



Group Benefits

What's on your mind?® – Having 'the talk' with an employee who may be suffering from mental health issues

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Discussing performance or behavioural issues with an employee you suspect may have mental health issues can be difficult. Even if you know you need to sit down with them and chat, you may keep avoiding it because you may not know what to say or how to say it.

What do you say and how do you say it?

It's important that you don't jump to any conclusions about the employee before you have the chance to talk to them. You should find a private place to have your discussion. The employee may have some idea why you're calling a meeting and possibly welcome the chance to talk.

As with any performance related issue, if the employee doesn't know why you want to talk to them, you need to tell them in a calm and non-accusatory manner. Attempt to focus on solutions in a positive way, without trying to assign blame. Your comments should only be about behaviours – not about them as a person.

Here are some examples of appropriate comments or questions:

- I notice you have been missing a lot of work.
- I notice you're not your usual self when on the job.
- Is there anything I can do to help you?
- Are you having difficulty with anything?

Phrasing things in a calm, non-threatening way may make the employee feel comfortable enough to discuss work issues with you, however, if they still don't have anything to say, or want to keep things private, you have at least let them know that you have noticed their workplace behaviour and that it is concerning.

Employee resources

If you suspect the employee may have a mental health problem, you can let them know that there are resources available if needed, including your company's Employee Assistance Program.

Privacy issues

Remember that it's not your job to diagnose or treat a mental health problem. You need to respect the employee's right to privacy and cannot in any way pressure them to confide personal problems or health issues to you. You just need to let them know that there are performance or behavioural issues that are impacting their work or the workplace, and that there are resources readily available to help if needed.

Mental health concerns are like any other health situation and should be dealt with that way. As a manager, if you feel an employee's performance is being affected by a health-related issue, your role is to keep the lines of communication open, provide support, and encourage them to seek assistance if necessary.

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