CREATING A MENTALLY HEALTHY WORKPLACE

WHAT CAN MANAGERS AND LEADERS DO?

INTRODUCTION

Workplaces that promote mental health can and do lead to staff who feel that their wellbeing is being supported. The result of such a positive approach is that staff are often more engaged and productive. We will be introducing a range of initiatives focusing on developing wellbeing and resilience as part of the implementation of the UN Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy.

Here is some information that will help to:
- build your skills and knowledge
- create a healthy workplace culture
- support individuals in your team who may need some extra support

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT – WHAT DID UN SYSTEM STAFF SAY?

Much of why it is important is covered in the PDF – Benefits of a Mentally Healthy UN System Workplace.

For the Launch of UN Mental Health and Wellbeing strategy In October 2018, we hosted a "**One Thing**" staff survey. We asked two questions:

- When you are struggling with your own mental health, what is the one thing you would like your co-workers or manager to know?

- When you are struggling with your own mental health what is the one thing you would like your co-workers or manager to do?

Here are some of their answers that tell us very clearly what our responsibility and obligation is.

Building and facilitating a healthy workplace will help staff and yourself.

I want my co-workers and managers to KNOW 'that:

"That people often hide what they are going through while suffering inside"

"I need time to find healing and not to use my lack of productivity against me."

"To be understanding, non-judgmental and maintain confidentiality"

"I will recover, provided that temporary arrangements can be agreed to enable me to recover smoothly."

"At least to recognise it."

"None. I would not like to disclose mental health problems with my coworkers or manager".

" I would like them o know that I will overcome this and that they can always count on me".

I want my co-workers and managers to do:

"Encourage help seeking behaviors and offer support"

"Treat mental and physical illness with the same compassion and support."

"Just to take a few minutes to ask how I am, if everything is OK, if they can do anything to help".

"Be Kind, Be patient. Understand I don't want to be absent. I don't want to have anxiety. I don't want to see a therapist. I don't want to spend days crying. I want to be an employee we can both be proud of."

"To accept that we all have good days and bad days. That I'm not weak."

"Build room to discuss temporary arrangements e.g. flexible working conditions".

1: BUILDING YOUR SKILLS AND KNOWLEDGE

The first step is to learn more about what you know and don't know and your impact. Here are two approaches.

Greater understanding of yourself and your impact in the workplace

The first step is to understand your strengths and gaps in terms of knowledge and skills related to good mental health.

Some questions to ask yourself:

- When you read the PDF -Benefits of a Mentally Healthy UN System Workplace, what stood out for in the information? Is there some new information you would like to more about?

- What stands out in terms of your strengths and what you might need to do in terms of your own wellbeing, mental health and healthy workplace habits?

- How would you describe your impact as a manager on the team, agency, some individuals?

- What do you need to know more about in the things that can cause harm in workplace?

- If you could make a difference to three things for your team over the next 3-6 months what would they be? Chose things you can have a high degree of influence in making happen.

Try this Self-assessment from the Canadian workplace mental health resources;
www.workplacestrategiesformentalhealth.com/mmhm/survey.html

There are also useful resources specifically for managers on this site.

2. CREATING A HEALTHY WORKPLACE CULTURE

A key role of an effective manager is to limit the potential of the work and workplace to cause harm to the wellbeing of staff / team, which may in turn lead to ill-health.

There are a range of practical things managers and leaders can do to promote a healthy workplace, implement prevention initiatives, intervene or provide support early and assist with the best possible recovery and return to work if that is required.

IOM have developed a tool that looks at Team Wellbeing – see link

There are many actions you can take to protect and promote mental health and wellbeing. What will work best will depend on your particular work environment. Some simple starting steps you can take are:

Raise awareness and knowledge in your team on what promotes wellbeing and good mental health

- Encourage staff to access materials on this site (information for everyone)
- Host a World Mental Health Day (10th October 2019) display in your workplace in partnership with Counsellors and local staff representatives
- Make sure there is information/posters available to your team on where to access help and what is available

2. CREATING A HEALTHY WORKPLACE CULTURE *(CONT'D)*

Review your workplace for risks or vulnerabilities that may impact the team's or individual's mental health and wellbeing	• Engage your team in reviewing the workplace to identify issues and solutions. • Work with staff representative colleagues- they often have people trained in supporting colleagues with mental health issues and understand the wider workplace dynamics. • Work with Counsellors, Ombudsmen, HR, Medical Services divisions in your agency to assist in conducting the assessment. They will have some existing tools for risk assessment using a biopsychosocial model – physical, psychological, social, environmental
Establish some simple team routines or habits, or enhance existing ones	• Acknowledging success and achievements, special events, social events • Strengthen teamwork/collaboration, build trust, relationships (i-centric/we-centric), • Champions for wellbeing, team support, wellbeing buddies and peer support • Review your communication within and between team/ teams; - what could you do more of, start doing, do the same, stop doing or do less of?
Talk to Counsellors on what courses, resources they have for team training and development	They may be able to help develop a plan or tell you how people can access courses e.g. (NB These are examples and not a full list) • Managing stress, Coping with change, Handling uncertainty • Preparing for duty travel, and coming back • Learn about psychological first aid • Understanding and accepting difference(s) / unconscious bias • Mindfulness training • Talk to Ombudsmen on training, materials for managing incivility and conflict and bystander training

