

Talking About Mental Health: A Guide for Managers

The conversation starts with you

One of your roles as a manager is to support your team – and that includes supporting their mental health. You're better positioned than almost anyone else to see when someone needs support.

- **Build a culture of connection through regular team check-ins.**
- **It's common for people to talk about viruses, stomachaches, and broken bones. It should be just as common to discuss mental health.**

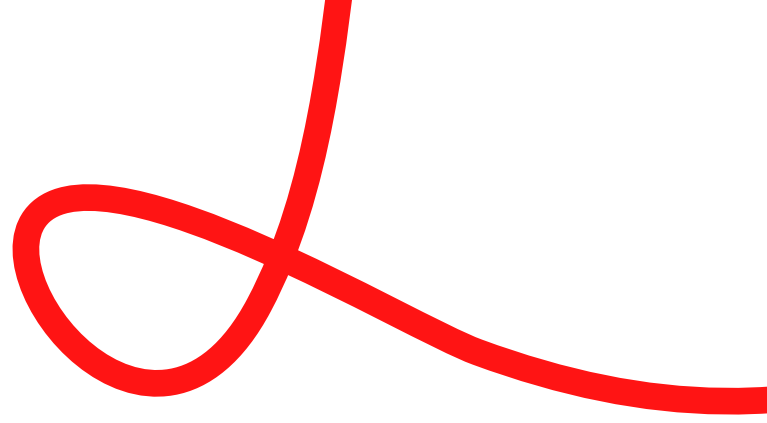
Lead by example

One of the best things you can do is check in with each of your team members on a regular basis.

Go beyond a simple “How are you?” and ask questions about what support would be helpful.

This leads to authentic conversations with compassion and empathy, so your team will feel safe and supported — and able to share their feelings and ask for help when they need it.

A comfortable conversation in 3 steps...



Prepare

Start the conversation

Keep talking

Step 1 — Prepare

- **Know the signs of stress.**

If you spot any changes in an Associate's behavior, check in with them to find out how you can help.

- **Know your role.**

Your team member may need professional support. If that's the case, your job becomes about connecting them with the resources in place to best support them. They may not want to share much detail, but knowing what resources they have available to them is what matters.

- **And while we're on the topic, brush up...**

... on resources and support options like personalized mental health solutions, "ASK" suicide prevention training, and meditation services. As a manager, you're first in line to help address Associate mental health, so use the opportunity to normalize the use of available tools and benefits.

- **Right time, right place.**

Choose a time and environment where your Associate is likely to feel most comfortable.

Do you know the signs of mental distress?

They are fatigue, lack of focus, withdrawal, irritability, loss of appetite, struggling to get things done.



Knowing the warning signs of serious emotional distress can help you assess the situation quickly and recognize when more support is required. Please refer to warning signs on page 8 for more information.

A comfortable conversation in 3 steps...

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Step 2 — Start the conversation

Convey your concerns with **care** when you spot changes in an Associate's behavior.

Like this...

"I noticed you are not speaking up in meetings as much as you used to. Is everything okay?"

"You seem irritated with your colleagues lately. Is everything okay?"

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Like this...

"I noticed you are under a lot of stress at work. What can I do to support you?"

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Ask open-ended questions to give your Associate the chance to add detail and context.

"You appear to be upset about something. Are you comfortable telling me about what you are going through?"

A comfortable conversation in 3 steps...

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Resist the urge to break uncomfortable silences.

Really listen and encourage questions and concerns.

Like this...

“It sounds like you’re going through a lot. Tell me more about how you’re taking care of yourself.”

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“What can I do to make it easier for you to seek support?”

Lead with empathy, speaking with sincerity and compassion. Validate your Associate’s outlook.

“I can understand how you would see things that way.”

Like this...

+

“This must be difficult for you. What can I do to best support you?”

Affirm and empower your Associates.

Acknowledge the courage and strength it takes to speak about mental health.

Like this...

“Thank you for trusting me enough to share this with me.”

