



HOW TO HAVE A CONVERSATION ABOUT MENTAL HEALTH.

TALK ABOUT WELLBEING

Make talking about wellbeing an everyday thing.

UNDERSTAND WHAT IS SUPPORTIVE

Listen non-judgmentally and understand the issue from their perspective.

WORK TOGETHER FOR SHARED SUCCESS

Collaborate to find solutions that work for both you and your team.

TALK ABOUT WELLBEING

If you notice a team member is struggling with their mental health, don't ignore it. But be aware that talking about personal struggles can be difficult and they might get emotional, embarrassed or upset.

It's good to remember that no special skills are required to talk about mental health. You just need to be empathetic, approachable, and willing to listen.



YOU DON'T SEEM LIKE YOURSELF LATELY, ANYTHING UP?

Before you approach the person ask yourself:

- Am I in a good headspace?
- Am I willing to genuinely listen?
- Can I give as much time as needed?

Where and when?

It is important that your first approach is not a formal one.

- Ask when will be good for them to chat. If they can't talk when you approach them, ask them for a better time to come back
- Choose a place where the team member feels comfortable being open. Taking them offsite is a good idea – grab a coffee or go to a local park
- Make sure they can talk somewhere quiet and private
- Let them know that anything they say will remain confidential

Ways to start the conversation

Don't worry if you don't quite know what to say. Just by being supportive and listening, you're helping to make a difference. So be as relaxed as possible.

HOW ARE YOU DOING?

Help them open up by asking questions like:

- "How are you doing?"
- "What's been happening for you lately?"
- "I haven't caught up, and wanted to check in about how you are feeling"
- "How's life? How are the family?"

Mention specific things that have made you concerned for them, for example:

- "You don't seem yourself lately, anything up?"
- "I noticed you've been quiet this week, you OK?"
- "You seem less chatty than usual"

If there are issues that are impacting their productivity – such as prolonged absences – talk about these early on. It's best to address these issues before they become a bigger problem.

What if the person doesn't want to talk?

Be relaxed if the discussion doesn't go as you'd hoped. If the person doesn't want to speak about it, respect their choice, but leave the door open for further dialogue.

WHAT CAN WE DO TO HELP?

DON'T INTERRUPT OR RUSH THE CONVERSATION, IF THEY NEED TIME TO THINK, SIT PATIENTLY WITH THEM IN SILENCE.

UNDERSTAND WHAT IS SUPPORTIVE.

Always try to listen non-judgmentally and see the issue from their perspective.

Let them know you're asking because you're concerned about them.

Acknowledge the person's feelings. If they get angry or upset, stay calm and don't take it personally.

Ask questions to explore what's going on, for example:

- "Have you spoken to anyone else about this?"
- "What would help you manage the load?"
- "What else is happening for you at the moment?"
- "How do you think you might resolve that situation?"
- "What can we change to make life easier?"

Don't interrupt or rush the conversation, if they need time to think, sit patiently with them in silence.

Most importantly, take what they say seriously.



WORK TOGETHER FOR SHARED SUCCESS

It is important to work collaboratively to find solutions that work for both you and your team member.

Help them to create a plan for how to address issues when they arise. Identify the signs that may indicate they are not doing well and what triggers them. Ask about who to contact in a crisis, and what supports need to be put in place in the workplace.

Explore what supports are available to them, for example:

- EAPs (Employee Assistance Programmes)
- Family, whanau, and friends they trust who they can talk to.
- Community leaders such as church ministers or local kaumatua
- Their GP

Remember that you can – and should – make reasonable accommodations for your team member if needed. Think about the flexibility you currently have in your workplace - sometimes the same adjustments offered for staff with physical health issues may be all that's needed to support a mental health issue.

Avoid assumptions about what they might need.

Ask! Questions that may help include:

- “What would be a good first step for us to take?”
- “How can I help?”
- “What has helped in the past?”

Look at the practical supports your organisation can give them, such as changes in work hours, extended leave, or changes in duties for a short time.

Follow up

Remember to follow up in a few days to check in and see how the person is doing and review any plans made.

For videos and other workplace resources visit mentalhealth.org.nz/openminds

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