



# LIVING AND WORKING WITH MENTAL HEALTH CONDITIONS

Many people work with a mental health condition. The actions required will depend on the individual. The information below is designed to offer suggestions of things to consider.

## GETTING HELP

If you feel that you're not yourself and have noticed changes in how you feel or behave, it is a good idea to reach out to a professional who can offer support. The UN offers a range of options, including Staff Counsellors and Medical Personnel. See the link below to how to access support within your organization.

You do not have to seek help within the organisation. If you prefer you should also familiarise yourself with your health insurance plan and the rules on accessing mental health specialists as well as reimbursement rates for those services. This will allow you to obtain external licensed professional help.

## DISCLOSURE

It can be difficult to know whether to tell someone in your workplace if you have been diagnosed with a mental health problem or condition.

There's no right or wrong answer when it comes to telling people at work about the state of your mental health. Whether you choose to tell others can depend on how much your condition affects your ability to carry out the tasks assigned to you, the amount of support you have outside the workplace and your relationships with your workmates.

### Reasons to tell:

- Is your mental health condition affecting your ability to perform your role safely?
- Discussing your condition gives you and your manager and/or HR an opportunity to talk about any support or changes you might need to help you stay at work and/or assist your recovery.
- Making adjustments to your schedule or workload can reduce the number of sick days you need and help you be more productive when you're at work.
- By sharing your experiences, you're helping to change people's attitudes, and it may mean others open up or seek support about their own struggles.

- Being open with your workmates can help to avoid rumours or gossip.
- If your performance or productivity has changed, telling your workmates means they're more likely to be understanding.
- If you believe that you are being discriminated against based on your mental health, you may need to make a formal discrimination complaint at a later date, keeping your manager / HR informed helps to protect your rights. You might like to familiarise yourself with your organisation's rules and regulations on this issue and / or contact your staff representatives or HRM for advice.
- Your employer may be able to provide you with support if they are aware of your condition. Otherwise, they may misinterpret a change in your behaviour as a performance issue.



## DISCLOSURE (CONT'D)

### Reasons not to tell:

- Your mental ill-health may not affect your ability to do your job.
- You might not need any adjustments to your workload or schedule at the moment.
- You might be worried about potential discrimination, harassment or reduced opportunities for career progression.
- For some people, the impact of the mental health condition may decrease but the label and associated stigma can be permanent.
- Some managers may fail to provide an appropriate level of support or follow legislative requirements.
- You might already have adequate support networks outside the workplace and feel there's not much to gain by talking about your condition.

## STAYING AT WORK

Just because you have a mental health condition doesn't mean that you will need to take time off work.

### If you're able to keep working, it can help to:

- set up regular meetings with your manager to define realistic goals and provide regular updates to them on how you are feeling;
- meet regularly with a trusted support person to discuss how you're doing;
- ask for adjustments to your role where necessary, such as flexible hours or teleworking if you need time off for appointments;
- make sure you communicate your needs clearly, don't assume others will know what support you do and don't need;
- work with your manager to develop a plan, so it is clear what is expected of you and what supports can be put in place to assist you.

Source: Beyondblue

## RETURNING TO WORK

If you do need to take time off because of a mental health condition, returning to work can feel daunting.

Firstly, you need to consider what you want to disclose and who to. See the previous information related to disclosure.

What you need when returning to work will vary depending on your circumstances. Consider what extra support you may need, whether you will return full-time or gradually increase your hours. Are there tasks you feel you won't be able to do initially? Consider whether you are comfortable to speak to your manager or whether your health-care provider can provide support and information.

Also think about what you want to tell your colleagues about your time away from the office. It can be useful to write the pros and cons of different options and talk this through with someone you trust.

## PLANNING YOUR RETURN TO WORK

If you're having some time away from the workplace and plan to return, **things you can do include:**

- having a regular catch up with your manager to keep you connected with the workplace
- letting your manager know if you want to receive visits, calls or emails from workmates



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