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“I admire the bravery it took for you to have this conversation today.”

Discuss next steps. Finish by agreeing what you will both do next. For you, this might involve reviewing workload or working hours. Keep notes to refer to in your next conversation.

A comfortable conversation in 3 steps...

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Keep talking

Step 3 — Keep talking

- **Arrange regular check-ins.**

Checking in regularly can help problem-solve any issues that come up.

This is also a great opportunity to reiterate practices that support mental health.

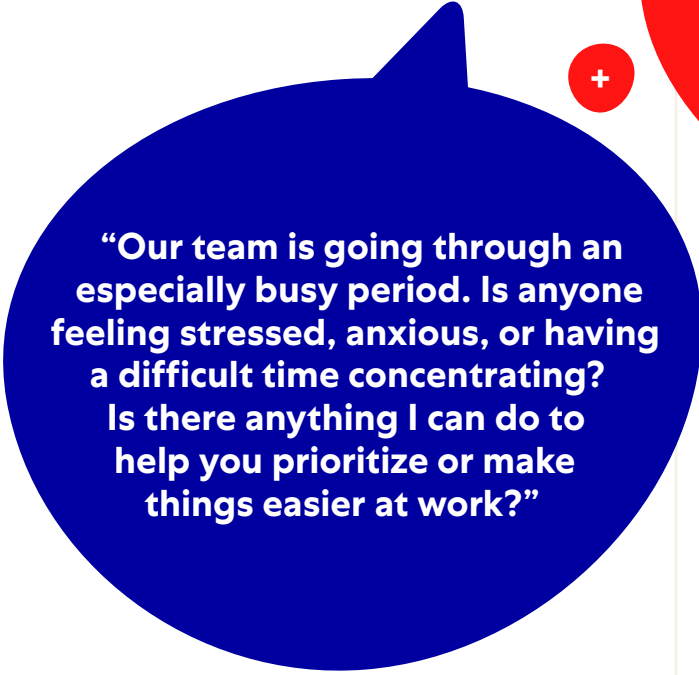
Remember to ask your Associate how you can keep supporting them. And use these check-ins to review the solutions you've offered – are they working? Do you need to suggest something else?

- **Have an open-door policy.**

Let your team know you're available for them whenever they need.

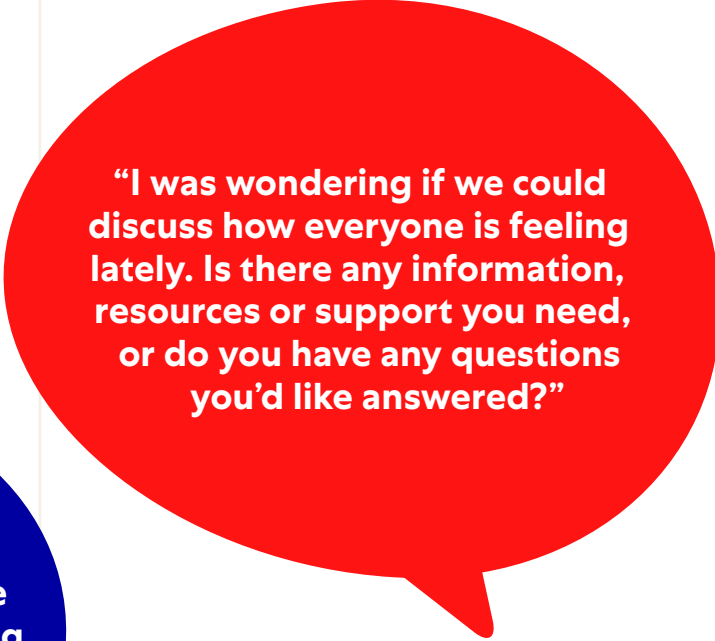
- **Normalize mental health conversations.**

Here are some conversation starters you can use in your team meetings:



“Our team is going through an especially busy period. Is anyone feeling stressed, anxious, or having a difficult time concentrating? Is there anything I can do to help you prioritize or make things easier at work?”

