

Managing Health & Wellbeing at Work

Workbook



Module 2: Fostering a Supportive Workplace Environment

Section 1: Mental Health Stigma in the Workplace

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Instructors of the program:

BENEDICT LIM, CEO & Chief psychologist



My name is **Benedict Lim**, and I'm the CEO and chief psychologist of iGROW. If I may share about how iGROW was started, its because I was working with at-risk youth in my first career and realized that one to one, the youth are very good, but when they go back to the home environment every good gets undone. So I was thinking how can we reach out to the people that they are living with? And we figured that most adults spend their time working, right? And if you can make the workplace happy and healthier hopefully they don't bring negativity back home. So, that was how iGROW was started. So right now I dedicate my time and energy helping business leaders who are frustrated with teams missing goals, build work cultures that are results oriented, productive, and loyal, so that there's more time and freedom to grow their business.

Instructors of the program:

MARIA PLENGSANGTIP, Partner & Consultant Psychologist



My name is **Maria Plengsangtip**, and I'm a partner and psychologist at iGROW. I'm from Thailand, and now based in Singapore. I help human capital professional facing difficulties to improve employee engagement and health of their employees by designing and developing customized strategies to achieve better health and employee well being. This frees up the precious time and energy to focus on their many priorities at work. I do this through individual counseling, coaching, culture training, as well as lecturing at the local university.

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MANAGING HEALTH & MENTAL WELLBEING AT WORK

Module 1: Understanding Employee Health & Mental Wellbeing

Module 2: Fostering a Supportive Workplace Environment

Module 3: Incorporating Employee Health & Mental Wellbeing Policies

Module 4: Managing Employee Health & Mental Wellbeing as a Leader

Maria Plengsangtip

M.A. (Applied Psychology), B. Soc. Sci (Psy)
Consultant Psychologist, iGROW



Welcome back to Managing Health and Mental Wellbeing at Work. My name is Maria Plengsangtip, and I am going to be facilitating this module on “Fostering a Supportive Workplace Environment. Let us take a look at what we will be covering.

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AGENDA

- 1. Mental Health Stigma in the Workplace**
- 2. Identify and Support colleagues in need of help**
- 3. Managing Mental Health Self-Care**
- 4. Creating a Supportive Culture & Encouraging Help-Seeking behaviour for mental wellness at work**

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We will cover the mental health stigma in the workplace and understand the common mental health issues such as stress, depression and anxiety.

In Section 2, we will focus on the ways you can identify and support the colleague in need of help.

Section 3 will focus on the ways that you can cope with stress. And this is important because we need to know what are the different ways that we can use to cope with the stress that we have in order for us to help others better.

Section 4 will focus on the way that you can help to create a supportive culture so that people can seek help when is needed.

These sections are divided into chunks for you to have more time to focus.

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AGENDA

1. **Mental Health Stigma in the Workplace**
2. Identify and Support colleagues in need of help
3. Managing Mental Health Self-Care
4. Creating a Supportive Culture & Encouraging Help-Seeking behaviour for mental wellness at work

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So let us start with section one.

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Mental Health Stigma in the Workplace



Stress has nothing to do with
how many hours you work



And everything to do with how
you feel during those hours

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A lot of people believe that stress and mental health in general is something that they should be able to handle themselves. Oftentimes people will keep the issues to themselves and then successfully cope with the issues. How most people deal with mental health is completely different from how we deal with our physical health.

For example, if you have a high fever, what do you do? you are likely to take some medication, probably anything that you can get from the supermarket or over the counter, then rest. What if your fever continues and does not go down? you are likely to visit the doctor at a clinic or a hospital nearby and, hopefully, the doctor will give you a stronger medication and for you to rest. And I am quite sure that you will not wait for more than two to three days to seek help if the fever does not go down.

What if you have mental health issues? How long would it take for you to get help? One week? Two weeks? A month? It is likely that you will persist to go to work, complete your tasks, and ignore the symptoms such as low mood, inability to concentrate at work, and constant worrying.

People with physical illnesses are likely to address the issues almost right away. However, when it comes to mental health, people often feel that it is not something that they can seek help and support.

