



# GOOD to GO?

## EMPLOYER TOOLKIT

Your Guide to Creating a Mentally Healthy Workplace



Developed in conjunction  
with Black Dog Institute



**Black Dog  
Institute**



## MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS INITIATIVE

### INTRODUCTION

#### Why Should You Care About Mental Health?

As an employer of apprentices/trainees, you not only want to get the best out of your staff, you also want to help them succeed in their studies. Creating a mentally healthy workplace is a great way to do this. Mentally healthy workplaces are positive and productive. They are environments where people want to come to work. They can play a large role in promoting and maintaining our mental health and wellbeing. This in turn means your apprentices or trainees are in the right mindset to take in and retain information.

#### Facts and figures<sup>1</sup>

**One in six working-age Australians are currently experiencing mental illness, most commonly depression and anxiety.**

- If you work in a place with more than 10 people, there's a good chance at least one or two people in your team are living with a mental illness.
- Further to that, an additional one in six of us will have symptoms associated with mental ill health – such as worry, sleep problems and fatigue – affecting our ability to function well at work.
- That's one in every three people in each Australian workplace currently experiencing some kind of mental health challenge.

**Mental illness is now the leading cause of sickness absence and long-term work incapacity in Australia.**

- More workers are absent due to stress and anxiety than flu and other physical illnesses or injuries.
- Mental illness is also associated with high levels of presenteeism. That's when someone remains at work even though they're experiencing symptoms, resulting in lower levels of productivity.

**Mental health conditions like depression and anxiety, are costing Australian businesses between \$11 and \$12 billion dollars each year through:**

- Staff being absent from work (sick days)
- Reduced work performance and productivity (presenteeism - at work but not working well)
- Increased staff turnover rates and associated recruitment and training costs
- Compensation claims.

**Given these figures, it makes perfect sense to address mental health and wellbeing in each and every workplace.**

### **Why We Care About Mental Health**

At The Apprenticeship Community, our focus is on helping businesses, apprentices and trainees succeed. Through our work in the WA community, we have come to recognise that mental health is one of the key factors that impacts whether an apprentice/trainee remains engaged with their employer and in their training. We want to help employers and their employees to build mentally healthy workplaces, where everyone is set up for success. Which is why we created our Good to Go Mental Health Awareness Initiative.

#### **VIDEO**

The Apprenticeship Community's  
**GOOD TO GO MENTAL HEALTH  
AWARENESS INITIATIVE**

click to play



### **About This Toolkit**

This toolkit has been created in conjunction with our Good to Go partner, the Black Dog Institute, and is designed to help employers to better understand mental health and its impact on the workplace. It contains important facts and information about mental health and steps that you can follow to make your workplace a supportive and positive environment for your apprentices, trainees and employees.

Throughout this toolkit you'll find links to additional resources you and your employees can access to create a mentally healthy workplace. You can also find all our *Good to Go* resources here:

[www.apprenticeshipcommunity.com.au/goodtogo](http://www.apprenticeshipcommunity.com.au/goodtogo)



## RECOGNISING THE SIGNS

Identifying mental health risks or issues in the workplace is one of the first steps to creating a positive, nurturing environment for your apprentices, trainees and other employees.

### VIDEO

#### HOW MENTALLY HEALTHY IS YOUR WORKPLACE?

By Black Dog

[click to play](#)



## Understanding Common Mental Health Issues

### Stress

Stress is often confused with anxiety, but it is not a diagnosable mental illness. It is a 'normal' condition, experienced by everyone, and involves an emotional, physical or mental response to events that cause bodily or mental tension. It can therefore be thought of as a state of 'readiness' – involving both physical and psychological responses and is associated with arousal – the "fight or flight" response. Within limits, stress has positive effects on motivation and performance, enabling us to meet deadlines, think and respond quickly.

Too little stress can cause problems. For example, it might be hard to motivate yourself to complete a task if there is no deadline to work towards. Too little stress can also allow time for negative ruminations, feelings of not making progress or failure, reduce the amount of positive feedback (internal or external) and lower the sense of personal satisfaction. All of which can contribute to mental health issues.

