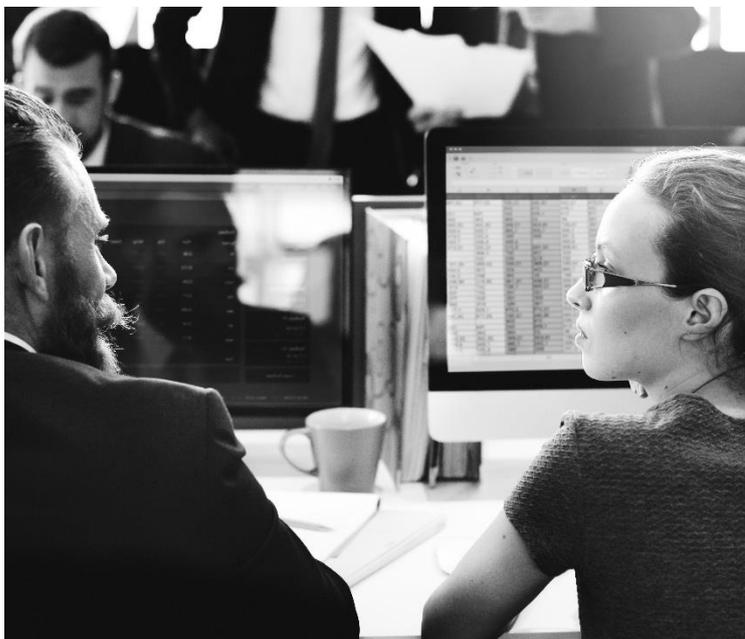


## Supporting People with Depression in the Workplace



Depression is a mental health condition characterized by persistent low mood and energy. It affects different people in different ways and ranges in severity. People with depression are generally able to maintain employment, especially if their employer is able to provide additional support.

People consistently cite their work environment as critical to their wellbeing. A workplace with strong awareness of mental health encourages a culture of mutual care and support. A workplace that ignores or dismisses mental health encourages a culture of stigma that can worsen mental health problems.

The following information aims to provide you with useful, evidence-based tips and advice to cultivate a workplace that encourages care and support for people with mental health difficulties.

- Acknowledge that there are workplace risk factors that can contribute to the development and/or maintenance of depression. High stress, high demand and low control, conflict, poor scheduling or unnecessary restrictions can be sources of significant stress for your employees and should, if possible, be minimized
- Acknowledge that workplace-related trauma can have a negative impact on mental health. If an employee witness's death, violence, or other traumatic incidents, an effort should be made to provide affected employees with support and resources. If traumatic experiences are regular occurrences (e.g., acute care industries), ensure that there are systems in place to support people involved
- Maintain genuine, caring relationships with your employees so that they feel comfortable approaching you if they are struggling. Note, you are not responsible for providing them with solutions or counselling, it is enough to empathize and provide resources that they can access
  - HR is a good place to start in terms of how to frame these conversations, and how to get them started – especially if your workplace is currently not talking about mental health at all



- Do not wait until an employee is taking time off work to express genuine care for their wellbeing – preemptive support will result in better outcomes for the employee and the organisation
- Ensure that you are taking care of yourself as well. It takes courage to provide a space for people to be open about their mental health, and it is important that you take steps to care for your own mental health as well
- Be mindful of the example you set regarding mental health in the workplace. The way that you speak about mental health and mental health conditions will be a significant contributing factor to the culture in your work environment. It may also have a direct impact on the mental health of your employees
- Ensure that any efforts to increase awareness about depression and mental health are genuine. Tokenistic gestures can be more harmful than helpful. If you already have programs or support systems in place, consider how they fit in your workplace and whether they resonate with your employees
- Make an effort to notice how your employees are tracking. Depression is “episodic” meaning some days/weeks/months are better than others. If you are paying attention, you can support your employees when they are struggling before their symptoms worsen. If you notice an employee is not themselves (signs may include withdrawal, changes in behaviour, changes in appearance, or mood changes) checking in to see how they are tracking and whether they need some support can be very beneficial
- If an employee has spent extended time away from work, it is important to develop a return to work (RTW) process that will maximise their successful transition back into the workplace. This plan should be individualized and cooperatively developed. Consider the types of accommodations you may need to make, and understand that an RTW is rarely a linear process and changes to the plan may need to be made along the way. Ongoing communication is vital, and it is important to respect your employee’s boundaries whilst maintaining involvement in their RTW process. Encourage other employees to respect the individual’s privacy and refrain from questioning them about their absence
- If you do not already have one, engage a high quality Employee Assistance Program (EAP). An EAP is a confidential counselling service, provided by a third-party that employees can access free of charge. EAPs offer assistance for employees and managers and are highly beneficial to workplace morale and employee retention. If you have an EAP, ensure that all your employees are aware of it and know how to access it



**If you would like further information about supporting employees with depression, please contact Working Life on 1300 369 072 or at [mail@working-life.net](mailto:mail@working-life.net)**