

TIP SHEET #4

SUPPORTING SOMEONE ELSE

One of the most positive and powerful actions you can take when someone is struggling with a mental health condition is to have a supportive conversation with them.

The conversations you have about someone's mental health may be initiated by you or by someone seeking support from you. Either way, having a conversation about mental health can seem daunting. It can be difficult to know what the "right thing to do" is. Unfortunately, this can often mean that the conversation is avoided altogether. Rather than avoiding or ignoring someone who is struggling with their mental health, a direct and caring conversation:

- 1 Encourages people to seek the support they need; and
- 2 Helps reduce stigma associated with mental health conditions.

PERSONAL BOUNDARIES AND CAPABILITIES

When having a conversation with someone about their mental health, it is important to remember your personal boundaries, capabilities, and responsibilities. A few things to keep in mind are:

- For a range of reasons which may include the quality or nature of your relationship with the person or your capability, you may not be the right person to have the conversation. In this case, your action will be to engage another leader, colleague, human resource or workplace health and safety personnel to have the conversation.
- It is not your role to diagnose a mental health condition or provide counselling. Your role is to listen and understand, demonstrate genuine care and concern, direct a person to support services, apply relevant workplace legislation and your organisation's policy and procedures, and to maintain a mentally healthy and safe work environment.

HAVING AN EFFECTIVE SUPPORTIVE CONVERSATION

So, how do you have an effective conversation with someone about mental health?

First, remember not to worry about saying the wrong thing or getting the conversation perfect. You are making a positive difference just by having the conversation. Then, your primary role is to listen, understand and refer the person to appropriate services.

Below are some tips for when either you or someone else initiates the conversation:

If a someone discloses to you that they are struggling with their mental health, you are encouraged to:

- Respond in a calm and non-judgemental fashion. When in doubt – focus on listening.
- Good basic listening skills are about:
 - Not interrupting
 - Regular eye contact and general focus on the individual
 - Demonstrating “minimal responding” to indicate understanding which are things like nodding your head, and saying things like “I see”; “I understand”; “Really”; “Okay then”.
- Whilst considering the specific context and circumstances, options for responding may include:
 - Encouraging them to access your organisation’s confidential EAP or TIACS.
 - Encouraging the individual to have a conversation with their direct line leader or you organisation’s health and safety or human resource personnel if available.
 - Providing information on mental health support and services available such as GPs, and mental health professionals. Information on this is available in Folder 4 of the eToolkit.

If you are concerned about a colleague and want to check in with them, you are encouraged to:

- Have a conversation with them if the nature of your relationship with them makes it appropriate to do so.
- You may say something like:

“I am glad we could meet up Sarah. I hope it is okay to check-in with you. It is just that I have noticed a few things about you lately that made me just want to touch base, see how you are going, and if there is anything I can do to help. Is that okay with you?”

“Thanks for your time. I’ve noticed you have not been your usual self lately. I just wanted to check in that you are okay?”

“I am glad we could meet up John. I hope it is okay to check-in with you. It is just that I have noticed a few things about you lately that made me just want to touch base, see how you are going, and if there is anything I can do to help. Is that okay with you?”

During the conversation, some helpful statements to assist the person to get assistance may be:

“I’m not qualified to offer any advice, however, here is some information on support services available if it’s helpful.”

“We have a confidential EAP service at work. Perhaps contacting them could be a good thing to do?”

Remember, if you are not the right person to have a conversation with someone, you may want to alert an appropriate person, such as their line leader so they can check in with them.

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.