Too much stress though and performance deteriorates. When stress is sustained for too long a period, health can also deteriorate. Research studies have now shown a direct link between chronic exposure to stress, prolonged activation of the body's normal physiological stress response and increased risk of depression and anxiety.

### Depression

We all feel sad, moody or low from time to time, but some people experience these feelings intensely, for long periods of time and sometimes for no apparent reason. 1 in 6 people will experience depression during their lifetime. Depression influences not only how you feel but also how you think, behave and interact with other people.



### Common signs of depression include:

- Lowered self-esteem or self-worth
- Change in sleep patterns, insomnia or broken sleep
- Changes in appetite or weight
- Less ability to control emotions such as pessimism, anger, guilt,
- Irritability and anxiety
- Varying emotions throughout the day, for example, feeling worse in the morning and better as the day progresses
- Reduced capacity to experience pleasure: you can't enjoy what's happening now, nor look forward to anything with pleasure
- Reduced pain tolerance: you are less able to tolerate aches and pains and may have a host of new ailments
- Reduced or absent sex drive
- Poor concentration and memory
- Reduced motivation: it doesn't seem worth the effort to do anything, things seem meaningless
- Lowered energy levels

If these signs persist for most of the day for most days over a two week period, and they interfere with your ability to manage at home and at work, then you might benefit from getting an assessment by a skilled professional.

### Anxiety

Just as there are times when you might feel down, but are not clinically depressed, there are times when you will feel anxious, but do not have an anxiety disorder. It's normal to feel anxious in high pressure situations such as a job interview, when you're speaking in public, or when you're experiencing change in your life or work environment and you're uncertain what the future will hold. To a degree, this anxiety can help us, making us stay focussed and alert.

Anxiety becomes a problem when you start to feel anxious most of the time and about even minor things, to the point where your worry is out of control and interfering with your day to day life.

### Anxiety disorders are a mix of:

- Psychological symptoms: frequent or excessive worry, poor concentration, specific fears or phobias e.g. fear of dying or fear of losing control
- Physical symptoms: fatigue, irritability, sleeping difficulties, general restlessness, muscle tension, upset stomach, sweating and difficulty breathing
- Behavioural changes: including procrastination, avoidance, difficulty making decisions and social withdrawal

To be diagnosed with an anxiety disorder, a combination of symptoms is present on most days for more than six months and interferes with your ability to function at work or at home.



It is common to experience a low mood secondary to excessive worry and the two conditions – clinical depression and anxiety disorder can occur at the same time.



### **Tailored Training for the construction Industry**

The Apprenticeship Community has teamed up with MATES in Construction to provide general awareness training for leaders to support building mentally healthy work places. In this free, face-to-face training, you'll learn how to promote a healthier workplace for your staff, boosting retention, productivity and general wellbeing. Participants will find out how to spot people in the workplace who are experiencing mental health issues, and how to assist them to address these issues.

This training is tailored to employers and managers in the building and construction industry and for companies who service the construction industry. It is a great introduction for employers and managers who want to learn about mental health in the workplace.

*To find out more:*

contact us on **08 6165 3362** or email [WAadmin@apprenticeshipcommunity.com.au](mailto:WAadmin@apprenticeshipcommunity.com.au)

### **Observing Changes in Behaviour**

If you notice any change in behaviour or performance in a colleague or team member always consider whether it is due to a mental health issue.

### **The types of changes in behaviour could include some of the following:**

- Change in routines (stopping participation in sport, social activities)
- Talking about unusual/disturbing thoughts
- Reporting or demonstrating symptoms associated with high levels of anxiety and/or lowered mood
- Lowered concentration and performance
- Reduced motivation
- Increased absenteeism
- Social withdrawal or isolation
- Decreased personal care
- Use of drugs (illegal and/or legal) or alcohol
- Reduced activity and energy
- High levels of irritability or aggression

If you see changes like these, and you feel you can talk to person because you know them well or you have some responsibility for them, don't be afraid to ask if things are OK. They might want to talk – or they might not – but just letting someone know that you've noticed and that you care can make an enormous difference.

## 10 Mental Health Risk Factors in the Workplace



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Research has shown that there are a number of factors that can impact mental health in the workplace. How does your workplace stack up?

