

MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING – HOW TO HELP OTHERS

A conservative estimate says that, at any given time, 1 in 4 of us are experiencing mental health difficulties.

Whether we work in a small or a large organisation, it is possible that one or more of our colleagues is either 'wobbling' or has a mental health problem or disorder.

In this cheat sheet we will learn how to SPOT some of the signs and symptoms; what we can do to SUPPORT people and how to SIGNPOST them to the professionals, if needed.



SPOT

BE MINDFUL that it isn't always obvious when someone has a problem. Investing the time in getting to know our colleagues well, means that we are more likely to notice any subtle changes in their behaviour.

It may be that someone is acting differently – they could be uncharacteristically moody, high one minute and low the next, or getting more angry than usual.

Perhaps they are less chatty than normal. They might be avoiding contact and interaction where they were previously active.

There might be a noticeable difference in their physical appearance, with an evident lack of self-care. They may look tired, have a dramatic weight loss or gain.

The quality of their work might decline. They may appear to be confused or overwhelmed.

Or you may notice them using catastrophic language, and struggling to keep seemingly minor setbacks in perspective.

SUPPORT

When we spot any of these signs or symptoms, it's really important that we don't jump to conclusions or dive in to help, when help may not be wanted or needed.

Asking someone if they're okay, is a good start. It might be that the person says they're fine, when they're not. 'How are things?' might encourage them to open up a little more.

If and when they do chat to us, we should listen without judgement, without trying to 'fix' them or instruct them on what steps we think they 'should' take.

Try to avoid saying things like, 'I know how you feel' as, let's face it, we don't. However, we can empathise by saying, 'I can hear that you're really upset about that.'

It's natural to feel a bit scared that we'll say the wrong thing when somebody tells us they're struggling. When someone has been keeping a lid on things, having the opportunity to talk to someone who really listens and doesn't judge them can be very powerful. We are not expected to be therapists, but we CAN help.

Remember that the way that person feels is very real to them, even if it is hard for us to understand.

SIGNPOST

It may be that the person has self-help strategies, but if not...

We can find out which mental health resources our employer has, discreetly and in confidence, by asking Occupational Health or HR.

There is likely to be support in the local community. A couple of internet searches will help us to pass on useful phone numbers or website addresses.

There are also many national organisations which can help, such as:

<https://www.mind.org.uk>

0300 123 3393

<https://www.thecalmzone.net>

0800 58 58 58 (for men considering suicide)

***NB: If we think someone is at immediate risk to themselves or to others, we should contact the emergency services.**