

# Having the conversation

## How to support coworkers or employees

### THE 5 STEPS APPROACH:

#### 1. Prepare

- Are you in the right frame of mind to start this discussion?
- Do you have access to resources you may need (crisis line numbers, etc)?
- Do you have some time blocked off?
- Have you thought about where to have the conversation?

#### 2. Talk about what you see

Mental illness is not invisible, identify any changes to:

- Physical health
- Eating habits
- Personal appearance
- Sociability
- Errors or accidents
- Punctuality
- Response to new tasks and familiar tasks
- Working more, unable to take a break

#### 3. Ask if they are okay—in your own words

- Step back from assumptions
- Be curious
- Listen for understanding (see sidebar)

#### 4. Ask what you can do to help

Reassure them that you are here if they need you. If you are a supervisor, ask what you can do to help support their success at work:

- Consider small “a” accommodations (everyday changes and supports)
- Ask what the employee/member is going to do to contribute to their success
- If appropriate, write next steps down either with the employee or after the meeting

**Important:** If you get a sense that this is warranted, ask if they are thinking about suicide. Be ready to connect them to resources (crisis line etc).

#### 5. Take a moment for yourself

It's important to take a moment to thank yourself and acknowledge that you have approached an important conversation and have started to build a stronger relationship with another human being.

- Take a walk
- Grab a coffee/tea/water
- Sit in silence for a few minutes

#### Listening for understanding

- Ask one question at a time
- Listen for the answers, allow pauses
- Avoid interrupting
- Seek clarification
- Don't problem solve
- Take more time to gather information than you normally would
- Be aware if you are arguing or defending



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