### 1. Demand and control

Jobs that are characterised by high emotional and/or cognitive demands have a higher rate of sickness absence due to mental illness. This is particularly the case when the role involves a high job demand (eg time pressure) but low job control (eg low-decision making capacity). Typical examples of these workforces include teachers, nurses, lawyers and industrial workers.

Apprentices and trainees are typically investing significant mental and emotional energy while they learn, but will experience very little control over their work tasks, particularly in the early stages of their apprenticeship/traineeship.

### 2. Opportunity and security

Roles involving variety, task identity, significance and appropriate feedback are more likely to be associated with higher levels of workplace wellbeing. Job insecurity, lack of appropriate resources, lack of learning opportunity and a disproportionate pressure to perform are associated with poor workplace mental health.

*If an apprentice/trainee is feeling as though they are not receiving sufficient feedback on their progress, or that they are not being offered the opportunity to try new tasks, they could be at risk of poor mental health.*

### 3. Trauma

Occupations with regular exposure to traumatic events have an increased risk of mental health problems including depression and post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). This includes police officers, paramedics, fire fighters, military personnel, medical staff and journalists. A recent review estimated that 1 in 10 emergency workers currently suffer from symptoms of PTSD.

## Did you know...

... that The Apprenticeship Community can assist with training your managers? Talk to us about the Certificate IV and Diploma of Leaderships and Management to enhance the capability of the leaders in your business

### 4. Relationships with colleagues and managers

Team relationships, and the focus on relationships placed by leadership, affect individual mental health outcomes. In many occupations, interpersonal relations are the most frequent source of workplace problems and stress, particularly if indicative of workplace bullying.

*Social support in the workplace, as well as perceived support from the organisation as a whole, appears to have a protective effect against mental health difficulties.*

### 5. Leadership training

Managers and supervisors play a clear role in the welfare of staff. The actions and opinions of someone in a leadership role can have a potent influence on a staff member at risk of mental illness. Research shows that managers provided with mental health training feel more confident in discussing mental health matters and have staff that display reduced psychological distress. Additionally, an inspiring, motivated and caring leadership style has been associated with enhanced mental wellbeing.

### 6. Organisational change

Common organisational activities such as restructuring and downsizing can result in increased job strain and insecurity. Research shows that even those staff members who were not at risk of job loss experienced increased rate of mental illness, sickness absence and disability. Humanising an organisation and planning how any changes take place can provide a level of support resulting in improved job satisfaction and mood.

### 7. Recognition and rewards

Recognition and reward in a work environment refers to appropriate acknowledgement and gratitude of an employee's efforts in a fair and timely manner. Two major research reviews have suggested that an imbalance



between effort and reward results in an increased risk of mental disorder. Additionally, these factors may indicate disconnect between organisational culture and employee expectations.

*We are all motivated by different kinds of rewards. Some apprentices/trainees might respond best to extra time off, or bonus pay, whereas others will be inspired by public recognition. It's important to get to know what rewards or recognition will be of most value to your individual apprentices and trainees.*

## 8. Safety and environment

A mentally healthy workplace provides a both a physically and psychological safe climate for employees. This includes a commitment to stress management, addressing of environmental triggers such as poor lighting or noise exposure, and participation of all levels of management to the development of safety frameworks.

*Safety is particularly important for workplaces that employ apprentices/trainees as these staff are often inexperienced and at greater risk of workplace injury. It is important that apprentices/trainees are well monitored and understand the safety risks of their job.*

## 9. Stigma

Mental illness remains the most stigmatised group of disorders in the workplace. Employers frequently state they would not employ someone with a known mental disorder and employees will not risk disclosing any mental challenges. A responsible workplace should make every effort to reduce stigma and encourage help-seeking and support.

## 10. Work-Life balance

Even with an understanding and proactive employer, individual employees may experience personal crises that will impact their productivity and ability to remain at work. Life experiences such as marital distress, financial strain or dependent children can exacerbate work stress and result in strain, illness and sickness absence. In addition, other issues such as substance misuse, poor diet and limited exercise may be directly related to the organisation culture as well as personal choices. Research has shown that job satisfaction, organisational support and resilience training can have a protective effect on individuals at risk.

