



SUPPORTING A COLLEAGUE

THIS PDF FOCUSSES ON RECOGNISING WHEN SOMEONE MAY BE DEVELOPING A MENTAL HEALTH CONDITION AND HOW TO SUPPORT THAT PERSON

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Are you willing and prepared to help a colleague who is in need?

Talking to somebody about their wellbeing, especially if they are having difficulties, can seem daunting. Maybe you already know how to have conversations like this. Here are some suggestions.

A)

IF A COLLEAGUE APPROACHES YOU

- Suggest that you talk in a private space, away from computers, telephones and interruptions. Be warm and validating in both your verbal and non-verbal responses.
- Be clear about the amount of time you have available. You may feel comfortable offering to follow up the conversation. Make a specific plan if you are open to that.
- Work out how you will remain relaxed and focused.
- Offer eye contact, unless the person does not seem comfortable with that.
- Let the person start talking in their own time.
- Listen actively, which means letting go of your own agenda, and any opinions you form, in favour of giving the other person your full attention.
- Be encouraging, asking open questions such as “What happened then?”.
- When somebody is distressed, they may be confused or distracted. It may help to recap what you have heard your colleague say before you end the conversation. They will likely feel heard and experience relief.
- Remember that it is not your role to fix your colleague’s problems. You may have ideas for practical steps that the person can take, but often, there is no easy solution. Your willingness to spend time listening is usually of greater value than any advice.
- **Important:** if you feel out of your depth, put your own wellbeing and self-care first. Take steps to ensure that your colleague has other support, but it is best for you and for them if you step back when you need to. If you feel ‘trapped’ by a colleague’s needs, overwhelmed by their problems, or overly responsible for their welfare, these are signals that it is time to refer them on to a professional.

B)

APPROACHING A COLLEAGUE YOU ARE CONCERNED ABOUT

- If you have concerns about a colleague’s wellbeing, and they are not showing signs of seeking support, be aware that their consent and readiness to open up is important.
- If you approach the person to talk, be gentle in your probing and do not begin a conversation by asking direct questions such as, “Are you well enough to be at work?”
- Direct observations, such as, “You do not look well”, or, “I am worried about you”, may also put your colleague on the defensive.
- Rather, begin by asking the person if they would like a cup of tea or what plans they have for the evening/weekend.
- As above, be mindful of the time and place in which you seek to open up a conversation.
- Ask yourself if you are the best person to approach your colleague, in terms of their receptivity.
- Be prepared to follow up an initial meeting and be clear about organizing that.
- As mentioned, be sure to manage your own feelings and reactions. If you reach a point where you would like to refer your colleague on, discuss it with them and encourage them in taking the next steps.
- The aim is not to be a therapist but help the colleague understand that it may be helpful to speak to a counsellor. It is not a good idea to be a counsellor and a friend at the same time.



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