

TIP SHEET: HOW TO HELP A COWORKER IN DISTRESS

If you're like most people who work, you probably spend more time around your fellow employees than almost anyone else. After a while, you begin to get a sense of what's normal for your coworkers on a day-to-day basis. While everyone has ups and downs, there may be times when you notice a change in a coworker that seems more significant or concerning. Fortunately, by simply reaching out and starting a conversation, you can help a coworker feel supported and get connected to additional help, if needed. Below are four simple steps all employees can take to support a coworker who may be in distress.

Step 1: Recognize the Signs

The first step is recognizing any significant changes in a coworker's behavior. Do they seem more tired, distant, sad or irritable? Have they withdrawn from others? Are they acting unusual? These types of changes can be an indicator of a coworker in distress, especially when they last more a few days.

Step 2: Start the Conversation

Once you've recognized the signs, it's time to start a conversation. Find a quiet time and place to talk. Be relaxed, friendly and concerned in your approach. Help your coworker open up by saying something like, "I've noticed you're not your usual self. Are you OK? Is there anything I can do to help?" Then, let the person talk. Listen to what they say. Try not to interrupt or rush the conversation. Don't judge their experiences or reactions. Rather, acknowledge that things seem tough for them right now. Show that you've listened by repeating back what you've heard in your own words.

Step 3: Encourage the Next Step

Your coworker may feel a sense of relief just from opening up to someone who cares enough to listen. But sometimes, additional help is needed. Your organization may provide services, such as an EAP, to help employees who are struggling with a personal or emotional health concern. These services are typically free, and completely confidential. If you're not sure what services are available, or how to access them, talk to your manager or HR department. Once you know, share this information with your coworker, and encourage them to reach out for help. Be positive about the role of professionals in getting through tough times.

Step 4: Check In

If you're able to do so, check back in with your coworker in a few days to see how they're doing. Ask if they've been able to take the next step in getting additional help, if needed. Ask if there is anything else they need. Remind them that you're available to listen. Remember – your care and concern can make a real difference during a difficult time in the life of your coworker.

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URGENT SITUATIONS

Sometimes, people may need more urgent help than you can provide. If a coworker is in severe emotional distress or tells you that they've had thoughts about suicide, encourage them to call the 24/7 National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-8255. If you are ever concerned about the safety of an employee or the workplace, tell a supervisor immediately. For emergencies, always call 911.

KNOW YOUR RESOURCES

Before reaching out to a coworker in distress, it may be helpful to have the contact information for the resources available to help employees. If you are not sure what resources are available, contact your Human Resources Department.

- Employee Assistance Program (EAP): _____
- Mental Health and Substance Use Disorder Benefits: _____
- Other Resources: _____
- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 1-800-273-TALK (8255); TTY: 1-800-799-4889
- Emergencies: 911