

# 10 TIPS FOR MANAGING EMPLOYEE MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES



- 1. Understand what it is.** The [Public Health Agency of Canada](#) defined mental illness as “changes in thinking, mood, and/or behaviour associated with significant distress and impaired functioning over an extended period of time.”
- 2. Recognize that it impacts many people.** Approximately [20%](#) of Canadians will personally experience a mental illness during their lifetime; the [WHO](#) noted that 5 of the 10 leading causes of disability are related to mental disorders.
- 3. Appreciate that it's a challenge.** Coping with mental illness can be the biggest challenge a person can face – both due to the specific condition but also because of the stigma and shame that often comes with diagnosis.
- 4. Watch for signs.** Look for changes in behaviour, mood, quality/quantity of work, and increased absenteeism. Know your employees well enough to [notice changes in behaviour](#).
- 5. Get the facts.** There are countless myths about mental health issues; don't draw uninformed conclusions. [Read](#) about mental illness, especially as it relates to [employment](#).
- 6. Know what you can, and can't, ask.** Meet privately and be prepared. Ensure you are aware of your organization's policies around accommodation and, if relevant, information about your employee assistance benefits. Don't try to name or diagnose the illness; instead focus on [changes in performance or attitude](#).
- 7. Respect an employee's right to privacy.** If you've noticed a change in behaviour, it is likely that others have as well. Your employee has a right to keep his/her mental illness confidential; [discuss how to handle questions that come up from other members of the team](#).
- 8. Accept that stress is a valid, and serious, mental health issue.** Stress claims cost up to 10% of a company's earnings, resulting in a total cost of [\\$12 billion per year](#) for Canadian employers, and a \$17 billion per year loss in productivity from the Canadian economy.
- 9. Clarify what “I'm stressed” really means.** Talk with employees about what's stressful for each of them, rather than making assumptions based on your own experience of stress. Some may feel overloaded at work; others may be looking for more structure in their jobs. Although two employees may have similar levels of work-related stress, one may be more impacted as a result of limited coping resources or personal strain that is taking a toll.
- 10. Be proactive.** Work-life balance initiatives, family-friendly policies, wellness programs, employee assistance benefits, coaching, training, and career development initiatives can cost far less than expenses related to employees suffering from work-related stress, burnout, anxiety, or depression.



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