



# WHSE TOOLBOX TALKS

## #3 Mental Health

### BACKGROUND

Mental health affects how we think, feel, and act. It also helps determine how we handle stress, relate to others, and make healthy choices. Mental health is important at every stage of life, through childhood, adolescence and adulthood and is just as important work as it is at home.

### DEFINITIONS

Mental health refers to our emotional, psychological, and social well-being.

### MENTAL HEALTH CONDITIONS

Mental health most common illnesses include:

depression | anxiety | substance use | [1]

### POTENTIAL SCHEME MENTAL HEALTH RISK

#### Understanding Mental Health

A person's mental health moves back and forth in response to different stressors and circumstances. At the green end of the mental health continuum (diagram below), people are well. Moving into the yellow area, people may start to have difficulty coping. In the orange area, people have greater difficulty coping. At the red end of the continuum, people are likely to be experiencing severe symptoms and may be at risk of self-harm or suicide.

Risk factors and protective factors influence mental health and can nudge people back and forth along the continuum. They can be individual or related to family, work or other life circumstances. Risk factors may increase the strain on our mental health, while protective factors can counteract these by helping us to stay or become well. With much of people's time each day spent at work, the workplace is a very influential environment when it comes to mental health and wellbeing. A positive and supportive workplace can mean the difference between being 'in the green' or 'in the orange' [2]



#### Staff, visitors, and customers

Staff, visitors, and customers could all be exposed to situations that may cause or exacerbate a person's state of mental health.

Potential situations that can negatively affect mental health are: [3]

- stigma and discrimination - this can happen when a person is treated in a negative way based on judgment and stereotypes etc.
- demand/control and effort/reward relationships - staff job stress may result from work changes and resulting conflicts
- presenteeism – where staff come to work not mentally present due to an illness, extreme family/life pressures or stress
- job burnout - where staff have high job demands and few supports can increase the prevalence of burnout
- harassment, violence, and bullying - situations where a person is abused, threatened, intimidated or assaulted
- substance use - signs of substance use may be similar to those stress, lack of sleep e.g. changes to behaviour, speech, alertness etc.

### TOOLBOX TIPS

Print copies of this sheet for yourself and each of the workers

Lead a discussion with your workers about the materials on this sheet at a location that is appropriate to the topic

Be sure to give real life examples whenever possible.

Ask your workers for their experiences

Have each worker sign your sheet to confirm their attendance

Conclude with a brief review of the main points or a summary based on the discussion

File your sheet in your worker training records to document the training experience

Fill in your operation name, location and the date on your sheet

Be open to questions

This toolbox is background information ONLY. Be sure to customise your talk to your operation and facilities. The following tips are some helpful suggestions with getting the best out of your toolbox.



# WHSE TOOLBOX TALKS - MENTAL HEALTH

## RISK MANAGEMENT PROCESS

Exposure to mental health risk may be prevented and managed by following the principles of a three-step risk management process:

Hazard identification

Risk assessment

Risk control



### Hazard Identification [4]

- Feedback from staff: Feedback may come from individual conversations, suggestions given by staff members, or through staff surveys
- Data: Organisational audits, incidents, complaints, rates of absenteeism, Employee Assistance Program (EAP) data, workers' compensation claims, disability statistics, bullying/harassment claims, staff satisfaction survey results
- Systems review: Reviewing what policies, procedures, supports, practices and/ or training programs are already in place.

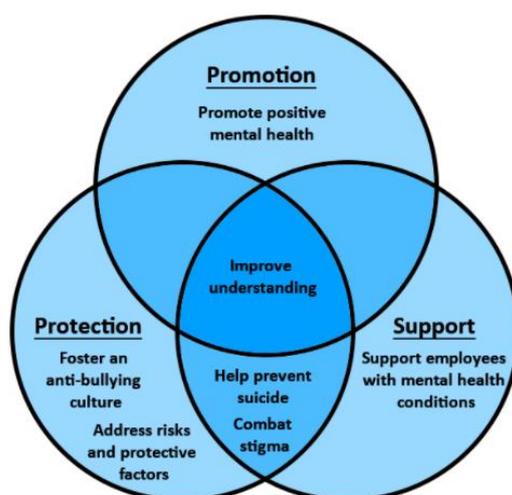
### Risk assessment [4]

- Assess the issues by importance to improving mental health and wellbeing
- Assess them by need to change them and potential positive impact
- Consult with your staff to understand the level of need and perceived importance of the issues
- Assign a risk assessment rating and prioritise the issues in order
- Identify what resources and / or expertise are needed to assist you.

### Risk control [4]

- Develop a plan suitable to the workplace with consideration to the following:
  - Protecting the mental health of staff (e.g. reducing job stress with supportive management practices)
  - Promoting wellbeing (e.g. matching jobs with worker skills, promoting positive working relationships)
  - Supporting staff (e.g. upskilling managers to initiate conversations, providing job adjustments to enable stay at and return to work)
  - Monitor and review the effectiveness of the controls implemented.

Evidence shows that taking an integrated approach to mental health and wellbeing in the workplace leads to the greatest benefits.



[4]

## RESOURCES/REFERENCES

[1] Black Dog Institute – facts and figures about mental health [2] Heads Up – Taking care of your mental health

[3] CCOHS - Psychosocial Risk Factors in the Workplace [4] Heads Up – Strategies for healthy workplaces

<https://www.headsup.org.au/>

<https://www.beyondblue.org.au/>

<https://www.blackdoginstitute.org.au/>

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