

HOW TO HAVE A MENTAL HEALTH CONVERSATION WITH A YOUNG EMPLOYEE

WORKPLACE MENTAL HEALTH DOS AND DON'TS

Stress is one of the biggest obstacles preventing Gen Z and young millennials from performing to their maximum potential. These dos and don'ts can guide you in starting a conversation with a young employee who may be struggling.

DO

- Start the conversation as early as possible: if your gut feel tells you something is wrong, trust it.
- Approach your employee in a non-confrontational, low-key way. "Lucy, you don't seem yourself. Shall we grab a quick coffee?"
- Have the conversation in a calm, private and non-threatening space.
- Listen carefully what the employee has to say to determine how serious the situation may or may not be.
- Be supportive and open.
- Suggest possible ideas or resources that may help your employee and discuss with them what approach would work best for them.
- Ask your employee who their support network is, and if they have someone to talk to. Find out if they are already seeking help, or if they need some guidance to find support.
- Discuss opportunities to help them manage their workload or study responsibilities better so that they feel less overwhelmed.

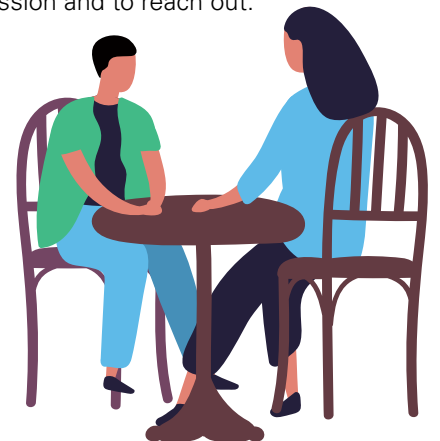
TOP TIP

First, take care of yourself – your mental health is just as important for the growth and resilience of your business as that of your employees. But most importantly: if you are seen to take care of yourself (through exercising, eating well or being open about challenges), you give "permission" to your employees to do the same. If you are struggling, or don't take mental health issues seriously, it will come across in the conversations you have with your young employees and may undermine how secure they feel. Eat well, exercise, remember that you are a human being too, and you're allowed to have days where you feel less than okay!

TOP TIP

Establishing regular check-ins or one-on-one chats with your young employees will make it easier for you to determine if – and when – one of them needs your help. If having a conversation is normalised, they'll find it easier to approach you or talk to you when they need to.

- Find out if they'd like you to reach out to someone on their behalf.
- Keep the conversation going. Check in with your employee regularly afterwards to make sure things are getting better.
- Keep your discussions private.
- Recommend internal mental health resources, programs or access to a dedicated person to talk to if needed.
- Encourage them to take part in external activities or programs that may support their mental health, such as exercising, seeing friends, taking up a hobby etc.
- Make Mental Health part of your workplace culture, embedding it into your policies and procedures, and embracing open discussion of issues. Use days such as "R U OK?" days and Tradies Mental Health month in August, for example, to motivate your employees to engage in open discussion and to reach out.



DON'T

- Dismiss concerns or struggles with phrases/ attitudes such as “she’ll be right”, “toughen up”, or “don’t be such a snowflake”.
- Avoid having conversations because you think it’s just a “phase” that will blow over.
- Stigmatise mental health issues or laugh it off as “imaginary”.
- Take an aggressive stance: “if we don’t solve this, there will be consequences”.
- Threaten your employee with the possibility of them losing their job or losing esteem in the eyes of their colleagues.
- Talk about your employee’s struggles to other parties – this is violating their trust and their privacy.
- Call in external help or violate your employee’s privacy without their knowledge and express consent/permission.
- Engage in a “Struggle Olympics” scenario, where you try to show young employees that their concerns are “nothing” compared to what previous generations or other people have been through.
- Fire your employee or “let them go” just because you don’t want to deal with mental health issues.

WHAT IF MY EMPLOYEE WON'T TALK TO ME?

Employees may not always be ready to talk about their mental health, and they may not engage or seem like they want to discuss what’s going on for them when their employer initiates a conversation. However, knowing their employer is supportive of their mental health condition and willing to help them in ways such as managing their workload, is helpful for employees. Regardless of how the conversation went, organise to catch up again within the week to provide another opportunity to have the conversation and ensure the employee feels supported.

WHY CARE?

The impacts of stress, depression and anxiety can be devastating. It affects your employees’ quality of life, quality of work, productivity and, ultimately, company culture. Neglecting it could cause serious harm, such as an increase in accidents on the job due to stress-related fatigue.

On the other hand, mental health support for your staff is an investment that can lead to long-term payoffs, such as reduced absenteeism, increased employee engagement and improved productivity.

SIGNS THAT A YOUNG EMPLOYEE IS STRUGGLING

- Sudden changes in behaviour and temperament, they seem “unlike” themselves.
- They may appear low, empty, flat or sad. They may even be irritable or angry.
- They have difficulty meeting deadlines (especially if out of character).
- They may not take part or show any interest in social activities or workplace activities they used to enjoy.
- Weight changes not linked to dietary changes.
- Tiredness, fatigue and low energy levels on the job.
- Difficulty concentrating.
- Making more mistakes on the job.
- May appear tense or restless.
- May display frequent worrying or fear of losing control.
- May become withdrawn and quiet.
- Increasing number of absent days (sick or other).
- Fatigue, tiredness, increased yawning at work.
- Incomplete duties or tasks.
- Loss of motivation.

THREE LEVELS OF IMPROVING WELLBEING IN THE WORKPLACE

LEVEL 1: INDIVIDUAL

- Offer variety, purpose and control within their role;
- Give them appropriate resources to carry out their job effectively;
- Give them opportunities for self-expression or to be truly heard and vent safely if needed;
- Regular catch ups with and feedback from supervisors to establish rapport and create an opportunity for discussion regarding challenges; and
- Foster a sense of connection with others.

LEVEL 3: ORGANISATION

- Implement ethical decision-making procedures;
- Involve employees in decision-making;
- Encourage clear communication between different levels of the organisation;
- Foster a strong psychosocial safety climate where senior leaders value and are actively engaged in addressing the mental health needs of staff; and
- Provide a safe physical environment.

LEVEL 2: TEAM

- Foster supportive relationships with supervisors and colleagues;
- Implement early and effective management of interpersonal conflict; and
- Encourage effective leadership from managers to create a more efficient pre-emptive barrier against mental health and other challenges.