*The Apprenticeship Community offers free mentoring services to all our apprentices and trainees, to help manage any issues, both inside and outside work, that make by impacting on a person's ability to work and study. Mentoring is a great way to provide your staff an outlet to address life issues without the worry that their privacy is being invaded.*



### **eBook - Retaining Apprentices and Trainees**

This guide contains helpful information for coaching and managing apprentices/trainees. Download [HERE](#)

# CREATING A SUPPORTIVE WORKPLACE

In this section you'll find some handy tips and step by step guides to help you build a mentally healthy workplace.

## VIDEO

### KEEPING YOUR TEAM HEALTHY

By Black Dog

[click to play](#)



## 6 Ways to Make Your Workplace Mentally Healthy

There are lots of simple things everyone can do to make a mentally healthy workplace. You don't need to spend a lot of money, and you can engage all the team to make it happen.

1 Smart work design

2 Building personal resilience

3 Building better work cultures

4 Increasing awareness of mental health

5 Supporting staff recovery from mental illness

6 Early intervention

### 1. Smart work design

- Establish flexible working hours.
- Address workplace culture of when, where and how you work.
- Involve staff in deciding how work is performed. Listen to people's ideas about how to get their work done.
- Monitor staff workloads.
- Ensure your physical work environment is safe and encouraging.

## 2. Building personal resilience

- Provide stress management and resilience training for those in high-risk jobs, such as emergency service workers exposed to significant levels of trauma or stress.
- Use evidence-based approaches such as cognitive behaviour therapy.
- Provide and encourage regular physical activity opportunities like lunchtime yoga, jogging or meditation.
- Encourage mentoring and coaching

## 3. Building better work cultures

- Learn how to have conversations with people you're concerned about and encourage all staff to look out for each other.
- Provide mental health education to the whole team.
- Reduce stigma. Speak openly about mental health conditions.
- Ensure senior staff are engaged in mental health promotion and providing a safe and positive workplace.
- Implement a mental health policy including zero tolerance of bullying and discrimination.

## 4. Increasing awareness of mental health

- Provide access to mental health information. Leave brochures about mental health on team notice boards.
- Talk openly about mental health at work.
- Participate in events like World Mental Health Day and RU OK? Day.
- Conduct mental health awareness programs and mandatory training.
- Include mental health development in staff induction and development.

## 5. Supporting staff recovery from mental illness

- Provide supervisor training on how to support workers recovering from mental illness and stressful life events.
- Facilitate flexible sick leave.
- Modify duties and work schedules when appropriate.
- Provide a supportive environment and ensure no discrimination or bullying occurs.

## 6. Early intervention

- Encourage staff to seek help early.
- Consider wellbeing checks once appropriate supports are in place.
- Provide mental health training so staff can support each other.
- Provide a peer support program for staff.

## Keeping in Touch

Regular, simple, informal conversations help build a sense of belonging and connectedness which has been shown to promote wellbeing. Find the time to ask about the weekend, have a chat about what you watched last night, ask how the holiday went. Or just ask how things are going.

Checking in regularly with our colleagues and team members also means that we are more likely to notice when things are different or their behaviour changes. It can make the person we're talking to more open to sharing information with us, and make a 'difficult' conversation easier because you've already shown that you're interested and care.

### Start the Conversation

If you notice a change in a colleague or team member's behaviour or performance ask yourself if it might be due to an underlying personal or mental health issue, and if you think this is a possibility then why not have a conversation and ask how the person is going?

### Keep these handy pointers in mind:

- Choose a time and a place that suits you both – somewhere private when you both have time to talk
- Talk about the changes you've noticed and ask if they want to talk about anything
- Encourage them to talk, but accept that they might not want to right now
- Listen and show that you're listening – don't jump in with a solution
- Find out if they're ready to look for help and if you can help them do that
- Check in after a few days and see how they're going



## Are you Good to Go?

As leader it's important to start with checking if we are good to go first then your team. Before starting work each day, you should ask yourself one simple question: 'Are you good to go?' Being good to go is not just about having the right tools, safety gear or feeling fit and healthy, it's also about being in a good state of mind. How are you feeling today? Are you tired, stressed or anxious? Are you feeling sad, low or depressed? If the answer is yes, the chances are you're not good to go.

