

Let's Talk with a co-worker

Your co-worker has been really irritable lately. He's been yelling at colleagues and has been seen storming out of people's offices. Colleagues are uncomfortable with his sudden outbursts.

Here are some suggestions on how to reach out and support someone you are concerned about. Start talking! Having a conversation is the best way to start breaking down barriers.

Reach out

One in five people will have a mental health problem at some point in their lives. And because of stigma, many don't seek out the treatment or support they need.

You don't need to be a mental health expert to offer support to someone you're worried about. Ask how the person is doing. And be specific about what is concerning you.

"Are you OK? You've been acting different, and losing your cool with colleagues. I'm worried about you. This isn't like you. Has something happened recently that you want to talk about?"

Even if your colleague doesn't want to talk or doesn't think there is a problem, knowing that you care and that he can come to you may open up a conversation.

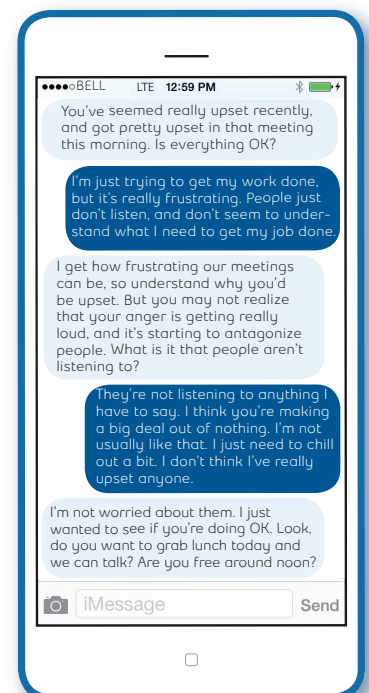
Offer support

Be compassionate. If your co-worker's behaviour is out of character, it may signify a mental health problem or that the person is under some other kind of stress.

Offer to connect over a virtual coffee with the person if this is the kind of thing you normally do together or ask your co-worker what he might like to do. Have the kinds of conversations you are used to having together. People don't want to be judged for reacting to understandable stress. Nor do they want to be defined by a mental health problem, if this is what they are experiencing.

If you do find a time to connect, of your offices, try to find a more relaxed time when you know you won't be interrupted. When you are together, listen to him tell you about how he's doing, without jumping in to give advice or problem solve, or try to diagnose. Talk about the effects of his behaviour, without lecturing. Stay on side. If he feels that you are doing this because you care, and are trying to act in his best interests, it is more likely that you'll be able to help.

Here's how
a conversation might go:



Get Help

Learn more about mental health problems and workplace accommodations. Call 211 or visit www.211.ca for information on other types of community and social services.

The kind of help people need depend on the type and severity of their problem.

Level 1

I'm worried about you

You are concerned about your co-worker, and that his behaviour is really uncharacteristic of him. If he believes there's a problem, you could say:

"I'm worried about you. What's going on? Have you thought of what kinds of support might help?" Depending on the type of problem he describes, support could range from an employee assistance program, to help around tenant rights.

If he doesn't believe there's a problem, then don't argue with him about it. And don't try to suggest possible solutions. Just keep checking in to see how he's doing, or go for a coffee more often, if that's what you normally do together.

Level 2

You need help now

His behaviour has gotten worse. He's speaking rapidly, not leaving work until late at night, and the angry outbursts are getting more frequent. Your boss has threatened disciplinary action.

"I really don't think this issue can wait. Do you have someone you can call who could support you – someone you could call right now?"

Even if your colleague doesn't want or feel the need to get help, stay supportive. Ask him if you or someone else he feels comfortable with could connect with him in the next couple of days to see how he's doing.

Level 3

It's an emergency

He's talking about killing himself, and describing ways he could do it.

"Will you let me accompany you to a nearby emergency department or is there someone else you would feel more comfortable going with?"

If he refuses help, and won't let you or someone else accompany him to seek professional help, call 911 to ensure his safety. It is important that he not be left alone. If he is not willing to stay in the company of another person, call 911 to assure immediate help.

What does a mental health problem look like?

We all feel sad, worried, scared or suspicious at times. But these kinds of feelings may become a problem if they get in the way of our daily lives over a long period.

Mental health problems can affect anyone, regardless of their age, educational background, income level, gender or culture.

Signs of distress can affect our feelings, our thoughts, our physical well-being and our actions. These signs may be visible or invisible. This is what you may observe in someone with a mental health problem:



Feeling

- Feeling sad or irritable for more than two weeks
- Having excessive worries, fears and anxieties
- Having extreme mood swings—from feeling really high to feeling really low
- Feeling apathetic or disinterested in things
- Feeling hopeless or desperate, crying a lot
- Feeling really angry



Thinking

- Having distorted or confused thoughts
- Having strange beliefs not based in reality (delusions), or hearing, seeing or smelling things that aren't there (hallucinations)
- Having difficulty remembering things and concentrating, which affects work or studies
- Making poor decisions



Doing

- Drinking or using other drugs excessively
- Seeming agitated and restless and appearing dishevelled
- Withdrawing from activities and friends
- Crying a lot
- Having many physical complaints, such as headaches or stomach aches with no clear cause
- Having difficulty sleeping
- Having significant changes in eating
- Talking about killing or harming oneself

Information in this publication is not to be used for diagnosis, treatment or referral services. Individuals should contact their personal physician and/or their local addiction or mental health agency for further information.