Managing Health & Wellbeing at Work

Workbook

Module 2: Fostering a Supportive Workplace Environment

Section 2: Identify and Support Colleague In Need of Help

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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.

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.

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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Section 2: Identify and Support Colleague In Need of Help
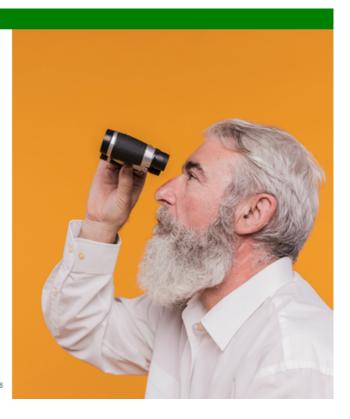
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While you can use the symptoms discussed earlier to identify and observe your colleague for signs of stress, depression or anxiety, it is hard to do so in the midst of a very busy day or a project or just work in general. A lot of cognitive and emotional symptoms can be hidden and can go undetected by others. The aim of this module is not to train you to become a psychologist, a health worker or a counselor. It is to give you a better awareness of the common mental health challenges people have at work and the importance of providing support for people around us, especially if the mental health stigma is still very strong.

Behavioral Indicator

- Absenteeism
- Confusion or Difficulty in Concentration
- Poor Relationship on the Job
- Change in Work Patterns
- Lowered Job Efficiency
- Safety
- Others

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In this particular section, we will be covering behavioral indicators that are linked to work to make it easier for you to identify colleagues in need of support. These behavior indicators can be used as a guide for you to evaluate if someone requires support. As mentioned, behaviors are visible and easier for us to observe as compared to cognitive or emotional symptoms. These behaviors are generally enough to identify colleague who requires support but do not use it as a medical health checklist.

Before diving into this list, do remember that we all have our off days and down moments. Some of our own behaviors might check some of these items. That does not mean that something is wrong with us. As I mentioned in the previous section, there must be change and consistency.

Behavioral Indicator

- **Absenteeism**
- Confusion or Difficulty in Concentration
- Poor Relationship on the Job
- Change in Work Patterns
- Lowered Job Efficiency
- Safety
- Others

- Repeated Absences
- Excessive Tardiness
- Leaving Work Early
- Increasingly improbable excuses for absences and/or tardiness
- Prolonged absences from work
- Higher absenteeism due to illness

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Researchers have suggested that stress, depression, and anxiety account for over 40% of the sickness absence making it one of the top five major causes of absenteeism in the workplace. There is a strong link between health and mental well-being at work. One of the easiest indicators for you to see if someone needs help is through the number of days or perhaps even hours that they are at work. This includes having repeated absenteeism, excessive tardiness, leaving work early or even being at work but not present. While they are physically present, they may not be able to concentrate and complete what they need to be doing. All these are signs to check on the colleague.

Behavioral Indicator

- Absenteeism
- Confusion or Difficulty in Concentration
- Poor Relationship on the Job
- Change in Work Patterns
- Lowered Job Efficiency
- Safety
- Others

- Difficulty in recalling instructions or details
- Work requires greater effort
- Increasing difficulty in handling complex assignments
- Difficulty in recalling own mistakes

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If you can recall the signs and symptoms of stress, anxiety and depression, one common similarity is the inability to concentrate. People are often preoccupied with thoughts, often times negative and worrying thoughts, that affect the work that they do. Perhaps inability to concentrate during meetings or recalling details discussed earlier. While they are still able to do their work, it requires a lot more effort to complete the tasks when other thoughts and worries cloud the mind. Simple tasks may be easier to complete since these are more automated, more complex assignments or projects that require analysis, calculation, and alertness will suffer if they have difficulties concentrating.

Behavioral Indicator

- Absenteeism
- Confusion or Difficulty in Concentration
- **Poor Relationship on the Job**
- Change in Work Patterns
- Lowered Job Efficiency
- Safety
- Others

- Counterproductive reaction to real or *imagined* criticism
- *Wild or unpredictable* mood swings
- *Unreasonable* resentments and grudges
- Behaviors that are disruptive to others in the workplace

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Sometimes mental health issues surfaces as complaints from fellow colleagues. This is probably one of the more common issues that we hear about because difficulties in working within the team or department can affect team dynamics and productivity at work. While conflicts happen and sometimes necessary within the workplace, the focus here is something happening too often, too much, and too extreme. Remember, if there are changes in consistency, it is a sign to look for support.

