Workplace Strategies for Mental Health

Compliments of Canada Life

Workshop series



Participant handout

Building trust

Notes:

Building trust

Today we'll focus on conversations that build trust and support employee success.

Trust is often lost when an employee feels misunderstood or the demands made on them are unreasonable. This is even more of an issue when an employee is experiencing stress in their personal or professional life.

Today's approach can be applied regardless of whether an employee has a mental health issue. It focuses on supporting success while they're at work. A more stressful or punitive approach could result in the employee being unable to work at all. Instead, you will learn how to ask questions that support an employee to develop solutions to any issues they are experiencing at work.

Learning objectives

- Ask effective questions
- Engage employees in developing solutions
- Create practical approaches for accountability

When should the conversation framework be used?

- Some examples of when the conversation framework can be used include:
  - Performance problems
  - Attendance
  - Return-to-work
  - Accommodation
  - Working relationships
  - Work stressors
- This framework is about asking questions rather than making demands or judgments that could destroy trust

Communicate without judgment

- Be aware of your assumptions and judgments about an employee's behaviour
  - Take a breath before you start speaking
  - Consider the content and delivery of what you're going to say and how it might impact the employee
- Think about the time and place of your discussion
  - Are you frustrated, short of time, overwhelmed or angry?
  - Is the employee racing out to pick up a child from daycare?
  - If so, is this the best time to discuss the issue, or can you set up another time?
- Please turn to the next page to read Questions to ask before engaging to help you prepare for any conversation with an employee

Questions to ask before engaging

Ask yourself these questions before engaging the employee:

Consider your own needs

- Do I have the time to do this properly or I am pressuring myself to rush through this?
- Am I responding to hearsay or speaking about known facts?
- Am I in the right frame of mind to do this or should I be rescheduling for another day?
- Am I considering my role in the situation or believing that I have no need to improve?

Approach the issues with a focus on solutions

- Am I looking for solutions or just rehashing the problem?
- Will this approach bring about the right behaviours or focus on the wrong behaviours?
- Will this approach bring about long-term improvement or only short-term results?

Explore possible effects on the employee and co-workers

- Am I seeing the bigger picture or just this particular situation?
- Will the potential solution provide energy for the employee or drain them?
- Can I preserve the dignity of those involved or will someone feel shamed or blamed?
- Does this approach encourage the employee to take control and responsibility for their well-being and success or am I retaining all control?
- Have I adequately addressed the fears and concerns of others or will they feel I am minimizing them?

Help the employee achieve success at work

- Can the employee and I develop a shared plan for success or will we hold separate ideas of what success will look like?
- Am I helping my employee be successful on the job or am I focused only on either personality issues or task concerns?
- Will I monitor and follow up or do I think one conversation will be the end of it?

Consider the impact of your management style

- How do I usually give instructions? Do I know if my approach works for the employee?
- How do I usually give feedback? Do I know how my style impacts the employee?

Additional techniques and resources

Some communication strategies that are helpful include:

- Listening for understanding
- Why blame and shame don't work
- Developing a workplace plan
- Supporting employee success
- Attribution error

Engage the employee in solutions

- We know that when we do something with employees, not to them, we benefit from creating competency.
- Encourage employees to develop their own solutions and build on their strengths.

A conversation framework

Role of the employee: We don’t need award winning performances. We just want you to imagine yourself on your worst day dealing with these types of pressures.

Role of employer: We want you to experience the act of asking an employee for ideas rather than telling them what they need. Remember to ask, “And what else?" after their answers. This helps the employee feel they’re really being heard and allows as many potential solutions as possible to be identified.

Maximum 11 minutes to answer all 3 questions using scenario 1,

then switch roles and repeat the process using scenario 2

Scenario 1: An employee comes to you very stressed and says that they don’t think they can meet their deadline for a very important report because of the complex systems and competing priorities in the workplace.

Scenario 2: An employee is dealing with serious family issues and is having problems concentrating at work.

What do you need to be successful at your job and go home at the end of the day with some energy left over?

Maximum 5 minutes to spend on this question

- Focus on getting at all of the issues that will affect the employee's ability to be productive, including:
  - Start time
  - Break times
  - Retraining needs
  - New training needs
  - Necessary tools and resources
  - Reorientation and reintegration into the workplace, if appropriate
  - Gradual increase in hours and/or days worked if stamina is an issue
  - Tasks the employee is most confident about completing successfully
  - Changes or modifications to tasks
  - Changes or modifications to communication including instructions, directions and feedback
  - Attendance at meetings, offsite events or social events

What do you need to be successful at your job and go home at the end of the day with some energy left over?

