



Wellness Tip Sheet

Dealing with mental health issues in the workplace

If a team member indicates they have a mental health issue that impacts their work, consider making some helpful adjustments. They don't have to have a formal diagnosis, it is still helpful for adjustments to be made.



“Helping a person won't change the world, but it will change the world for that person.”

- Wright Thurston

It's your role to assist your staff member to manage any difficulties they are experiencing at work and making reasonable workplace adjustments to help them if required.

What are reasonable adjustments?

These are temporary changes that will enable a staff member who is dealing with a health issue to perform their duties more effectively. Adjustments are likely to be more effective if both you and the staff member involved agree on what they should be. These may include:

- o Offering flexible working arrangements, modifying tasks or changing work environments.

Reasonable adjustments do not include:

- o Changing the inherent requirements of the job
- o Assigning performance of some inherent requirements to another staff member permanently or creation of a different job.

Identify and make reasonable adjustments

Identify the 'inherent' requirements of the job

The inherent or core requirements of the job are the essential activities of the job. For example an accounting

professional's job may involve preparing management accounting reports and submitting them on time.

Assess the staff member's skills and abilities

It is important to objectively assess the actual abilities of the staff member. This can be done by:

- o Not making assumptions about what someone can and can't do
- o Discussing the situation with the staff member involved and asking for their thoughts
- o Asking questions of the staff member in much the same way you would with a potential candidate for the job
- o Consider any medical advice or recommendations the staff member is willing to share with you; this information may assist you in assessing key skills, abilities and experiences.

Identify reasonable adjustments with the staff member

Discuss what reasonable adjustments may be required to maximise job efficiency. When identifying reasonable adjustments:

- o Be flexible and open to the many options available
- o Be creative and look at the individual needs of the person, the inherent requirements of the job and then think outside the box for solutions
- o Investigate what has worked well for others; adapting good ideas to match staff needs and workplace requirements leads to success.

Putting together an action plan

It might be useful to put together an action plan that documents:

- o What, if any, adjustments will be put in place
- o How and when you will review the adjustments
- o Any information that might help you assist the staff member if they become affected by mental health issues at work, such as:
 - A list of stressors that increase the risk of an episode of the illness and how these stressors can be avoided
 - Early signs that may indicate that the staff member is becoming unwell
 - Instructions on what to do if the staff member is showing signs of becoming unwell at work
 - A number for you to call if they become unwell (such as family, GP or counsellor).

If you think the nature of the adjustments may inadvertently lead to disclosure, you should take this opportunity to discuss what information could be presented to colleagues so that potential issues (such as questioning, speculating and gossip about the reasons for the change) do not arise. It is essential to determine the parameters for disclosure, even if it's a bit uncomfortable to talk about it.

If the staff member does not agree to let you disclose their mental health issues, it might be useful to discuss (and possibly revisit) what adjustments will be possible without such disclosure or making other staff aware (or likely to assume) that the staff member has mental health issues.

Review the situation

Once reasonable adjustments have been made, and sufficient time has passed, objectively review and assess whether:

- o The adjustments can be modified so that the staff member is meeting the inherent requirements of the role, or whether ongoing adjustments need to be in place for a further period of time, and then review.

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