

TIP SHEET #3

TALKING ABOUT YOURSELF

If you find yourself struggling with your mental health there are many different courses of action that you can take to get the support that you may need.

In certain circumstances, you may decide (or be required by health and safety legislation) to talk with your workplace about your mental health condition. Alternatively, a leader or colleague may approach you to offer support.

Tip Sheet 3 explores some hints and tips on deciding whether or not to disclose, and if you do decide to discuss your mental health in the workplace, how to successfully have this type of conversation.

DECIDING TO DISCLOSE

Deciding whether or not to talk with your workplace about your mental health is an important decision that needs to be well considered.

Some reasons to disclose may be:

- Your mental health condition is impacting some areas of work performance such as attendance, quality of work, timeliness of work, ability to work with others effectively or ability to fully participate in certain expectations such as team meetings or presentations.
- Your mental health condition may impact the health and safety of yourself or others.
- Your relationships with others is in some way negatively impacted by your mental health condition and disclosing may assist with developing more positive relationships.

Some reasons not to disclose may be:

- Your mental health condition does not interfere with your work performance at all.
- You feel that disclosing will limit your career in some way.
- You believe that disclosing will threaten your employment either immediately or in the future.
- The culture of your workplace is not a positive, healthy or helpful environment to make a disclosure of this nature in.
- You fear being discriminated against or harassed in some way.

The decision to disclose is going to depend on very specific circumstances and may include weighing up many of the above factors and more. As you are working through this decision it may be helpful to seek advice and support. Some options for seeking counsel on this matter may be:

- Specialist legal and/or HR advice from inside or outside of the workplace
- A trusted family member, friend or colleague to weigh up the pro and cons and likely outcomes of your decision
- Confidential EAP, TIACS, GP, psychologist or another mental health professional

HAVING THE CONVERSATION

If your decision is to have a conversation about your mental health with the workplace, the individuals you are most likely to have this conversation with are your direct line leader or another workplace leader, and/or HR. In addition to consulting other professionals for support and advice, here are some tips on preparing for and having this conversation:

PREPARE

- Plan what you want to say. Only share information that is necessary and that you feel comfortable disclosing.
- Ensure the conversation is being held in a location that supports your privacy and allows for adequate time. For conversations initiated by others, this may require a suggestion to change location, clearing your schedule, or rescheduling if you need an opportunity to prepare.
- Think about what practical outcomes you would like from the meeting. Is it just an “FYI” or does something need to change? Think about how you could fairly and reasonably work with your organisation so they can support you and have some suggestions ready. Some suggestions could include:
 - Flexibility with work hours
 - Extension on projects or other deadlines
 - A period of leave
 - Adjusted work role responsibilities
- Ensure you are aware of your organisation’s relevant HR policies so you know the framework you are operating within.

ENGAGE

It can be difficult to know where to start a conversation about your mental health. Some examples of opening statements to help you get off to a positive start are:

“Thanks for meeting with me Mathew. You may have noticed that I’ve not been my usual self lately. I just wanted to let you know what’s going on for me.”

“I really appreciate you meeting with me. I wanted to discuss a personal matter and work through some options so we can get a good outcome.”

“This is really difficult for me so I’m glad we could meet up for a discussion. Things aren’t going so great for me and I wanted to share with you what this means for me and plan a way forward”

Once you have shared the appropriate details, it is important to explore the next steps depending on the outcome you want to achieve. A couple of examples of the type of thing you might say is:

"I was hoping we could discuss how we might be able to help me work through this. I have some ideas that I think might work"

"There is nothing I need right now, I just wanted to make you aware and I'll let you know in the future if I need anything further."

"I'm not sure what this means for what we can do. Can you help me work through how the organisation can help?"

If you or someone you know needs help contact **TIACS** on 0488 846 988 or your organisation's Employee Assistance Program (EAP), your GP or call: **LifeLine** on 13 11 14, **Kids Helpline** on 1800 551 800, **MensLine Australia** on 1300 789 978 or the **Suicide Call Back Service** on 1300 659 467.