



Group Benefits

What's on your mind?® – Clues to help detect mental health issues in the workplace

Dr. Thomas Ungar

Associate Professor, University of Toronto and Chief of Psychiatry, North York General Hospital

How do you recognize a mental health concern?

Here are some clues that may indicate an employee is suffering from a mental health concern. It's important to remember that the presence of these symptoms or behaviour patterns do not necessarily mean that an employee has a mental illness, however, in cases where performance has become an issue, you may want to take them into consideration.

Absenteeism

An indication that there might be a problem is when an employee starts missing a lot of work and begins calling in 'sick' for a variety of reasons.

Presenteeism

A harder to notice clue that may be even more revealing is when an employee is at work but is less productive or not getting things done the way they used to. This is known as presenteeism and there may be more people impacted by this than you think. Often the employee will start to isolate themselves and avoid others. They may no longer eat lunch in the lunch room or go for coffee breaks with their colleagues.

Brain clues

Since a mental health condition may be affecting the employee's cognitive functioning, or the way in which they make decisions, you may want to look for clues related to their thinking and behaviour. These 'brain' clues might include an inability to concentrate, missing deadlines, not finishing things, or making more mistakes than usual. Sometimes out of embarrassment and fear of getting fired, the employee may hide these symptoms from their manager and others. They may lose energy, interest and motivation for the job as a symptom of slower brain functioning.

You can also look for other clues like how they get along and interact with their coworkers. They may have mood swings, or be irritable, argumentative, angry, difficult, tearful, down or sad.

Physical clues

Sometimes the employee doesn't say a thing but their body language might give some clues. You may notice that they look like they have stopped taking care of themselves, have poor hygiene or appear to have slumped shoulders. They may also move slower than usual, not be able to sit still or become physically aggressive. Even the way they talk can be a clue. They may speak slowly and quietly, or exhaust you with their fast nervous talk, repetitive worries, comments, yelling, swearing, etc.

Pay attention to the clues but don't jump to conclusions

You may simply notice that something has changed with the employee or that things just don't seem quite right. Make sure you stop, take a look and listen if you think something is wrong. Use your powers of deduction before jumping to any conclusions about an employee who may be having difficulty. If you think there are enough clues to indicate that something is wrong, you may wish to have a private chat with the employee and discuss any performance issues or unusual behaviour. During this discussion, you may suggest that if they need help, they may use the Employee Assistance Program or any other available resources.

Paying attention to changes in behaviour may help you determine if an employee is suffering from a mental health concern and help you to appropriately manage these types of situations in your workplace.

The opinions expressed herein are those of Dr. Ungar and do not necessarily reflect the views or opinions of Manulife Financial. The information contained in this document is for general information purposes only and should not be considered or used as a substitute for medical advice, diagnosis or treatment. Please consult with your own doctor without delay if you have or suspect you have any medical condition or symptoms. What's on your mind?® is offered through Manulife Financial. ©2011 The Manufacturers Life Insurance Company. All rights reserved. What's on your mind?, Manulife, Manulife Financial, Manulife Financial For Your Future logo and the block design are service marks and trademarks of The Manufacturers Life Insurance Company and are used by it and its affiliates under license.

GC2514E 07/2011

FOR MORE INFORMATION, PLEASE VISIT THE *WORKPLACE SOLUTIONS FOR MENTAL HEALTH* WEBSITE AT WWW.MANULIFE.CA/MENTALHEALTH.