

# **Promoting positive mental health practices in the workplace**

Many of us spend more of our waking hours working than doing anything else, whether the workplace is in-person, online, or on the road. Our workplace has a great impact on our mental health. The good news is that when the workplace is a positive and supportive space, the mental health benefits are tremendous. The other good news is that if the workplace isn't positive and supportive, there is plenty of opportunity to improve it.

It's useful to keep in mind that workplaces are communities of purpose, and workplace well-being approaches can spread to families, friends and other communities that workers are a part of.

**Here's how you can embed positive mental health practices into your working week.**



## Checking in with mental health in mind

People often use “How are you?” as an icebreaker or a way to initiate a conversation. It can be polite – but answers are often more automatic than thoughtful.

Although it can be asked with good intent, it might not provide the means to properly check-in with others.

Instead of “how are you?”, consider the power of asking more mindful questions. For example, you could:

- Keep a person more present by asking “What’s been happening today?”
- Reflect on a recent past by asking “What’s happened in your world since the last time we met?”
- Promote an optimistic outlook by asking “What are you looking forward to this week?”

Keep in mind these tips to make the most of a casual check-in:

- Opt for open-ended questions to promote thoughtful responses
- Tighten the timeframe to tighten their frame of reference
- Focus on the person as driving the action for their day or week

It can also help to show genuine interest and open the door for the mental health conversations in the future.

## **Making the time for curiosity**

Workplaces can often require a balance of competing priorities, stakeholder management and day-to-day tasks. It’s also a place where creative thinking and problem solving matter – and can even contribute to improved psychological well-being.

Encouraging people to use their imagination and embrace curiosity can help to promote a mentally healthier workplace. It can also boost creativity and

innovation, introduce new ways of working, and solve old problems with new perspectives.

Foster a sense of creativity and curiosity in your workplace by:

- Taking advantage of any training or learning programs available
- Setting aside time each week to read about the latest industry news, research and innovations
- Learning about specific topics and sharing the key takeaways with others
- Experimenting with new software, programs or ways of working

You can also nurture relationships, inclusion and cohesion through activities that focus on camaraderie, cooperation, collaboration and contribution, such as:

- Eating with someone new at lunchtime
- Finding a common interest with someone from a different team
- Taking a 10-minute walk break with a colleague or group in the afternoon
- Starting a chat thread to share recipes or recommendations for books, movies or TV shows
- Tackling a workplace problem such as a dull lunchroom or an environmental issue
- Getting a group together to raise funds for a charity you care about.

## **Incorporating reflective practice into work**

Introducing team-based reflective practices into our workdays can help to balance calendars, to-do lists and daily tasks with mindful exercises.

No matter how small a task or long a road ahead, it's important for teams to take time out to reflect on

progress and celebrate achievements. Reflective habits can help **steer the focus of the work at hand**, identify progress and help connect that progress from concept to finished product.

Introducing reflective practice into the team can be as simple as:

- Sharing your “done” tasks alongside your “to-do” tasks to show your progress
- Shared reflections on team and individual tasks, achievements and challenges
- Making it a habit to celebrate wins and milestones as a team.

## **Tackle stigma through awareness**

Normalising the mental health conversation can open the door to people talking about their mental health in open, honest and helpful terms. Opening the door to the mental health conversation includes promoting activities and ideas that help to raise mental health awareness and helping people feel comfortable in starting a conversation.

Ways to open the door to mental health awareness in the workplace include:

- Taking part in awareness days such as **R U OK? Day**, **World Suicide Prevention Day** and **World Mental Health Day**
- Promoting the availability of your Mental Health First Aiders as part of the onboarding process and internal communications
- Holding regular check-ins with your company's Mental Health First Aiders
- Making time for sporting, creative or team challenges that support mental health related causes

- Including mental health tips in internal communications.

## Embrace flexible workplace policies

There has been a shift to flexible workplaces over the past few years, with many organisations now embracing remote work and hybrid work arrangements. Some companies are broadening their flexible work policies in line with research showing that **flexible working practices can support improved employee well-being**.

This includes a healthy interest in approaches such as:

- offering a four-day work week to **improve productivity, morale and team culture**
- offering remote work to **boost happiness and productivity** and increase opportunities for people with disabilities.

## Checking in with meaning and purpose

Roles that provide meaning and purpose can be a driving force for many people, providing a sense of

genuine engagement with their work. Making the time to check-in between daily tasks can help to remind people of the bigger picture and reconnect them with the purpose and meaning in their work.

Some suggestions for checking in with meaning and purpose include:

- Writing down the “how” and “why” of a project or working role – and identifying ways to help fulfill them
- Asking for feedback and guidance outside of performance reviews
- Designing a professional mission statement for your career and check with it periodically to maintain focus
- Asking regular questions like “how does this work align with my personal values and aspirations?” and “how does this work contribute to the greater good?”

Finding meaning and purpose outside of the working realm can also be valuable. Sometimes, finding regular purpose or meaning at work can be challenging. This is where exploring opportunities outside of work can help to offset or supplement the desire to find meaning and purpose primarily in the workplace.

Finding purpose outside the workplace may come from:

- Utilising skills and interests in engaging pastimes such as creative side projects
- Emphasising family or individual health and well-being
- Making a difference through volunteer and community work
- Focusing energy and drive into study or a career change in the medium to long term.

Unlocking small changes that embed positive mental health practices in and beyond the workplace can be a powerful way to creating supportive, mentally healthy environments for all.



Copyright © Mental Health First Aid Australia 2023