

Identifying a mental health issue in the workplace



Given that over 45% of Australians will suffer from a mental health condition at some point in their lifetimes, it should come as no surprise that the negative characteristics associated with mental illness often reveals itself in the workplace...

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When someone is suffering from poor mental health, it usually manifests in increased misconduct or poor work output, which inadvertently alerts management to a perceived performance issue.

Despite what we know about mental health, when an employee starts demonstrating uncharacteristic signs of misconduct or poor performance, the usual knee-jerk reaction for management is to performance manage or discipline the person.

However, it's important to recognise that these behavioural or performance changes can often be caused by a mental health issue. The quandary for managers is knowing when these issues are caused by mental health problems and when they are not.

Is the behaviour personality-driven?

Before investigating any behavioural changes, it's important to know the difference between a mental health condition and a personality-driven behaviour.

The former is reflected in changed behaviour, while the latter is continual, unchanged and often unchangeable. In other words, you're looking for a change in the norm when deciphering whether or not a colleague is suffering from a mental health issue. When the misconduct has always been there, it is less likely to be mental-health-driven.

Characteristic changes to look out for

Unfortunately, it's often difficult to know for sure if someone is suffering from a mental health issue unless they tell you themselves. But there are several things to look out for to help you reach this conclusion.

1) Changes in work habits

- Does the person appear to demonstrate a lack of motivation?
- Is their concentration levels and productivity lower?
- Is the productivity/behavioural problem a change, or has the problem always been there?

2) Changes in physical appearance

- Has there been a sudden change in the person's appearance?
- Are they unkempt (lack of personal grooming)?
- Are they wearing 'daggy' clothing consistently?

3) Increased absenteeism or tardiness

- Does the person turn up late for work consistently?
- Are they regularly late for meetings?
- Do they forget meetings altogether?
- Do they complain about aches and pains, excessive fatigue, or general tiredness consistently?

4) Changes in demeanour

- Does the person appear more nervous talking to colleagues/clients?
- Do they appear more restless?
- Do they demonstrate more irritability?

5) Increased outbursts and mood swings

- Have you noticed more angry outbursts from the person?
- Are the person's mood swings more regular?
- Have they been flouting rules?
- Are they more aggressive/defensive than they used to be?

6) Avoiding interaction

- Is the person not communicating like they once were?
- Do they suddenly avoid going out with colleagues?
- Do they avoid communicating through group calls or even emails?

Once you believe someone is suffering from a mental health condition, the next stage is to offer support. Although this can seem daunting, Converge has a number of programs and EAP support services to help. Call one of our friendly team on **1300 687 327** to learn more.