

# Healthy Workplace Month:

How to talk with an employee or colleague about their mental health

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Parlons-en. **paesf**

Deciding to talk with someone out of concern for their mental health, especially an employee or colleague, may feel daunting. You may wonder what's appropriate to say, whether you will come across as judgmental, or fear that you will 'get it wrong' or misinterpret what you are seeing.

The reality is that if someone is struggling with personal distress or mental health concerns, open non-judgmental communication and connecting is what they need most - as no amount of hiding will help them feel better or deal with their challenges effectively.

At some point, it's much better to deal with a suspected problem directly and offer what may be much needed help or support.

## Everyone needs help sometimes

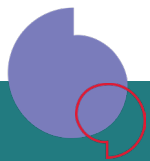
Below are a number of tips and strategies for recognizing when an employee or colleague might need a helping hand, and describes how to reach out in a way that is respectful and supportive.

### Here are a few signs that things may not be going well for an employee or colleague:

- Arriving late for work more often than not (or not checking in regularly if working remotely).
- Frequently calling in sick.
- Making up excuses for overreacting, or becoming more angry than the circumstance warrants.
- Not remembering what to do or not being able to concentrate.
- Making excessive mistakes, or performing inconsistently or below normal levels.
- Shifting unexpectedly from easy-going to grouchy; becoming difficult to be around or being short-tempered for no reason.
- Avoiding responsibility, or refusing to take responsibility.
- Avoiding socializing and withdrawing from normal conversation.
- Showing up at work with signs fatigue or exhaustion.

## Knowing when and how to help

So, what do you do when you think someone might need a helping hand and you're willing to offer them yours? *Before you do anything, first check in with yourself.* Is this the best time for you to have this conversation? Are you feeling calm enough, well enough, strong enough? If you are, great! If not, take a moment to get grounded yourself so you can focus on the other person in the moment.



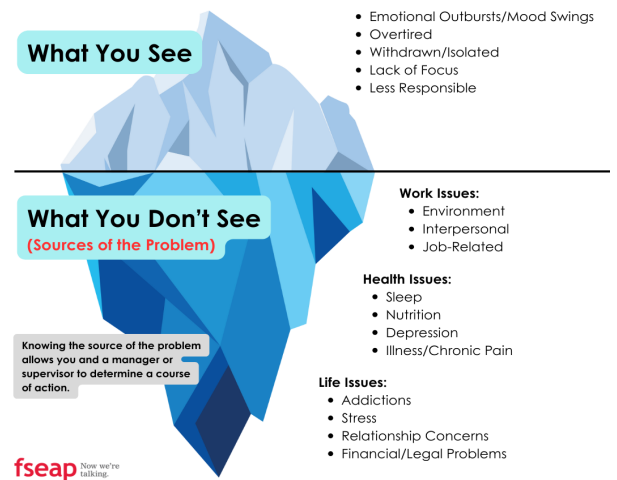
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## The Iceberg Analogy

Be prepared for a variety of responses. They might be open to talking to you, or may become emotional or even respond with anger or defensiveness, not ready to hear what you have to say. They might be offended and suggest you've made a mistake, or tell you to mind your own business.

Whatever their response, it's important that you know and maintain your own boundaries, and respect the other person's willingness or unwillingness to accept your support. You are simply trying to state what you're observing, and offering support in response.



## Follow these five steps to lend a helping hand:

1. Ask if your employee/colleague is willing to chat with you. Find a quiet space that's private for this conversation, or ensure there is privacy (on both ends) of a phone or video call.
2. Focus the discussion on what you've noticed - changes in behaviour, appearance, performance, or attitude - and share your concern for their well-being.
3. Leave room for a response and listen to them without judgment. This is crucial, and will go a long way to inviting openness and sharing. (If they aren't ready or willing to talk, remind them that you are there to talk and listen any time.)
4. Ask them what they need and how you can help. Reassure them that you will respect confidentiality.
5. Depending on the issues that surface, suggest they access appropriate professional support, and remind/inform them of any available services such as their EAP, extended health benefits, or other community health services. If they are reluctant to call or reach out on their own, suggest you make the initial call together.

## Remember, you're not there to diagnose the problem

It's not on you to diagnose any issue, or provide counselling. You are offering a helping hand to someone you're concerned about, suggesting suitable help, and fulfilling your mandate as a manager which is to:

- Ensure the psychological health & safety of your employee or colleague.
- Confirm that their well-being is appropriately supported.
- Verify that they can continue to work safely.
- Take appropriate action to address any issues of poor performance and the well-being of the overall team.

## Giving and receiving help

Remember, it's completely reasonable for you to ask for support before, during, and after this process. Consult with your manager, an appropriate leader, HR staff, or FSEAP for guidance and feedback on your approach.