Behavioral Indicator

- Absenteeism
- Confusion or Difficulty in Concentration
- Poor Relationship on the Job
- Change in Work Patterns
- Lowered Job Efficiency
- Safety
- Others

- Alternate periods of high and low productivity
- Jobs or tasks take more time than usual
- Increasing difficulty in getting job done

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This is another behavior indicator that should be easy to identify. Changes in work pattern includes an alternative a period of high and low in productivity, taking more time to do the job that usually take a lesser time, or difficulty in getting the task completed.

Behavioral Indicator

- Absenteeism
- Confusion or Difficulty in Concentration
- Poor Relationship on the Job
- Change in Work Patterns
- Lowered Job Efficiency
- Safety
- Others

- Missed deadlines
- Mistakes due to inattention or poor judgment

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Job efficiency in the workplace is related to how effective one can complete the work or task. These are links to the individual's goals or KPI. Missed deadlines, having more mistakes - these can be telltale signs that something is not right.

There are many reasons why people cannot complete the task. Sometimes, we fall into a thinking error that make us think of the worst in people and attribute their mistakes or shortcomings to their personality and quality.

Can't finish in time? He's irresponsible.

Poor quality of work? She's lazy.

Is it really true? This cognitive bias is called Fundamental Attribution Error, which is the tendency for people to overemphasize personal characteristics and ignore the situational factors in judging other's behavior. This cognitive bias makes us believe that others do bad things because they are bad people. We are inclined to ignore the situational factors that might have played a role.

Ironically, if the same situation happened to us, it is highly unlikely that we will blame our own characteristics. Case in point, if you drive and happen to cut another driver off, it is unlikely that you would say, "I am a reckless driver." You are likely to have other reasons for it such as, "I am in an emergency" or perhaps, you might just blame the other driver by saying that, "They are just driving too slow."

The Fundamental Attribution Error helps us to understand why we often judge others harshly while letting ourselves off the hook by rationalizing our own behavior.

Why is this important? To create a positive work culture, we need to reduce blame and be more kind to one another. It sounds easy but sometimes it is not. Instead of asking why they cannot complete the tasks in time, first check how they are doing personally and what are the difficulties that they have.

Do not be too quick to blame someone for their characteristic or personality. Missed deadlines, delays, bad quality of work are unacceptable, but before we punish anyone or blame them, check in with them first.

Behavioral Indicator

- Absenteeism
- Confusion or Difficulty in Concentration
- Poor Relationship on the Job
- Change in Work Patterns
- Lowered Job Efficiency
- Safety
- Others

- Higher than average on-the-job accidents
- Taking needless risks
- Disregarding the safety of others

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Workplace safety is the utmost concern across industry. It is essential for organizations to create policies and guidelines for our employees to adhere to. On the employee's side, it is their responsibility to stick to the policies given for everyone's safety.

As mentioned, poor mental health can result in cognitive decline resulting in poor decision making. People sometimes take extreme risk. Imagine if you are working in an airline industry as a pilot or a trader in the finance industry dealing with millions of dollars. This could result in catastrophic consequences if you do not follow the guidelines or protocols given. It is therefore important to observe if people around you are following proper guidelines to ensure that they and everyone around them are safe.

Behavioral Indicator

- Absenteeism
- Confusion or Difficulty in Concentration
- Poor Relationship on the Job
- Change in Work Patterns
- Lowered Job Efficiency
- Safety
- Others

- Changes in personal appearance or hygiene
- Loss of interest in job
- Recent life experiences

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Changes in appearance, poor hygiene, or loss of interest in job in general can be another telltale sign. It is also important to check if something has happened to them recently.

Recent changes in their life can trigger mental health related issues. Grieving the loss of loved one, divorce or an end to a long-term relationship, fear of safety for the loved ones, or a life-altering medical diagnosis can affect people psychologically.

Remember, humans are complex. We feel and we respond to the changes around us. We experience a variety of emotions. We feel happy when things are going well. We also feel sad and behave in ways that are aligned to that sadness in our lives. And this is natural. We are not robots that can be programmed to turn on or off, or close certain functions within the processing unit. What happens around us will definitely affect us.

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In this section, we have covered a number of behavior indicators that should be easy to observe in the workplace. These indicators can help us to provide support to others. If you noticed any of these behaviors, it is much easier if you already have built a good relationship with the people around you and to approach them and check in and see if they need support.