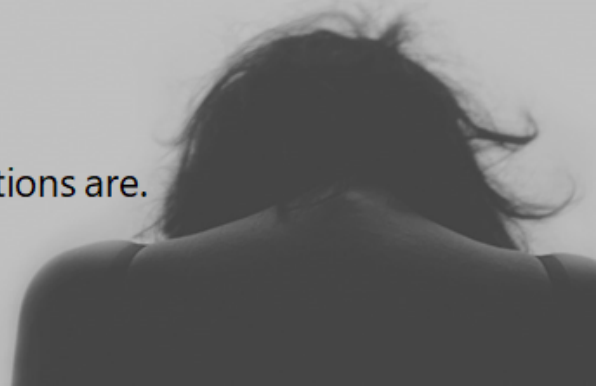
This is the mental health stigma that we hope to reduce in the workplace. Do you know what is the average time it takes for someone with depression to seek help? Years! Furthermore, 50% of people with depression do not seek help in their lifetime. Imagine having a fever or flu that does not go away for more than a year. I do not wish for anyone to go through that at all.

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It is therefore important that we address this particular mental health stigma by providing support when needed. While there are many mental health issues relating to the workplace, I will be focusing on stress, depression, anxiety, and the general descriptions of what they really are. It is important to know and be aware of the various issues that can happen at the workplace.

Science of Stress: What is it?

- Stress is **tension, strain, or pressure** from a **situation** that requires us to **use, adapt, or develop new coping skills**.
- **Adrenaline** is a chemical naturally produced in our body as a **response to stress**
- Stress can be **positive** or **negative**.
- **PERCEPTION** plays a key role in interpreting how stressful situations are.



Let us start with stress. Technically, stress is tension, strain, or pressure from a situation that requires us to use, adapt, or develop new coping skills. It affects how our bodies respond to a situation. And stress can be positive or negative. The keyword that you need to focus on is perception. It is how we view the situation that affects our level of stress. It is the reason why some people become more stressed in certain situations, while others in the same situation, do not feel the stress at all.

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What We Know About STRESS

- It is natural
- We all experience it
- It is not a weakness

In summary, what we know about stress is that it is natural. It is a response to a situation or environment that we are in. It can be positive or negative. And because it is a natural response, we have all experienced stress before. Therefore, it is not a weakness, we all experience it.

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Science of Stress: Types of Stresses

Eustress:

- a type of stress that is fun and exciting, and keeps us vital

Acute Stress:

- a very short-term type of stress that can either be positive (eustress) or negative (distress)

Episodic Acute Stress:

- where acute stress seems to run rampant and be a way of life, creating a life of relative chaos

Chronic Stress:

- the type of stress that seems never-ending and inescapable



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In order to cope with stress, we need to understand the different types of stress that we have. Here are the four types of stresses. As I go through this list, take your time to reflect and identify the type of stress that you often have.

Let us start with Eustress. Eustress is the type of stress that is more fun and exciting. And if you like to go on a rollercoaster ride, you are likely to be familiar with the sensations such as heart beating a little faster, sweaty palms, shaking and/or sweating as you are queuing up to get into the rollercoaster. It can be quite stressful, but it is the fun and exciting type.

Acute Stress is something more of a short-term stress. It comes, but once you deal with it, it goes away and it does not come back. For example, if you are asked to speak in front of a huge crowd, and it is not something that you often do, you are probably stressed about it. you are likely to be nervous, but once you have completed it and step down from the stage, it is done. You do not feel any more stress, the stress is gone.

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On the other hand, Episodic Acute Stress is the type of stress that comes and goes away, but comes back again. It is almost like a cycle- a way of life. Dealing with monthly accounts or working through a project cycle are some work examples of Episodic Acute Stress. The stress comes and goes as you attend to it, but you know that it will come back.

The most worrying type of stress is Chronic Stress. This is the type of stress that seems never ending. And I am not talking about the amount of work that people have at work. I am talking about the feeling that people have that they feel they are not able to handle the situation, that their situation is helpless and hopeless and nothing that they can do will change the situation that they are in. Chronic stress really makes people feel that it is something that they cannot escape. It is something that drains the energy and make people not want to seek help.

My hope is that most of the stresses you have are a mixture of Eustress, Acute Stress, or perhaps Episodic Acute Stress. If you sense that you have Chronic Stress, it is best for you to talk to someone- a counselor, coach, or psychologist so that you can work through what is happening right now in your life.

