



# Vitality

An EFAP Newsletter for Human Resource and Occupational Health Professionals, Program Administrators, Supervisors, and Key Personnel



## Supporting Men in Getting Mental Health and Addiction Support

The following statements are sometimes used when speaking about mental health and/or addiction support for men.

*It's a weakness for 'real men' to get help for mental health and addiction. If a man is feeling sad or down, it's not 'normal' or 'masculine', and they need to control their emotions and move on. Men shouldn't ask for help; they should be able to cope on their own. Depression or anxiety in men is a sign of vulnerability or weakness.*

Simply put, these statements are inaccurate and apply to no one. Perceived or real, men often face stigmas when it comes to their mental health and/or addiction challenges.

The reasons men don't talk about their mental health or addiction challenges:<sup>1</sup>

- 'I've learnt to deal with it' (40%)
- 'I don't wish to be a burden to anyone' (36%)
- 'I'm too embarrassed' (29%)
- 'There's a negative stigma around this type of thing' (20%)
- 'I don't want to admit I need support' (17%)

- 'I don't want to appear weak' (16%)
- 'I have no one to talk to' (14%)

As a manager or supervisor, it is essential to know that men face stigmas when addressing mental health and/or addiction. Often, men suffer alone and in silence due to these stigmas. How can you help?

### **Be aware of the signs and symptoms of mental health and addiction**

When it comes to mental health and addiction, it is important to realize that mental health and substance abuse are not exclusively linked. Having a substance abuse problem isn't always related to mental health challenges. In some instances, people abuse substances to ease the symptoms of an undiagnosed mental health disorder to help them cope with the painful emotions and/or the temporary changes in their mood. The downside is that substance abuse may prolong and/or worsen the symptoms of mental health-related challenges and may lead to additional long-term challenges.



Within the workplace, no matter the environment, it is important to be aware of the signs and symptoms that someone may be suffering from mental health and/or addiction-related disorder(s). It's essential as a leader that you do not diagnosis or assume that employees' who display one or more of the following behaviours is suffering from a mental health and/or addiction disorder. As a leader you may view symptoms that impact both current and future performance. Here are some of the signs that may impact performance:

### **Possible signs of potential substance abuse or related concerns:<sup>2</sup>**

#### **Performance**

1. Carelessness, mistakes
2. Disregard for safety
3. Errors in judgment
4. Extended lunch periods and early departures
5. Inconsistent work quality
6. Increased absenteeism
7. Lowered or sporadic declines in productivity
8. Needless risk taking
9. Poor concentration
10. Unexplained disappearances from the workplace

#### **Behaviour**

1. Avoidance of friends and colleagues
2. Blaming others for own problems and shortcomings
3. Complaints about problems at home
4. Complaints and excuses of vaguely defined illnesses.
5. Deterioration in personal appearance
6. Frequent financial problems

In many instances symptoms of physical illness mirror those of persons facing mental health-related challenges. As a leader your expertise and role does not reside in the diagnosis of a mental health or addiction disorder. Given the complexity, as a leader we look for behavioural patterns that may impact performance. Here are some general signs of mental health-related challenges:<sup>3</sup>

#### **Performance**

1. Inability to perform duties, control behaviour, or concentrate
2. Increased absenteeism

3. Insubordination
4. Not going out or answering phone calls
5. Previously punctual employee with increased frequency of being late

#### **Behaviour**

1. Angry outbursts or aggression
2. Constant headaches
3. Constant fatigue
4. Depressed and/or suicidal thoughts
5. Hygiene changes
6. Increased frequency of anxiety and/or panic attacks
7. Loss of humour
8. Noticeable increase in alcohol consumption or smoking
9. Tearfulness

### **Addressing these challenges with your male coworkers**

There are challenges in speaking about mental health or addiction-related difficulties. With men, however, the stigmas they face often result in them not talking about their challenges. Here are some tactics you can implement to provide support:

1. **Bring awareness to the problem.** Becoming knowledgeable about mental health and addiction is a helpful step when discussing with your team(s). Understanding what creates a supportive workplace that preserves an individual's psychological health, and allows employees to feel comfortable speaking to managers or supervisors about their addiction or mental health challenges can help foster proactive solutions when dealing with these scenarios in the workplace. For leaders and key personnel, reaching out to your Key Person Advice Line for additional support and information may help you better understand unusual employee behaviours.
2. **Talk to your employees.** It is critical to speak to your employees about mental health and addiction. Continuously speaking about mental health and addiction can help to break down stigma associated with getting help. Acknowledging the stigmas that men face, and reinforcing the strength it takes to confront and address one's challenges, can help to create an environment of support.

3. **Talk to the individual.** If you suspect an employee may be going through a tough time, consider pulling them aside to speak with them. Here are some suggestions you can use in these conversations:<sup>4</sup>

- **Be honest.** Let your employee know the signs you have noticed, and why you are worried about them.
- **Offer support.** Let the individual know that you are there as a resource for them.
- **Encourage openness.** Let employees know you are genuinely interested in their well-being. Provide reminders of the resources available to employees, there may be a point where an employee who is struggling begins to seek support, assistance or guidance.
- **Don't lecture; listen.** The employee may be in a fragile state; therefore, being critical may discourage communication. Listen to what's being shared before asking questions. Take the information seriously.
- **Don't be afraid to address the issue.** You may be unsure or hesitant about whether the employee has an issue. Even if you are unsure, you should address the concerning changes you have observed that are impacting performance.
- **Speak to the individual with dignity and respect.** Remember that everyone experiences difficult times. You may feel shocked, angered, sad or scared by what's being shared with you. Remember to remain calm and professional. By treating the employee with respect and dignity, you encourage communication in a calm and supportive environment.

- **Seek support.** Knowing an employee is going through challenging times can be intimidating and stressful. Reach out to your Key Person Advice Line for guidance and support on how to address workplace performance. They can help in providing decisions that are in the best interest of employee, employer and workplace.

Through a better understanding of the signs and symptoms that one experiences when facing mental health and/or addiction-related challenges, may help you in providing the best support for your employees. A great number of people experience or know someone in their life with mental health and/or addiction challenges, so being more conscious of these challenges enables you to become a stronger leader. Realize, you are not alone. There are resources available through your company's Employee and Family Assistance Program, as well as community based resources. Help is available.

#### References:

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4. Mental Health America. (2018, May 10). Addictions. Retrieved August 30, 2018, from <http://www.mentalhealthamerica.net/addictions>

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