If you are not good to go or your staff are not, check out the resources available to you at [www.apprenticeshipcommunity.com.au/goodtogo](http://www.apprenticeshipcommunity.com.au/goodtogo) or contact **Lifeline** on **13 11 14** (24 hrs a Day).



### How to Ask RU OK?

*RU OK* has some great resources on starting conversations with workmates about their mental health

**RU OK website:** <https://www.ruok.org.au/how-to-ask>

## VIDEO

### IF YOU'RE WORRIED ABOUT SOMEONE, HAVE A CONVERSATION

By Black Dog

click to play



# SUPPORTING YOUR EMPLOYEES

Even if you have worked hard to create a mentally healthy workplace, your apprentices, trainees or other employees may still experience a mental health issue. It's important that you understand your obligations and responsibilities as an employer and the ways in which you can support your team members.

## Employer Obligations

Under the Work Health and Safety Act 2011 workplaces need to prevent harm to the health and safety of workers. This includes physical and mental health. Under the Act, an officer is a person who makes, or participates in making decisions that affect the whole, or a substantial part, of a business or undertaking.

Officers have a duty to be proactive and continuously ensure that the business or undertaking complies with relevant duties and obligations.

An employer must not discriminate against, harass or victimise a person in employment because they have a mental illness.

## Making Reasonable Adjustments

Generally, employers have a positive obligation to make reasonable adjustments for employees and prospective employees experiencing a mental illness. Making reasonable adjustments to work for someone experiencing a period of mental ill health is a legal obligation of all employers and can greatly assist the employee in remaining at work. A failure to make reasonable adjustments for an employee or prospective employee experiencing mental illness can constitute discrimination.

Reasonable adjustments can include changes to the work environment, the work someone does, their workload or hours, or the amount of supervision and support they need.

## Employers are required to make reasonable adjustments for workers experiencing a mental illness, unless:

- The employee could not or cannot adequately perform the inherent requirements of the employment even after the adjustments are made; or
- Making the adjustments would impose an unjustifiable hardship on the employer.

## Looking After Your Own Mental Health

Just as it is important to keep an eye on your employees for any signs of mental health issues, it's also vital you check in on your own feelings.

If you are feeling overwhelmed by work, always seek help with your GP. Your GP has lots of useful resources to help you manage stress and worry with work, and can help you get better.



## Things you can try to achieve a better work-life balance

- Find a job that suits your personality, coping style and ability to manage stress.
- Try online mental health resilience programs like those provided by The Apprenticeship Community's Good to Go initiative.
- Become part of something bigger than yourself such as volunteer for a community group or help others.
- Do something you love. Think of the things you used to enjoy and make time to start doing one of them again.
- Get involved in outside interests that create 'flow' (being so immersed in something you lose all concept of time and effort). People get flow from doing things they enjoy or find challenging, like painting, surfing, solving hard puzzles, playing chess or bridge, gardening, bushwalking, building, sport, playing music and cooking.
- Exercise often for stress release and pleasure.
- Practice mindfulness (being in the moment) to enhance concentration, alleviate anxiety and help sleep. There are lots of resources online to get started.
- Try something new that uses something you're good at. For example, if you're creative, take a new art, sculpting, writing or building class.

### VIDEO

## BUILDING PERSONAL RESILIENCE

By Black Dog

click to play



### Resources for Your Team

We have curated a range of resources that your apprentices, trainees or other employees can use to monitor and manage their own mental health.

You can access the full range of resources at:

[www.apprenticeshipcommunity.com.au/goodto go](http://www.apprenticeshipcommunity.com.au/goodto go)



# GOOD *to GO?*

## MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS INITIATIVE

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Content provided by Black Dog institute



**Black Dog  
Institute**

## THE APPRENTICESHIP COMMUNITY

# CONTACT *US*

Our friendly local team members are ready to make the apprenticeship journey easy for you.

**Call us today on 08 6165 3362  
and join the community.**

Email [info@apprenticeshipcommunity.com.au](mailto:info@apprenticeshipcommunity.com.au)

Web [apprenticeshipcommunity.com.au](http://apprenticeshipcommunity.com.au)