

How to Support a Colleague Showing Signs of Mental Distress

According to the World Health Organization, over 300 million people in the workforce suffer from depression. Because it's not always obvious when an employee is experiencing mental distress, it is imperative to familiarize yourself with the warning signs of mental illness. Although each mental health condition has its own set of symptoms, there are universal signs of mental illness to keep in mind.

12 Warning Signs That May Indicate Mental Distress or a Mental Health Problem:

- Excessive worry or fear
- Anxiety (*can cause somatic symptoms, i.e., stomach aches, vomiting, muscles tension and headaches*)
- Excessive sadness
- Extreme mood changes, such as uncontrollable "highs" or "lows" (*this can include euphoria*)
- Strong feelings of irritability or anger (*difficulty self-regulating and may be prolonged*)
- Suicidal thoughts or actions
- Problems with concentration and/or focus
- Avoidance of social activities
- Sleep disturbance (*difficulty going to sleep, staying asleep or both*)
- Excessive fatigue (*more than what is normal and impacts ability to perform day-to-day tasks*)
- Changes in eating habits (*eating too much or forgetting to eat*), which leads to weight changes
- Substance abuse

If you notice a colleague exhibiting any of these signs, it's critical to take the following steps:



Communicate Concerns to Appropriate Individual

Set up a meeting with HR, an on-site mental health professional or another trusted adviser who can take the proper measures to ensure the employee receives immediate and confidential care.



Express Empathy and Support

If you are comfortable, inquire with the individual about how she or he is doing. This is the time to exercise compassionate listening. Express concerns for the individual's wellbeing and assure them you are there for support.



Offer Assistance

Validate the employee and his or her experience. Then ask how you can be of assistance.

Are you experiencing mental distress?

If you recognized any of the warning signs in yourself, it's essential to take immediate steps to meet with a mental health professional. It's never too late to seek help. Find out what resources are available to you by setting up a meeting with HR, an onsite mental health professional or a trusted colleague.

