Minnesota Department of Health

You Matter. Talk to us. 1-800-273-8255 or text MN to 741741

# Supporting a Co-worker Living with Mental Health Issues

One-fourth of employees view their job as the biggest stressor in their lives, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Many people feel alone and fear stigma or discrimination, preventing them from reaching out for support. Co-workers are among the first to notice symptoms of poor mental health.

## What signs should I look for?

* Withdrawal from activities and social connections.
* Low mood, pessimistic or negative comments, expressing hopelessness.
* Physical symptoms such as fatigue, headaches, changes to eating habit, lack of/too much sleep.
* Problems with concentration and thinking clearly.
* Irritability.
* Changes in personal hygiene.
* Suicidal thoughts, comments, or behaviors.
* Worrying.
* Difficulties relaxing.
* Increased sensitivity to stimuli such as light, odors, and sounds.
* Lack of interest in work, colleagues, or outside activities.
* Suspicion or paranoia.
* Abnormal or unusual behaviors.
* Sudden or radical changes in mood.
* Substance use.

## How can I offer support?

* Talk to your co-worker. Remind them that talking about mental health can be helpful.
* Listen without trying to “fix” anything.
* Empathize with how your co-worker feels, without judgement, even if you can’t understand.
* Ask how you can help.
* Remind your co-worker that you are there for them.
* Remind your co-worker that they can seek help for their mental health.
* Reach out to include your co-worker in activities.
* Take care of yourself.

## How can I talk to my co-worker about mental health?

* Make yourself available and open to mental health conversations.
* Listen closely without interrupting.
* Ask open-ended questions to allow your co-worker to share how they feel.
* Pay attention to your body language.

## How do I talk about suicidal thoughts and feelings?

* Talking about suicide does NOT make people more likely to attempt suicide.
* Ask the person directly if they are thinking about suicide.
* If they say yes, listen non-judgmentally and avoid offering advice.
* Connect them with resources
  + National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 1-800-273-8255
  + Crisis Text Line: text MN to 741741
* Know your own limits.
* Reaching out isn’t always easy, so be mindful of your own capacity to provide support.
* Knowing your employer’s supports such as an Employee Assistance Program (EAP) can be a helpful place to start.
* Having information before you are overwhelmed is important.
* Be prepared to guide your co-worker to other supports.
* The most important thing is to show compassion and empathy.

Minnesota Department of Health Suicide Prevention Unit  
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St. Paul, MN 55164-0882  
[health.suicideprev.mdh@state.mn.us](mailto:health.suicideprev.mdh@state.mn.us)   
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To obtain this information in a different format, call: 651-201-5400