

Help for troubled co-workers



Untreated mental health conditions in the workplace take a heavy toll on the entire workforce, often leaving co-workers feeling lost, alone and disconnected. Because of the significant time spent at work and the close working relationships that exist among co-workers, the workplace provides a unique opportunity to recognize potential mental health problems early and provide assistance.

If you are concerned about a co-worker, use an approach such as NOTICE. TALK. ACT.™ to approach him or her.¹

NOTICE. If you see a co-worker's behavior or performance changing over time, notice if the changes persist for two or more weeks, suggesting something more than just a bad day.

TALK. Find a quiet and private place to ask if he or she is OK. Expressing your concern demonstrates commitment to a healthy and safe work environment. When talking with a co-worker, provide specific examples of the behavior that is worrying you. Be sure not to place judgement on the person. Don't give advice. It is best to assume you do not know what is happening and want to learn more from the person's perspective. Remind the person that everyone has challenges from time to time when extra support could be helpful. Be a good listener. Ask how you can help.

ACT. In addition to listening, try to connect the person with a source of care. If your employer provides an employee assistance program (EAP), share information about how to connect to this confidential resource. Also, recommend that the person visit with his or her health care provider. If you are worried about the person's immediate safety, do not leave the person alone. Seek emergency assistance and stay until help arrives. Get back in touch with the person in a day or so to see how things are going.

Remember that you are not a therapist. Make referrals to appropriate resources and just continue to be a concerned co-worker who is there for support.

Workplace bullying

Bullying used to be an issue that mostly impacts children. That's no longer true. More and more adults report experiencing mistreatment and hostility at work. Workplace bullying involves multiple, repeated, intentional acts of aggression, hostility, social isolation or disrespect. These acts often happen in person but also can occur through email, text messaging and social media. Certain work environments are more likely to foster bullying, such as those with high stress, demanding workloads and those in which employees feel high levels of job insecurity or boredom. Many workers feel ashamed or embarrassed about being targets of workplace bullying and are afraid to report incidents.²

If you observe or experience bullying, report it to your supervisor or human resources department. If your organization has an employee assistance program (EAP), reach out for counseling on conflict resolution and stress management resources.

Workplace burnout³

While not considered a mental illness, burnout can be considered a mental health issue. Burnout is having a growing impact on workplaces. It is more likely when employees:

- expect too much of themselves
- never feel that the work they are doing is good enough
- feel inadequate or incompetent
- feel unappreciated for their work efforts
- have unreasonable demands placed upon them
- are in roles that are not a good job fit

People could be dealing with burnout and not be aware of it. They might believe they are just struggling to keep up during stressful times and deny the problem. Stress, however, is usually a feeling of urgency, while burnout is more commonly experienced as helplessness, hopelessness or apathy — more similar to depression on the continuum of feelings.

Some of the symptoms that may suggest burnout are listed below:

- reduced efficiency and energy
- lowered levels of motivation
- increased errors
- fatigue
- headaches
- irritability
- increased frustration
- suspiciousness
- more time spent working with less being accomplished

Tips for dealing with a stressful work environment

- Try to avoid unnecessary conflict or acting out when feeling stressed.
- Take short breaks from work, as appropriate. Go for a walk outdoors for fresh air and to improve concentration.
- Set aside a block of time to check emails and phone messages rather than dealing with each one as it comes in.
- If you are feeling overwhelmed, make a list of all current tasks and focus on one task at a time. Don't try to do everything at once. Ask your manager to help prioritize those tasks that are most important.
- Focus on solutions rather than problems.



What can you do?

Foster a positive and supportive work culture so that troubled co-workers feel safe asking for and receiving help.

Sources:

1. American Psychiatric Association Foundation Center for Workplace Mental Health. Know the Warning Signs. Available from: www.workplacementalhealth.org; accessed on 5-1-2020.
2. American Psychiatric Association Foundation Center for Workplace Mental Health. Bullying. Available from: www.workplacementalhealth.org; accessed on 5-1-2020.
3. Mayo Clinic. Job burnout: How to spot it and take action, 11-21-2018. Available from www.mayoclinic.org; accessed on 7-14-2020.

The information and materials included here as well as in MetLife's Health and Wellness Information Library, including all toolkits, modules, template communications, text, charts, graphics and other materials, (collectively, the "Content") are intended to provide general guidance on health and wellness matters and do not constitute medical advice. While the Content is based on resources that MetLife believes to be well-documented, MetLife cannot vouch for the accuracy of the Content, and you rely on the Content at your own risk. Each person's condition and health circumstances are unique, and therefore the Content may not apply to you. The Content is not a substitute for professional medical advice. You should always consult your licensed health care professional for the diagnosis and treatment of any medical condition and before starting or changing your health regimen, including seeking advice regarding what drugs, diet, exercise routines, physical activities or procedures are appropriate for your particular condition and circumstances.