

Supporting a Colleague Who May Have Mental Health Concerns

1st September 2020

It can be hard to know whether a colleague's troubling behaviour is just a result of a difficult emotional phase or a signal of mental illness. Stigma can also make talking about these issues difficult. But turning a blind eye to a mental health concern could deprive someone you know of the support and care they might need.

Warning signs

If someone you work with is exhibiting one or more of the behaviours listed below, they might be struggling with a real mental health issue:

- unprovoked emotional outbursts
- obvious personality changes
- problems coping with daily activities and challenges
- major changes in sleeping and eating patterns
- difficulty making decisions, concentrating or remembering things
- extreme anxiety

Reaching out

In many cases, early intervention in a mental health issue speeds the recovery process. If you've noticed something is wrong but you're unsure of how to talk about it, consider:

Speaking to a manager, supervisor, or human resources (HR) representative. They may have received specialised training to deal with these situations and may be able to offer the appropriate resources and support.

Treading carefully. Discussing the topic of mental health with a colleague can be highly sensitive. If you feel your help would be welcomed and you're the most appropriate person to talk about the matter, do it privately to avoid creating a situation where your colleague feels their privacy has been violated or that they are being threatened or put on the spot. Focus on your concern over their well-being and your desire to help and reinforce their value in the workplace.

Offering information on support services. If your colleague seems open to seeking help, you

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may want to remind them that they can speak to their doctor, a mental health professional, or the assistance programme.

Staying tight-lipped. If your colleague shares personal information with you, don't disclose or gossip with others about it. Keep information you've been entrusted with to yourself unless you're concerned your colleague is a threat to themselves or could harm others.

Talking about the issues of mental health with someone you work with can be difficult, but there are more resources available than ever before. By treading carefully, offering information and support, and letting the person know that you're there to help—and not to judge—you can support them in getting the help they need.