

# Mental health awareness in the workplace

## Statistics

- About 1 in 5 Americans will experience a diagnosable mental disorder in any given year
- Suicide is the 10th leading cause of death in the U.S.
- Suicide is the second cause of death for people between the ages of 10 and 34.
- The fourth leading cause of death for people aged 35 to 54.
- Mental health conditions are the leading cause of disability in the United States
- Untreated mental illness costs the nation \$113 billion annually
- Mental illness is estimated to result in 35 million workdays lost per year

## How you can support someone

You don't need to be a therapist to help someone with a mental illness. In fact, the best thing you can do is be with the person and listen. And while it might be tempting, avoid giving advice. People often say getting advice isn't helpful.

### Don't say

- "There's always someone worse off"
- "No one ever said life was fair."
- "Stop feeling sorry for yourself."
- "You need to snap out of it."
- "I know how you feel."

### Helpful things to say

- "I'm here for you"
- "You're important to me."
- "Let me know if you need to talk."
- "Come talk to me anytime."

## Role play: Sally

**What do you think is going on in the situation?**

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**What helpful things were said?**

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**How did it make the person in the role play feel?**

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**What suggestions would you make?**

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## Role play: Joe

**What do you think is going on in the situation?**

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**What helpful things were said?**

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**How did it make the person in the role play feel?**

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**What suggestions would you make?**

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## Role play: Lori

**What do you think is going on in the situation?**

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**What helpful things were said?**

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**How did it make the person in the role play feel?**

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**What suggestions would you make?**

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## Role play: Tom

**What do you think is going on in the situation?**

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**What helpful things were said?**

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**How did it make the person in the role play feel?**

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**What suggestions would you make?**

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## When you're worried about suicide

- Ask openly if the person is feeling suicidal
- Make sure the person isn't left alone
- Help the person identify resources and support people
- Have him or her work with you to make decisions

## Checking for safety

### Ask the person directly about suicide

- “Are you having suicidal thoughts?”
- “Are you thinking about killing yourself?”

### Other questions to ask

- “Have you thought about how you would kill yourself?”
- “Have you thought about when you would do it?”
- “Do you have what you need to carry out your plan?”

## Myths about suicide

1. **People who talk about suicide won't really do it.** Almost everyone who commits or attempts suicide has given some clue or warning. Don't ignore suicide threats. Statements like, "You'll be sorry when I'm dead" or, "I can't see any way out" should be taken seriously. Even if it sounds like the person is joking, you will want to ask the questions above.
2. **Nothing will stop a person who is suicidal.** Even the most depressed person has mixed feelings about death. Suicidal people often waver between wanting to live and wanting to die until the very last moment. They really just want the pain to stop.
3. **Talking about suicide might give someone the idea.** You don't give a person ideas by talking about suicide. The opposite is true — bringing up the subject of suicide and discussing it openly is one of the most helpful things you can do.

## Signs a person may be suicidal

- Talks about suicide
- Shows drastic changes in behavior
- Withdraws from friends
- Loses interest in hobbies, work or school
- Makes final arrangements, such as a will
- Gives away prized possessions
- Has attempted suicide before
- Takes unnecessary risks
- Has had recent losses
- Is interested in death and dying
- Loses interest in personal appearance
- Increases use of alcohol or drugs
- Is suddenly happier after a period of depression

## **You may need to call 911 if the person:**

- Threatens to engage in suicide right away
- Has immediate access to means (guns, weapons or drugs)
- Behaves aggressively
- Is in a different location from you

## Resources

- 911
- Suicide prevention hotlines
- Employee Assistance Program
- School or university services
- Primary care physician
- Mental health professionals
- 311 for local resources
- Pastor or clergy

## **Providing ongoing support**

- Keep listening
- Let people improve at their own speed
- Set aside your own expectations and judgments
- Be present
- Ask what you can do to help
- Convey hope
- Educate yourself about mental health issues

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