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“I was wondering if we could discuss how everyone is feeling lately. Is there any information, resources or support you need, or do you have any questions you'd like answered?”

The words you use are important

DO SAY:

“Thank you for opening up to me.”

“How are you feeling today?”

“Is there anything I can do to help?”

“Thank you for sharing.”

“I’m sorry to hear that. It must be tough.”

“I’m here for when you need me.”

“What support can I offer?”

“Can I help you find out about our mental health benefits?”

“Can I help you connect with a counselor through one of our Associate mental health resources?”

“I’m here for you.”

DON'T SAY:

“It could be worse.”

“Just deal with it.”

“Snap out of it.”

“Everyone feels that way sometimes.”

“You may have brought this on yourself.”

“We’ve all been there.”

“You’ve got to pull yourself together.”

“I’m sure it’ll just blow over.”

“Try thinking happier thoughts.”

Encourage action

Ask your Associate questions to find out how you can offer them support, such as “How can I help?” Depending on their answers, and how they are feeling, some good options for support offered for Associates include:

- Calling your **Associate Assistance Program (AAP)** – a safe place for confidential support and advice.
- Contact your **Ombudsman** for confidential support.

Check in

Mental health can change on a monthly, weekly and even daily basis.

If someone confides in you, always remember to check in with them to see how they're doing. Follow up on your previous conversation, recognizing what was shared before and asking how it's going, and whether they received the necessary support. Understand that sometimes it can take a long time for someone to be ready to speak to anyone about their mental health.

Associate Assistance Program:

- Confidential, anonymous, third-party service offered to support Associates and their family members to better manage stress and build emotional resilience.
- Licensed counselors provide support for a wide range of issues including daily stress, relationships, managing life changes, substance abuse, and other personal or work-related issues, 24/7 service with local language capability.
- Includes referral services and resources for child and elder care, financial and legal aid. Can offer on-site counseling to support emergency situations.
- No cost for Associates and families for the first five sessions (varies by provider).
- Can provide additional training (from a catalogue of sessions or bespoke training), coaching, resources and support to managers.

**Steps,
support &
resources...**

Everybody can benefit from conversations about mental health but sometimes severe changes in behavior can indicate something more serious.

The next few pages detail warning signs and further resources.

Warning signs



If you are concerned someone may be feeling suicidal, look for changes in behavior or entirely new behaviors. This is particularly important if the new or changed behavior is triggered by a painful event, loss, or change.

Most people who take their lives exhibit one or more warning signs, either through what they say or what they do.

There are three key categories of warning signs to watch out for: **Talk**, **Behavior**, and **Mood**.

TALK

If a person talks about:

- No longer being alive
- Feeling hopeless
- Having no reason to live
- Being a burden to others
- Feeling trapped
- Unbearable pain

BEHAVIOR

Behaviors that may signal risk, especially if triggered by a painful event, loss, or change:

- Increased use of alcohol or drugs
- Withdrawing from activities
- Isolating from family and friends
- Sleeping too much or too little
- Visiting or calling people to say goodbye
- Giving away prized possessions
- Re-homing a beloved pet
- Uncharacteristic aggression
- Excessive Fatigue
- Looking for a way to end their life, such as searching online for methods

MOOD

People who are considering suicide often display one or more of the following moods:

- Depressed
 - Gloomy
 - Overwhelmed
 - Hopeless
- Anxious
 - Fearful
 - Worried
 - Uneasiness
- Loss of interest
- Irritability
- Humiliation/shame
- Agitation/anger
- Relief/sudden improvement
 - the suicidal person may feel relief and seem to no longer be struggling when a decision to end their life has been reached

Risk Factors

“Risk factors” are characteristics or conditions that increase the chance that a person may be in mental distress or try to take their own life.