What will you do differently to contribute to your own success and well-being at work?

Maximum 3 minutes to spend on this question

- Support the employee to take both control and responsibility for their own well-being at work. Encourage the employee to come up with ideas. Some employees have answered this question in the following ways:

  - I commit to taking my lunch rather than staying at my desk because I know it allows me to be more productive in the afternoon.
  - I will not cry at my desk. I will briefly leave and compose myself and come back.
  - I will write down instructions rather than ask for them several times.
  - I will not speak in anger. I will wait until I feel calm before responding.

What will you do differently to contribute to your own success and well-being at work?

How will we deal with any future issues? (illness, conflict, performance, etc.)

Maximum 3 minutes to spend on this question

- This question is intended to identify how others can best interact with the employee in the following situations:
  - When they believe the employee may be unwell.
    - Many supervisors or others may be uncomfortable approaching an employee when they feel the employee may be experiencing a mental health issue. The employee may just be having a bad day. Using an approach that the employee has provided in advance, can make it easier for both parties.
    - Example: An employee suggested the supervisor say, "You do not seem yourself today. Are you okay?"
    - The actual words are less important than the shared understanding that you are using them as directed by the employee to show your concern.
  - When the plan is not being implemented in the way it was agreed.
    - There is usually a honeymoon period following the development of a workplace plan where everyone is trying their best for success. There will probably come a time when a challenge arises and having an agreed-upon process in writing on how to address this with the employee will make it much easier to deal with when or if it happens.
    - Example: A workplace plan included a bi-weekly 10-minute check-in with the supervisor to discuss how work was going. It was agreed in advance that either party could request a longer discussion if an item (work task or behaviour) was not being implemented as agreed. This helped to ensure that the 10-minute check-ins would not become hour-long sessions on a regular basis. It also provided an opportunity for both parties to review each section of the workplace plan to determine if everything was being carried out as agreed.
  - When there are performance management issues.
    - Discussing how to give critical or corrective feedback with the employee before a problem or challenge arises, sets up a dynamic for a more positive outcome.
    - Example: An employee asked that all critical feedback be done in a private setting and be accompanied by positive reinforcement. For more examples and information, see Supportive Performance Management.

How will we deal with any future issues? (illness, conflict, performance, etc.)

Discussing the conversation framework

1. What were your employee solutions?

When you had the role of the employer, list 1 – 2 solutions to the issue that your employee came up with.

2. What did your employer do to build trust?

When you had the role of the employee, list 1 – 2 things the employer did to help build your trust. You can include body language, phrases, tone and demeanour. Make sure your answers are specific and measurable.

3. How does question 3 support accountability?

When you were the employer, what answers to question 3 would help you to identify and address any future issues?

What will you do differently?

Please record at least one thing that you will do differently at work as a result of what we have discussed today. We will take up the answers when you are done.

Notes:

Workplace Strategies for Mental Health

Compliments of Canada Life

Workplace Strategies for Mental Health resources are:

- For all employers, people leaders and employees
- Available in English and French
- Evidence- or practice-based
- Available to anyone at no cost

Examples of the resources available at clwsmh.ca/materials include:

Identifying workplace issues

Learn the questions to ask yourself and the employee before a potentially sensitive discussion. Topics include:

- Considering your own needs
- Focusing on solutions
- Addressing workplace and mental health stressors
- Creating a list of resources for these issues

Leadership development

Improve the comfort and effectiveness in resolving workplace issues to enhance psychological health and safety for all. These resources can help.

Psychologically safe leadership assessment

Identify and support leadership strategies that are psychologically safe for you and all leaders in your organization.

Resolving conflict

Use this unique approach to help effectively resolve conflict, including when mental health is a factor. Both parties maintain their dignity while changing the way they interact with each other.

Responding to issues

Use these practical and action-oriented guidelines to address work issues, including:

- Conflict
- Performance
- Accommodation
- Impairment
- Return to work
- Violence

Supporting employee success

Use this free tool to help employers help an employee create and follow a workplace plan that addresses performance and workplace stressors.

Supporting return to work success

Plan before an employee returns from leave to help prevent potential challenges in areas such as working relationships and performance.

All Workplace Strategies for Mental Health resources are available to anyone at no cost, compliments of Canada Life.

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We’d love to hear how you used this free resource!

Contact us through social media or at clwsmh.com

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