job, as it can reinforce that they are valued. As well as improving morale, recognising our team members can increase job satisfaction and strengthen team loyalty. A lack of recognition is a significant risk factor for psychological distress at work.

Be a positive role model

As a leader, you can influence your workplace culture by being a positive role model. Engage in mentally healthy activities and events and share this with your team, for example actively maintaining positive balance between work and your personal life, taking care of your physical health, and engaging in activities that help maintain your energy and wellbeing. Demonstrating this will encourage those who look up to you to do the same.

In addition to behaving in an appropriate manner, be aware of the non-verbal messages you can send to your team members, whether you intend to or not. Being able to recognise when your behaviour or body language may be perceived in a way that could upset others or instil a sense of fear or anxiety, is important to prevent psychological harm to your team.

Most importantly, recognise and reward team members who behave in an appropriate and respectful manner. This increases the chance that the behaviours will occur again and encourages the broader team members to behave in a similar way.

Be open when times are challenging

As a leader, acknowledging the reality of challenging times ensures your team feel you have a clear grasp on not only the situation at hand, but also what they might be needing in response. This acknowledgement may provide people with an opportunity to feel safer to speak up. Having open conversations with your team to monitor how they're feeling is a great way to reinforce your support.

Offer support at every appropriate opportunity

Taking time to regularly check in with your team members is a good way to maintain open communication channels, and more promptly intervene if people need to access extra support. Extending offers of support, even if it's as simple as a caring conversation, can support people regardless of their mental health.

What *not* to to do or say

It's important to remember a few key points when supporting your team's mental health and maintaining a mentally healthy workplace. These include:

- Do not breach confidentiality or privacy

- Do not use terms such as "insane", "crazy", or "psycho"

- Do not speak about mental health experiences in the media in a disrespectful way or discredit people's own experiences

- Don't assume you know what they are going through

- You're not a counsellor, and it is not your role to diagnose a mental health condition. However, being sensitive to the signs that someone needs help and support is important.

Mentally healthy workplaces enable people to be the best version of themselves.

5. Knowing when to help

How to recognise the signs of someone who isn't coping.

The most important thing to remember is that everyone can experience mental health challenges differently. That's why knowing your team is so important. A common sign of someone who is not coping and requires help is a change in their behaviour, feelings or thoughts.

Someone who is not coping can display a range of symptoms which may include, but not limited to:

- Withdrawing from work; increased absenteeism
- Withdrawal from colleagues, friends, or activities they usually enjoy
- Loss of motivation and changes to work performance
- Changes in their mood, such as being increasingly irritable, tearful or flat

- Significant, unexplained changes to their weight
- Lack of interest in personal appearance or hygiene
- Changes in thoughts such as feeling helpless, lost or overwhelmed
- Changes to their sleep habits such as difficulties falling or staying asleep, or sleeping an unusual amount
- Increased reliance on alcohol, or other drugs
- Sudden elation or extreme energy/excited moods for no apparent reason
- Regularly talking about death and dying.

6. Starting a conversation

Approaching a team member you're worried about can feel a little daunting, and it's normal to feel worried about saying the 'wrong' things. But, for anyone finding life difficult, a conversation with someone who is willing to listen can be a powerful support. Remember it's not your role to be a trained counsellor. This conversation is about better understanding your team member's experiences and guiding them to appropriate support.

There are 5 simple steps to having a caring conversation and starting to communicate. These are explained in the following pages.

Before you approach someone you're worried about

- Make sure you're in the right headspace to provide genuine care and have enough time for the conversation to take its course.

- Prepare any notes on your observations and worries for the individual to help you feel comfortable and prepared for the conversation.

- Choose somewhere private and relaxed to chat, at a time that's good for you both. Be prepared to hear that someone is struggling and not okay, and that they may become emotional and upset.

Be relaxed and help them be open

- Ask, "How are you going?" or, "I've noticed that you don't seem yourself lately, how have you been feeling?"

- If they don't want to talk, this is okay. Tell them you're still concerned about the changes you've noticed and that you care about them. Saying, "I'm here if you change your mind and want to chat" can be reassuring.

Listen without judgement

- Allow the person to express their emotions fully. Be an empathic listener, be patient, and give them time to think.

- Refrain from providing solutions at this point; small pauses of silence can be helpful, as it's important that the team member explores their thoughts.

- Use phrases such as "I understand this must be challenging for you right now"

- Ask open questions to get more information, "How are you feeling about that? How's that affecting you?"

- Demonstrate you are paying attention by maintaining eye contact. Expressing small phrases such as, "yes" or "mmm" can help show you're listening, but use these phrases sparingly to maintain authenticity.

- Remember any key points you wish to revisit with your team member, as this proves attention was kept and will encourage them to continue speaking.

Reassure them for opening up and offer support

- "I know it can be hard to talk about this, thanks for trusting me with it"

- "What can I do to support you?"

