

## Identifying people who are struggling

By understanding the common signs and symptoms of mental health issues, you will be in a better position to identify and help a colleague in need.

If you are worried that someone you work with is struggling with a mental health issue, look out for **some of the common changes** in mood and behaviour outlined below.

Change in emotional reactions	Change in thinking	Change in behaviour
<p><i>such as an increase in:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● fear and anxiety</li> <li>● anger and irritability</li> <li>● sadness and despair</li> <li>● emptiness or hopelessness</li> <li>● disconnectedness</li> <li>● withdrawing from favourite activities</li> </ul> <p><i>less:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● involvement or enjoyment</li> </ul>	<p><i>such as difficulties in:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● concentrating</li> <li>● following complex instructions</li> <li>● remembering</li> <li>● communicating</li> <li>● conversing including hesitation, silence, and broken sentences</li> </ul> <p><i>more:</i></p> <p>intrusive (unwanted) thoughts</p>	<p><i>such as:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● withdrawing from others</li> <li>● being unavailable</li> <li>● being overprotective</li> <li>● startling easily</li> <li>● denying and avoiding</li> <li>● taking greater risks</li> <li>● abusing substances</li> <li>● speeding or careless driving</li> </ul>

Source: [mentalhealth.org.nz](http://mentalhealth.org.nz)

## Talk

Talking is the best way to identify when someone you work with may be struggling. Encourage open conversation and check in with employees regularly - whether you are currently concerned about them or not.

Many people have a long delay between developing a mental illness and receiving appropriate treatment and support. The longer people delay getting help and support, the more difficult their recovery can be.

By making mental wellbeing an everyday topic, it will be easier to raise issues when you do have concerns and employees are likely to feel more comfortable discussing their problems.

## Key Signs and Symptoms to Look Out For

### Depression

- Loss of enjoyment and interest in activities that used to be enjoyable
- Lack of energy and tiredness
- Feeling worthless or feeling guilty when they are not really at fault
- Difficulty concentrating or making decisions
- Moving more slowly or sometimes becoming agitated and unable to settle
- Having sleeping difficulties or sometimes sleeping too much
- Loss of interest in food or sometimes eating too much. Changes in eating habits may lead to either loss of weight or putting on weight.

### Anxiety

- Mind racing or going blank, decreased concentration and memory, indecisiveness, confusion, vivid dreams.
- Unrealistic or excessive fear and worry (about past or future events), irritability, impatience, anger, feeling on edge, nervousness.
- Avoidance of situations, obsessive or compulsive behavior, distress in social situations, sleep disturbance
- Increased use of alcohol or other drugs.

- Pounding heart, chest pain, rapid heartbeat, blushing or rapid, shallow breathing and shortness of breath
- Dizziness, headache, sweating, tingling and numbness
- Choking, dry mouth, stomach pains, nausea, vomiting and diarrhoea
- Muscle aches and pains (especially neck, shoulder and back), restlessness, tremors and shaking.

### **Substance Abuse**

- A lot of time is spent obtaining the substance, using it or recovering from its effects.
- Craving (i.e. a strong urge) to use the substance.
- Repeated use that affects their ability to fulfil their work, school or home responsibilities, e.g. repeated absences from work, poor work performance, neglect of children or household.
- Repeated use despite this causing ongoing problems with other people, e.g. arguments, fights.
- Repeated use in situations where it is physically hazardous, e.g. driving a car or using machinery while affected by a substance.
- Continued use despite knowing that they have a mental or physical health problem caused by the substance.

### **Stress Overload**

- Anxiety or panic attacks
- Irritability and moodiness
- Physical symptoms, such as stomach problems, headaches, or even chest pain
- Allergic reactions, such as eczema or asthma
- Problems sleeping
- Drinking too much, smoking, overeating or doing drugs
- Sadness or depressed feelings

### **Suicide**

- Threatening to hurt or kill themselves
- Looking for ways to kill themselves: seeking access to pills, weapons, or other means
- Talking or writing about death, dying or suicide
- Rage, anger, seeking revenge
- Acting recklessly or engaging in risky activities including increasing alcohol or drug use
- Withdrawing from friends, family or society
- Anxiety, agitation, inability to sleep or sleeping all the time
- Dramatic changes in mood (including sudden improvement in mood following an episode of depression)