3. WHAT TO DO IF A STAFF MEMBER NEEDS ADDITIONAL SUPPORT?

How will I know if someone needs more support?	Many managers and leaders worry they don't know how to support someone with poor mental health. You do not need to know how to treat someone or be a therapist. If you are concerned about someone in your team, there are several practical and straightforward things you can do. Remember, get good at noticing changes in people- you may notice a change in behaviour of one of your staff members, or a change in their work performance. Some possible indicators that a staff member could display are noted below and in other material on the site including- Supporting a Colleague: Signs of Poor Mental Health: What is Mental Health.

It is vital that you are careful about reaching early conclusions about someone's mental health. It is not your job to diagnose, but if you notice changes, there are steps you can take to help them get assistance if required.

Here is a link to an online programme that will help you consider your approach so that the person receives the help they need. The programme will also help you consider how to create a positive culture around mental health: **https://ispri.ng/vNVWn**

WHAT SHOULD I LOOK OUT FOR, HOW DO I NOTICE IF SOMEONE MAY NEED HELP OR MORE SUPPORT?

- Get really good at noticing your team- how its working, how people are getting on, individuals in the team: have you noticed any changes good or not good?

- Some simple things to look out for are changes in how people are at work for example: general mood, concentration, irritability, lateness, not getting work done on time, not getting on so well with other, increased conflict: changes in appearance: repeated or extending time off.

- Get to know your team as people if you don't now: things that are going on that might be stressful as well as the positive and celebrations they have.

WHO CAN I GO TO FOR ADVICE AND HOW DO I ACCESS HELP FOR PEOPLE IN MY TEAM?

Work with Counsellors, Ombudsmen, or Staff Representatives, HR Advisors, Medical Services staff in your agency - they will be able to connect you to right person or may be able to help directly. They are also likely to know what help is available in your organisation and how to understand staff health insurance rules and processes and access care, if need be.

Many managers and leaders worry they don't know how to support someone with poor mental health. You do not need to know how to provide mental health treatment for someone or be a therapist. If you are concerned about someone in your team, there are several practical and straightforward things you can do.

START A CONVERSATION

- Start with something simple – a friendly are you OK? Has something happened? These questions are a better than saying – is something wrong with you?

- Ask – How could I support you with that? This is better than saying Can I help you?

- If person doesn't want to talk, share gently and in friendly manner that you have noticed them not looking or feeling their usual self – and you were concerned about their wellbeing.

  i) Suggest they can come and talk to you any time, or is there someone in the team to whom they could talk to

  ii) If you are concerned enough, share with them other options for talking to someone or accessing things that might help (see information for everyone on this site on seeking help)

ACT EARLY – DON'T WAIT TOO LONG TO START THE CONVERSATION OR SEEK HELP

- Talk with the person about what can be done in the short term to assist e.g. temporary changes to hours, role, travel, additional support, taking leave.

- If you are worried don't wait too long before seeking help from a counsellor or medical team. You will need the staff members permission to share personal information though.

- Early intervention and access to treatment, if needed, helps achieve better outcomes for people's wellbeing and health, and to reduce or limit suffering people experience.

UNDERSTAND THE IMPACT OF THEIR HEALTH AND WELLBEING AND THE NEED FOR SICK LEAVE, EXTENDED SICK LEAVE AND SEEK HELP WITH PUTTING IN PLACE A RETURN TO WORK PROGRAM IF REQUIRED:

- Talk with the medical services team in your organisation to find out about what you should do for sick leave arrangements, and for return to work.

- Have a conversation with the staff member if possible, or delegate if they have one, about how often to stay in touch while they are off sick – to check-in on how they are doing, not to put pressure on returning to work.

- Sometimes you may need to seek advice and help from HR advisors if you are unfamiliar with policies, entitlements, and processes.

- Well managed and planned return to work, with help of medical staff and counsellors is important to successful and timely return to work. It is a proactive action to ensuring staff can continue their career with the UN if they have had very extended time off due to ill-health.

- Ensure that a return to work plan includes, potentially, a phased return to work (days and hours), workplace accommodation in terms of phasing in or changes to duties, and agreements around ongoing treatment and or re-assessments.

- Don't assume that the person will need time off work. Sometimes the best thing they can do is to remain at work to ensure that they don't become isolated, and maintain a sense of purpose.

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