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**What are things that
cause **STRESS** to
people?**

*It can be anything, nothing is
too insignificant, as long as it
matters to you.*

Just take a moment to list down some things that usually causes stress to you or the people around you. It can be anything, nothing is too insignificant as long as it matters to you.

Stress can come from anything. It can be a deadline, lack of resources, dealing with people at work or people in your own family. It can even be due to personal expectations such as wanting everything to go well, beating yourself up for the mistake or labeling yourself as a failure. What stresses you may not be what causes stress to others. What causes stress to others may not be the cause of stress to you.

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Stress: Signs and Symptoms

Cognitive Symptoms	Emotional Symptoms
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Memory problems▪ Inability to concentrate▪ Poor judgment▪ Seeing only the negative▪ Anxious or racing thoughts▪ Constant worrying	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Moodiness▪ Irritability or short temper▪ Agitation, inability to relax▪ Feeling overwhelmed▪ Sense of loneliness and isolation▪ Depression or general unhappiness
Physical Symptoms	Behavioral Symptoms
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Aches and pains▪ Diarrhea or constipation▪ Nausea, dizziness▪ Chest pain, rapid heartbeat▪ Loss of sex drive▪ Frequent colds	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Eating more or less▪ Sleeping too much or too little▪ Isolating yourself from others▪ Procrastinating or neglecting responsibilities▪ Using alcohol, cigarettes, or drugs to relax▪ Nervous habits (e.g. nail biting, pacing)

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Note: There must be CHANGE and CONSISTENCY

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So how do you know if you are stressed? This might surprise you, but a lot of people are not aware of when they are stressed. The first step in making any changes is to be more aware of the changes in ourselves. And, if you remember, I described stress as a natural response to the environment. The slide above shows the signs and symptoms of stress. It is divided into four sections.

As you go through the boxes, do note down the ones that apply to you. All of us have been stressed before, so let us just take some time to check in and reflect on our own stress signs and symptoms.

Let us start with a cognitive symptoms- symptoms that affect our thinking. Stress can affect our memory, concentration and ability to make a decision in general. Sometimes we want the stress to just go away instantly that we choose solutions that might not be the best. Panicking, using anger to deal with the issues at hand, throwing in the towel, leaving work, quitting because we are not able to deal with the situation are some examples.

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Furthermore, when we are stressed, we often see more negativity, perhaps to the extent that every single thing around us is going badly. Everything around us is going wrong and make us worry excessively. Do take some time, check the ones that fits you or the symptoms that you often have.

Moving on to the next box. Emotional symptoms include moodiness, being irritated, agitated, sense of loneliness, and depression in general. The one that I want to focus on is the feeling of isolation and loneliness, feeling that nobody is there to support you feeling that nobody understands, feeling that you put in so much effort in the work that you do but nobody seems to understand that. This is crucial because if you feel that way, you are not going to seek help. A lot of people feel this way as they are going through stress. They feel unappreciated.

As we go from cognitive to emotional to physical symptoms and behavioral, physical and behavioral symptoms are something that are easier for you to observe. This means that if you are using this checklist as a reference for checking in on other people, physical and behavioral symptoms are the ones that can be easily observed. Cognitive and emotions are more internal and therefore not always easily seen by others.

Physical symptoms include aches and pains, diarrhea, constipation, nausea, and loss of energy. Behavioral symptoms include eating more or less, sleeping more or less as these symptoms differ in people. Stress can affect appetite, sleep, relationships and the work quality. Sometimes, people also rely on alcohol, cigarettes, and/or drugs to cope with stress.

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There are two words that you need to remember: Change and Consistency.

Having gone through the checklist above, there might be times that you check many of the boxes. This does not mean that you need to be worried about it. It is only worrying if there is a change- a change in the person's behavior that deviates from the usual, everyday behavior. Consistency includes changes that extends beyond the situation and into every other aspect of life and the changes remains. If the checklist/symptoms are applicable for just one or two days, it should not be something to worry about. However, if the detected changes remain consistent for more than two weeks, it is something for you to be more aware and take action.