- "What do you think we could do now as a first step that might help?"

- Options for actions and support may include speaking to family, friends, your local People Partner, their GP or a mental health professional through your Employee Assistance Program.

- Smile, Bupa's employee wellbeing program, also has resources and information to support mental health (see section 9 for more details).

- If they are needing immediate crisis support, call Lifeline on 13 11 14 (in Australia) or 0800 543 354 (in New Zealand).

- If life is in imminent danger, call 000 (Australia) or 111 (New Zealand).

Check in & document all interactions & observations

- Follow up after a few days to see how your team member is going by asking, "I've been thinking of you and wanted to know how you're going since we last spoke?"

- Ask if they have found a way to manage the situation. If they haven't done anything, you could consider asking, "Would you like us to find some support options together?"

- Document all informal and formal behaviours (reported and/or observed), and conversations (informal and formal). This is highly important should anything escalate or require involvement of the People Team, as this allows a clear story to be told about the support that has been provided and enables them to take further action if ever needed. Without this documentation, it is difficult for the People Team to adequately assist managers to achieve any outcomes due to a lack of documented evidence.

7. What's best for who?

Recovery at work versus taking time off.

In your conversations with different members of the team, you will realise that everyone needs something different when it comes to looking after their mental health. For most people, in addition to financial security, work can bring a sense of purpose in our lives, where our day-to-day efforts contribute to something that is bigger than ourselves. Empower your team members to determine what will work best for them by engaging in open discussion.

If a person requests any adjustments to be accommodated, these may or may not be a reasonable adjustment, depending on business needs. Discuss this with your People Partner, to ensure that appropriate decisions are made and that we comply with WHS legislation.

No significant changes should be implemented without clear and documented medical guidance from an individual's treating medical practitioner. Any changes made should be communicated as temporary, with regular reviews to determine if they are beneficial to the individual.

Why it can be helpful to stay at work while recovering from a mental health condition

Staying at work can help fulfil a sense of belonging and purpose. It also supports people to maintain a routine, may help avoid isolation at home, can be a healthy distraction (situation dependent), enables opportunities for support from peers and management, allows managers to monitor progress, and can provide a person with a sense of productivity, value and accomplishment.

It is possible that your wider team may become aware of an individual's concerns, especially if changes are made to their role or working environment. Ensure that privacy is maintained at all times by allowing the impacted individual to guide what they are comfortable with disclosing to the team. Instruct your wider team that if they have any concerns about the individual they should speak with you directly. Explain the importance of both privacy and supporting their team member during this time.
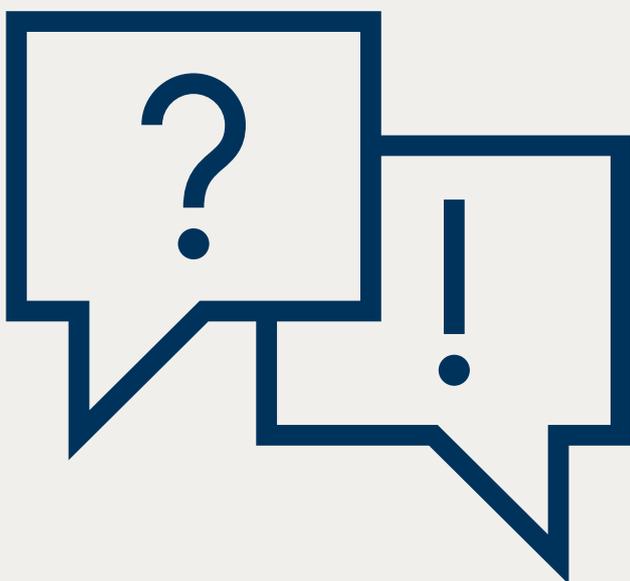
Why it can be helpful to take time off work

Taking time off work is required if an individual has been deemed unfit for work. This may include being unable to perform the inherent requirements of their role, or if a mental health condition significantly impairs their ability to function daily, including concentration and a capacity to control their emotions. An individual may also be unfit for work due to treatment needs. It is also beneficial to take time off work if there are situations that may compromise the safety of those around them, including colleagues and customers.

If a team member has advised that they are unfit for work, this must be medically evidenced. For more information on this and to support any return to work process, please speak with your local People Partner.

Some indicators a person may not be fit to perform the inherent requirements of their role may include:

- Extremely concerning performance issues.
- Very high absenteeism.
- Extremely concerning comments or behaviours.

If you observe any of the above, speak to your People Partner about organising further assessment.

Helpful resources

Lifeline Australia: www.lifeline.org.au

Beyond Blue: www.beyondblue.org.au

Heads Up: www.headsup.org.au

Suicide Call Back Service: www.suicidecallbackservice.org.au

Lifeline New Zealand: www.lifeline.org.nz/

Mental Health Foundation of New Zealand: https://www.mentalhealth.org.nz/

This guide will help you to better support your team's mental health.

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