



Mental Health  
Commission  
of Canada

Commission de  
la santé mentale  
du Canada



# RECOGNIZING DECLINING MENTAL HEALTH IN EMPLOYEES

*“Some members of my team are performing well but have become noticeably withdrawn. Others are suddenly missing deadlines after years of great performance. I’m not sure what’s going on or how to approach the situation.”*

# 1

## Look for changes in mood, behaviour, or performance

When an employee deviates from their typical attitude, behaviour, or performance, it may be a sign of declining mental health. Changes in mood or behaviour can be brushed aside if work performance is consistent, but it’s important to be mindful of *all* patterns of change. These changes can be as subtle as leaving the camera off during meetings or a decline in personal grooming. At times, something may just seem “off.”

These observations can also lead to important conversations about mental health.

### You could begin by saying something like:

- “You’ve been doing a great job, but I notice you haven’t been as involved as usual in team meetings. Is everything OK?”
- “I’m concerned about you. I’ve noticed some changes in your work lately (give examples). How are you doing?”

# 2

## Create a safe space for having open conversations about mental health

Remind your team members how important it is for them to reach out if they are struggling, whether they’re working from home, in the office, or in the field. Let them know you will make time if they need to talk, and you are there to support them. Also bear in mind that they might want to talk privately or have additional support or representation during a discussion (e.g., from a health and safety rep, union rep, or another trusted employee).

If someone does approach you, be sure to turn off distractions and practise [active listening](#) so they have the chance to share freely. Offer empathy and compassion, along with an assurance that you’ll do your best to assist in any way possible, whether that means making accommodations, helping them connect with resources, or simply setting aside future times to talk. After the meeting, try to schedule a little buffer time to give you both a chance to reset before moving on to your next tasks.

For more guidance, take a look at our tip sheets on [helping your team](#) and [helping someone in mental distress](#).



# 3

## Have regular check-ins and meetings

Regular check-ins will help you recognize changes in each team member's usual mood, behaviour, and performance. These one-on-ones can also strengthen your personal relationship and build the kind of trust that will make employees more likely to get in touch with you if there's a problem.

It's equally important to hold regular team meetings that aren't about work – the kind that give everyone a chance to simply check in. Casual meetings can help build relationships, reduce isolation, and provide a forum to celebrate personal victories. Even for meetings focused on work, always leave space to talk about life outside of it.

# 4

## Share internal and external resources

Make sure your team knows what internal programs are available (employee benefits, employee and family assistance programs, etc.) and how to access and use them. While frequent use of mental health benefits was once considered an organizational red flag, we now know it's a positive indicator showing that employees are prioritizing their mental health and not letting stigma stop them from seeking help.

You can also let them know about useful external resources, such as those at the Mental Health Commission of Canada's [COVID-19 resource hub](#). A collection of resources created specifically for leaders is also available in the [Building Mental Health into Operations During a Pandemic](#) toolkit.

# 5

## Consider The Working Mind and/or Mental Health First Aid training

[The Working Mind](#) is an evidence-based course on addressing mental health stigma in the workplace. It also builds resilience for participants while showing them how to recognize signs of declining mental health, in themselves and others. A variation of the course developed specifically for managers includes strategies to support mental wellness for team members. Whether for yourself or your whole team, the course is a powerful tool for fostering awareness of mental health problems and improving attitudes toward them.

[Mental Health First Aid](#) (MHFA) is a trauma-informed, evidence-based course that gives participants the skills they need to assist a person experiencing a mental health crisis (or a decline in mental well-being) until further treatment is obtained. Having dedicated MHFA-trained employees is a valuable workplace resource, particularly during a crisis.



For more information, visit [mentalhealthcommission.ca/covid19/](https://mentalhealthcommission.ca/covid19/)



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