

Supporting someone at work



If a colleague or someone in your team is struggling and you think they need support, it's important to take action.

Start by having a conversation. Remember, it's not your job to offer a diagnosis or counselling. Providing emotional support is about being willing to talk about what is going on, how the person feels and their options for support.

It's essential to speak to the person if:

- you are concerned about their mental health or wellbeing
- their work standards or relationships are being compromised
- the person is a danger to themselves or others
- you hear that they are feeling suicidal or planning to end their life – take this very seriously and encourage them to seek support immediately.

It is helpful to talk openly about anxiety and depression, and reassure them that you will respect their privacy.

If the person doesn't want to speak about it, respect their choice, but leave the door open for further discussion. They may choose to talk about it later or continue the conversation with others.

Some workplaces also have Manager Assistance Programs (MAPs), which are confidential advisory services for managers dealing with difficult situations. This can be a useful resource for handling complex issues around a mental health condition and its impact on a team.

Supporting an individual's mental health needs

As a manager or leader, there are a number of practical things you can do to support individuals in the workplace who are experiencing a mental health condition. Some ways to approach this may include:

- Take an interest in the employee's life without intruding, while also maintaining their privacy. Listen and offer support.
- Seek written permission from the employee to speak to their treating health professional about how

the workplace can support their recovery.

- Explore the possibility of staying at work before assuming the employee will need time off.
- Develop a work plan together with the employee. This should provide clarity on roles, responsibilities and any reasonable adjustments to the workplace to support the employee's recovery. Every plan will be unique and tailored to the needs of the individual, workplace and role.
- Seek support from any human resources specialists, occupational rehabilitation providers or Employee Assistance Programs (EAP) that may be available to the business.
- Manage absences where required and review workloads of other team members to ensure they are not unfairly burdened by the changes.
- Communicate with the rest of the team about why adjustments have been made, in a way that protects the employee's privacy. Discuss with the employee how and what they would like others to be told.
- Keep in touch with the employee during periods of leave and support them on their return. This might include a return to work plan, developed collaboratively, and regular problem-solving meetings between the employee and his or her manager.

beyondblue's *Managing someone with a mental health condition* fact sheet has more advice on how to support a direct report. Download the fact sheet from www.headsup.org.au