

Matte article

Is it a performance issue, or a sign of depression? Managers want to know

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(WPG) – A growing number of Canadian managers and supervisors believe it is their responsibility to support depressed employees. According to a recent [Ipsos Reid survey](#) on *Depression in the Workplace*, commissioned by the Great-West Life Centre for Mental Health in the Workplace, 84 per cent of managers believe it is part of their job to intervene with an employee who is showing signs of depression. All survey results are available on the Centre's website at www.workplacestrategiesformentalhealth.com.

But managing people is not always easy – and it can become even more challenging if a workplace issue arises and you are not sure if it is performance related or if the employee may be depressed. Despite her extensive experience as a director, manager, human resources professional and nurse, even workplace health consultant Susan Jakobson, has had her share of challenges in helping to support work accommodation for employees experiencing a mental health issue, such as depression.

“There are times when it seems there are road blocks every step of the way. It can be that the employee does not recognize that they have a mental health problem or that the manager does not believe the illness is real. Then there may be organizational policies that do not allow the level of flexibility that would allow the accommodation to work best,” Jakobson said.

She adds that despite the challenges, it really is worth it when you can help someone who has been ill become productive and confident in the workplace again. Jakobson suggests that the process can be much easier when a manager is able to identify and respond to mental health concerns early on, and survey findings seem to support this: of those managers who had reported intervening in the past with an employee who was showing signs of depression, 63 per cent said that better training could have made the experience better or easier. Further, more than two-thirds of respondents are seeking more training, greater flexibility from organizational policies, or better support from upper management and human resources.

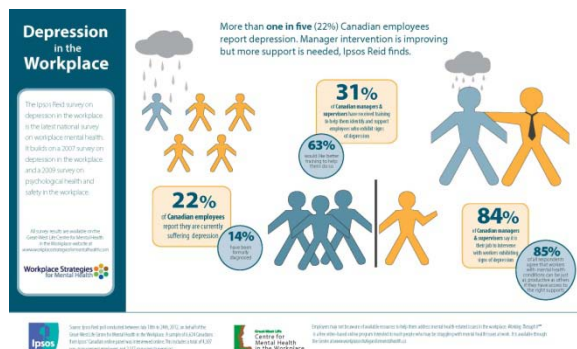
“When the manager has expressed concern and a willingness to help the employee be successful at work, there is a different dialogue going on. Things are often more contentious if the manager has avoided the issue, or where the first conversation was to criticize the employee.”

Free online training resources such as [Managing Emotions](#) can help managers and supervisors improve their emotional intelligence in the workplace. Skill areas are dealing with other people's negative emotions and reactions, understanding and managing our own reactions, and communicating effectively, including resolving conflict. The training resource is made available through the Centre's [website](#) alongside the survey results.

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[Infographic:](#)
Depression in the Workplace



[Photo:](#)
Susan Jakobson



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