



## Mental health issues in the workplace

### Guide for managers and human resources officers

Around 18 percent of employees suffer from psychological problems and disorders such as anxiety, burnout, depression, addiction and schizophrenia. Around one third of these people are in treatment as a result. Half of all people suffer from a psychological disorder at some point during their life. Regardless of the various causes and triggers, psychological suffering affects (social) behaviour and performance at work. This guide gives you, as a manager or HR officer, tips for effective cooperation and support because, fortunately, psychological disorders are highly treatable and treatment leads to recovery in the majority of cases.

#### Duties of supervisors

Supervisors have a special duty of care towards their employees (CO 328):

- The employer is responsible for ensuring that the physical or mental health of employees is not adversely affected in the workplace.
- Workplaces and work systems must be designed so that they do not have a detrimental impact on employees.

#### Signs of psychological problems

- You observe that an employee has been working more slowly, is making more mistakes, struggling to concentrate or has simply been irritable. They are absent more frequently and turn up late, behave differently or appear unhappy. An additional sign might be working overtime, even though their workload hasn't increased. If several of these factors are present, you should intervene.
- Watch out for behaviours that are unfamiliar to you and which cause irritation. Employees with psychological problems can react in unusual ways. Some become increasingly insecure and withdraw, while others become highly strung or short-tempered.
- Verify your observations and impressions by discussing them with other managers. It's a good idea to approach several different people for their input, as others may have made similar observations. Be sure to involve Human Resources in this process.

## Potential approaches if signs of mental health issues arise

We recommend you take the following approach:

**Be prepared – seek out dialogue with the person concerned – talking helps. The sooner you react, the more chance potential measures will have of succeeding.**

- Note down facts and observations about changes in their behaviour. If in doubt, seek assistance (e.g. HR division, Pro Mente Sana, DI office, internal confidants).
- Invite the person concerned to have a conversation and let them know what it's about.
- Arrange a convenient time and suitable place for a conversation. Plan in enough time for it. Keep a clear head for a positive dialogue.
- Suggest the option of approaching a trusted person, either within or outside of the workplace. People struggling with mental health often want a confidential dialogue to begin with.

### 1. Have a meeting

Specify the meeting's objectives and how it is to proceed. Describe your perceptions and show your appreciation of the person concerned. It's important to make «I statements» when doing this.

Listen to your conversation partner with interest. Ask the person how they themselves perceive the situation. Show an understanding of the situation by giving a brief summary of what you have heard in your own words. Repeatedly mention everything that's going well.

Emphasise at the end that it's important to find a solution together for a positive change. Arrange a follow-up meeting with the person concerned in three to five days' time to decide on measures together.

### Follow-up meeting

Specify objectives and measures with the person concerned:

- Changes to workload
- Changes to working hours and location
- Personal support

It is important that something is changed to help the person become well again.

### After the meeting:

Record what was agreed in writing.

Let the team know afterwards (by agreement with the person concerned).

Change takes time. That's why it's important to set realistic time frames and stay in regular contact with the person concerned and the team.

If the situation doesn't improve, get a specialist involved (e.g. case manager, job coach, psychiatry/ psychology expert).

Don't forget to arrange a closing interview if the situation changes for the better – this shows that you appreciate the person concerned.

## Preventive measures

A positive working climate means:

- Prioritising safety and appreciation
- Allocating the right amount of work (not too much and not too little), allowing scope for independent action and ensuring a pleasant company climate

These and additional factors play a decisive role in motivation and mental health. If you feel comfortable at work, you stay healthy and ready to engage.

Have your employees fill in the free stress check at [www.stressnostress.ch/index.php/ich-und-stress](http://www.stressnostress.ch/index.php/ich-und-stress) (in German). For a detailed evaluation, you can request access to Suva's job stress analysis.

Hold a **prevention module on coping with stress** with your employees. This will prevent stress among your team and boost the resilience of its individual members. You can find more information at [www.suva.ch/praeventionsmodule](http://www.suva.ch/praeventionsmodule).

Reduce downtime and operating costs with an effective **absence management** system. Create conditions for fewer absences and a productive, appreciative corporate culture. You can find more information about this at [www.suva.ch/absenzenmanagement](http://www.suva.ch/absenzenmanagement).