Do also note that in some situations some behaviors should not be of concern. For example, under behavioral symptom, we talk about social withdrawal or isolating oneself from others. If you have a colleague who likes to eat lunch with other people, and suddenly this colleague decides to eat lunch by himself or herself. If this change continues for over two weeks, it is something of concern. However, if you have a colleague who just prefers to have lunch alone, then it is not thing for you to worry about. Therefore, the two words: *Change* and *Consistency* are very important.

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Depression: Signs and Symptoms

Cognitive Symptoms	Emotional Symptoms
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Inability to concentrate▪ Seeing only the negative▪ Frequent Self-criticism▪ Indecisiveness▪ Thoughts of death/ suicide	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Moodiness▪ Feeling overwhelmed▪ Sense of loneliness and isolation▪ Sadness, guilt, and/or anger▪ Feelings of helplessness or hopelessness
Physical Symptoms	Behavioral Symptoms
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Aches and pains▪ Chronic fatigue▪ Weight gain or weight loss▪ Loss of sex drive▪ Frequent colds	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Withdrawal from others▪ Not going out▪ Procrastinating or neglecting responsibilities▪ No longer been doing things they used to enjoy▪ Sleeping too much or too little

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Note: There must be CHANGE and CONSISTENCY

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Let us talk about depression. Depression is a condition that affects how we feel, think and do things. Depression can affect us over a long period of time if we do not seek help. It affects the ability for us to perform daily tasks, including work. Depression is characterized by a number of feelings including sadness, feeling blues, having low interest, low appetite, sleep changes, fatigue and feelings of guilt or worthlessness.

Above are four sections describing the signs and symptoms of depression. The cognitive symptoms of depression share many similarities with stress. It is also common for people experiencing depression to see only the negatives. They may describe and belief that they are a failure and blame themselves. These are some of the common things that they might say:

- Nothing good would ever happen to me
- I am worthless
- Life is not worth living for

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The way that they see and think will affect how they feel emotionally. Therefore, it is not surprising that the negative thoughts contributes to the experience of low mood- feeling overwhelmed and alone as well as feeling of helplessness and hopelessness.

Physical symptoms include experiencing low energy. Depression can also affect appetite, weight gain or weight loss.

Behavioral symptoms can include isolation and withdrawal from the community and people in general. Depression can also affect the ability to complete work on time and their ability to enjoy something that they like to do in the past.

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Anxiety: Signs and Symptoms

Cognitive Symptoms	Emotional Symptoms
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Anxious or racing thoughts▪ Constant worrying▪ Inability to concentrate	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Agitation, inability to relax▪ Feeling overwhelmed▪ Fear of things going out of control/dying▪ Sense of loneliness and isolation
Physical Symptoms	Behavioral Symptoms
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Muscle Tension▪ Nausea, dizziness▪ Chest pain, rapid heartbeat▪ Difficult Breathing▪ Dry mouth▪ Excessive Sweating▪ Trembling	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Poor Sleep▪ Nervous habits (e.g. nail biting, pacing)▪ Hampered ability to express self▪ Daily functioning is affected

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Note: There must be CHANGE and CONSISTENCY

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People suffering from anxiety often feel anxious without any apparent reason, and the resulting anxiety disrupt their daily life. There are different types of anxiety, including panic disorder, phobias, and obsessive compulsive disorder. In general, people feel that they have a lot of worrying thoughts and inability to concentrate which are symptoms under the cognitive category.

Emotional symptoms include being more agitated, feeling overwhelmed. These cognitive and emotional symptoms also affect their physical symptoms.

Anxiety can affect muscle tension, increase aches and pains, as well as digestion, nausea, and diarrhea. Anxiety can also cause trembling, excessive sweating, and dry mouth. Difficulty breathing is another symptom. Anxiety and panic causes people to breathe a lot faster sending a message to the brain that confirms that their worries are true. It can be a vicious cycle to be in.

Behavioral symptoms include difficulty falling asleep and having complete rest. Anxiety can also affect appetite, increase soothing/coping behaviors such as nail biting.

In this section, we have covered the signs and symptoms of stress, depression and anxiety. Just remember that as you go through this list of symptoms and signs, make sure that there are *change* and *consistency*. We should be concerned only when there is a change. A change in the person's behavior from the usual everyday behavior, and it is consistent. Change should exist beyond the situation that they are in and into other areas of their life. It affects the work and home and it affects them over a long period of time.