There are three key categories of risk factors: **Health, Environmental, and Historical**

HEALTH

Mind:

- History or signs of depression
- History of mental illness

Body:

- Major physical illness
- Loss of physical abilities that impact quality of life

ENVIRONMENTAL

- Following an adverse patient event
- Feeling or actual lack of support from family, work or community
- Housing Instability
- A death or relationship breakup
- A job loss or change in financial security
- Prior to or following disciplinary action at work
- Feeling unsafe
- High stress family environment or dynamic
- Holidays or anniversaries
- Following natural disasters

HISTORICAL

- Previous suicide attempts
- History of self-injury
- History of abuse or mistreatment
- Exposure to traumatic events
- Family history of suicide

Know the resources

Know the resources available that provide immediate professional support for a person in distress. Here are several resources available to you:

Emergency

If someone is experiencing a physical or mental health emergency, call emergency services (for example, **911** in the U.S.).

First responders are trained to assist in these situations.

Local

There may be resources available through your employer and/or health insurance.

Please reach out to your primary care doctor or benefits team to learn more about these programs—and be sure to ask about your employer’s Associate Assistance Program.

Support in the United States

National 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline

The Lifeline provides 24/7, free, and confidential support for people in distress, prevention and crisis resources for you or your loved ones, and best practices for professionals in the United States.

Dial **988**, or visit [988lifeline.org](https://www.988lifeline.org).

The Trevor Project

24/7 crisis and suicide prevention services to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer & questioning (LGBTQ+) people.

Call **1-866-488-7386** or Text “**START**” to **678678**

Veterans’ Crisis Line

24/7 free crisis and suicide prevention services for veterans and their loved ones.

Call **1-800 273-TALK (8255)** & press 1 or Text **838255**

Not One More Vet

Veterinary professionals providing support for each other. Visit www.nomv.org.

Support in Canada

The Canada Suicide Prevention Service enables callers anywhere in Canada to access crisis support by phone, in French or English.

Call **1-833-456-4566** or text **45645**. To find a centre near you at <https://www.suicideprevention.ca/Need-Help>.

For other social support, call or text **211**. 211 is an information line for referrals to community, social and government services available in each province.

If you would like to learn more about the knowledge and skills necessary to respond to people at risk of suicide, visit the Centre for Suicide Prevention at www.suicideinfo.ca.

Support in United Kingdom

Emergency services UK

Call **999**

Samaritans

Call **116 123**

24/7 free support for anyone struggling to cope, whoever they are, however they feel, whatever life has done to them

Vetlife Helpline

Call **0303 040 2551**

24/7 Free safe, non-judgemental space for you to explore your options. It's for VNs and students, too. All calls are confidential, and callers are referred on for specialist advice where appropriate.

The Mind Matters Initiative

Cannot offer direct support or advice. Instead, one of our key aims is to raise awareness and share reliable, evidence-based information about mental health and wellbeing. We have listed a range of useful external resources at

www.vetmindmatters.org/help-links.

Support in Australia

Emergency services Australia

Call 000

Lifeline Australia

Call 131 114

24/7 free crisis support and suicide prevention service for all Australians.

Suicide Callback Service Australia

Call 1300 659 467

Health professionals supporting people who are affected by suicide.

Beyond Blue Australia

Call 1300 224 636

Information and support to help everyone in Australia achieve their best possible mental health.

MensLine Australia

Call 1300 789 978

Support for men with family and relationship concerns staffed by professional counsellors, experienced in men's issues.

Love Your Pet Love Your Vet

Australian wellbeing information and resources for those in the veterinary industry at

www.loveyourpetloveyourvet.com.au.

Support in New Zealand

Lifeline

Call 0800 543 354 or (09) 522 2999

Free text 4357 (HELP)

24/7, free confidential support from qualified counsellors and trained volunteers.

Youthline

Call 0800 376 633 free help and can access support when needed

Samaritans

Call 0800 726 666

27/7 free Confidential, non-judgmental & non religious support for anyone experiencing loneliness, depression, despair, distress or suicidal feelings

Mental Health Foundation of New Zealand

Provides a list of other mental health resources available in New Zealand at www.mentalhealth.org.nz/get-help/in-crisis.

MARS
Veterinary Health