

# SUPPORTING OUR EMPLOYEES – MANAGER HANDBOOK



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**1 SEPTEMBER 2018**

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## SUPPORTING OUR EMPLOYEES – MANAGER HANDBOOK



### **Scope**

This handbook is applicable for all Managers –Retail & Corporate, in Australia and New Zealand.

### **Purpose**

This handbook is designed to offer guidance on areas such as: common signs and symptoms of distress, advice on how to offer support, as well who to contact for professional advice.

The skills required for supporting employees are the skills of good people management.

An employee could need our support for a variety of reasons and the majority of time, by simply listening and showing that we care can help them feel better.

However, there are certain situations that can't be fixed by a friendly face and a hot drink.

Employees experiencing mental health illness or domestic violence may be coming to work and trying to operate as if everything is 'normal', however underneath there may be much more going on.

While some knowledge about mental health problems and domestic violence and their signs and symptoms is valuable, you definitely don't need to be an expert.

Being a good manager includes **supporting employees** through new or difficult periods in their lives. Mental health illness or domestic abuse can have a devastating impact on individuals and their families.

As a manager, it is very important that you feel confident to talk to an employee who might be experiencing one of these situations; your intervention could make a real difference.

**The most important thing to remember is: LISTEN WITHOUT JUDGING**

### **References:**

<http://www.mindhealthconnect.org.au/#!/signs-mental-health-issue>

<http://returntowork.workplace-mentalhealth.net.au/dealing-distressed-employee>

<http://returntowork.workplace-mentalhealth.net.au/node/28>

<https://www.qld.gov.au/community/getting-support-health-social-issue/support-domestic-family-violence-victim/>

<http://au.reachout.com/what-is-domestic-violence>

[http://www.cipd.co.uk/binaries/managing-and-supporting-employees-experiencing-domestic-abuse\\_2013.pdf](http://www.cipd.co.uk/binaries/managing-and-supporting-employees-experiencing-domestic-abuse_2013.pdf)

[Mental Health@Work – An Introduction for Leaders](#)





## **Mental Health Illness**

### ***What are some of the common signs of a mental health illness?***

Common signs and symptoms of a mental health illness could include:

Physical	Behavioural	Emotional	Cognitive
Headaches	Changes in eating patterns	Low mood	Overly negative thoughts
Tiredness	Attitude changes	Irritable	Concentration difficulties
Muscle Tension	Social Withdrawal	Low motivation	Memory problems
Digestive Problems	Reliability issues	Quick to anger or tears	Mental confusion
Nausea	Increased use of alcohol and/or other drugs	Hyper sensitive	Intrusive thoughts and/or excessive worrying

## **Overview of mental health problems in Australia**

- The most common mental health diagnoses in Australia are anxiety, followed by depression
- The prevalence of mental health problems in Australia is around 20% or 1 in 5 (Black Dog Institute 2012)
- Around 45% of Australians aged 18-65 have experienced a mental health illness (National Mental Health Survey, 2007)

### **Common signs of depression and anxiety:**

Depression	Anxiety
Noticeable changes in mood – persistent low mood (negative affect) or emotional disconnectedness (flat affect)	Persistent avoidance of situations perceived as stressful (e.g. interacting with certain people or attending certain places)
Changes in reliability – starting later and/or finishing earlier	Reduced work productivity – mistakes, slower to complete tasks, not following work directions as advised



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Reduced motivation and engagement with work	Observable heightened stress response – appearing anxious (e.g. reduced eye contact, shakiness, stuttering, hyper emotional – quick to anger or tears
Social withdrawal and isolation	Reduced quality and regularity of communication – not speaking up about issues, difficulty discussing confronting topics

### ***How can we support an employee who might be suffering from a mental illness?***

Talking to an employee who may be distressed is difficult for many managers, whether or not the person has a mental health problem.

As with many things, prevention and early intervention can help avoid situations in which employees become distressed.

If you believe one of your employees is experiencing distress, which could be related to a mental illness, the following guidelines can assist you to support them:

#### **Step One: The First Discussion**

- Ask the employee to meet with you in a private yet comfortable location (e.g. have a coffee away from your worksite or go for a walk)
- Try to maintain a casual and relaxed environment and discussion, as this is most likely to make the employee feel comfortable to discuss a sensitive topic
- Start with a general, open question such as “How are things going?” or “How are you?”
- If the employee is not forthcoming, try explaining that you are concerned for their wellbeing and use examples where possible to support your assertion (remember to focus the discussion on the employee’s wellbeing, not their work performance)
- Take time to listen to the employee and give them time to speak. You do not need to have a solution to any issues they might have
- Ask what you can do to help, remember all they might want you to do is listen.

#### **Remember to:**

- Contact your People representative for advice and support
- Stay calm, this benefits you and can also help the employee feel safe
- Address any specific issues of concern as soon as possible to avoid things getting worse, particularly if work performance is a problem
- Have regular work planning sessions or informal chats to find out about any problems the employee may be having to achieve their daily activities



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- Discuss confidentiality with the employee, agree on who else you could discuss the situation with, e.g. Area/Regional Manager, People Representative
- If having a scheduled meeting, ask if the employee would like to bring someone to support them. This could be a close colleague, friend or family member
- Be realistic about what you can do, remember you are not a trained counsellor. Some problems might have immediate solutions, while others might need a more long-term approach
- Be aware that someone who is very upset may not take in everything you say, check in regularly and re-offer support
- Be aware of where you can obtain support to help you manage these issues

### Try to avoid the following:

- Platitudes and comments that may be perceived as dismissive, such as “Things will get better”, “It will be ok” or “You just need to”
- Judgements and assumptions, it’s natural to have these, but they are unhelpful and can leave a person feeling embarrassed, guilty and ashamed
- Asking closed questions or focusing on the specific details of the employee’s problem. This is likely to limit the conversation and direct it down a path that is not aligned with the support managers can and should provide
- Blame the person or make assumptions about whether their mental health problems are ‘genuine’
- Providing solutions and answers. Always encourage the employee to generate alternative solutions and steps they can take. It’s okay to offer suggestions if the employee is having difficulty with this, but try to avoid directive responses.

### Step Two: Assess Current Intervention

If you become aware that an employee is experiencing personal difficulties or a mental health problem, you could ask the employee the following questions to identify the level of risk:

- Are you aware of, or have you used the company’s Employee Assistance Program (EAP) service?
- Have you spoken with your doctor about your concerns and symptoms?
- Have you consulted with a mental health professional?

High Risk	Moderate Risk	Low Risk
No consultation with doctor and no engagement with EAP or a mental health professional	Engaged with doctor, but no or limited engagement with EAP or a mental health professional	Consulted with doctor and currently accessing treatment with a mental health professional







### Step Three: Recommending Appropriate Intervention

**High Risk:** Strongly encourage the employee to consider either consulting with their doctor, or accessing the EAP service. You could offer to assist in making the appointment. Ask to check in with them again in a few days.

**Moderate Risk:** Discuss with the employee the benefits of engaging with a psychologist (EAP or Privately) and provide information for the employee to consider, e.g. EAP details. Recommend they speak with their doctor about a referral via Mental Health Treatment Plan. Ask to check in with them again in a week's time

**Low Risk:** Recognise the employee's initiative in seeking appropriate treatment. Ask to check in with them now and then (to monitor progress)

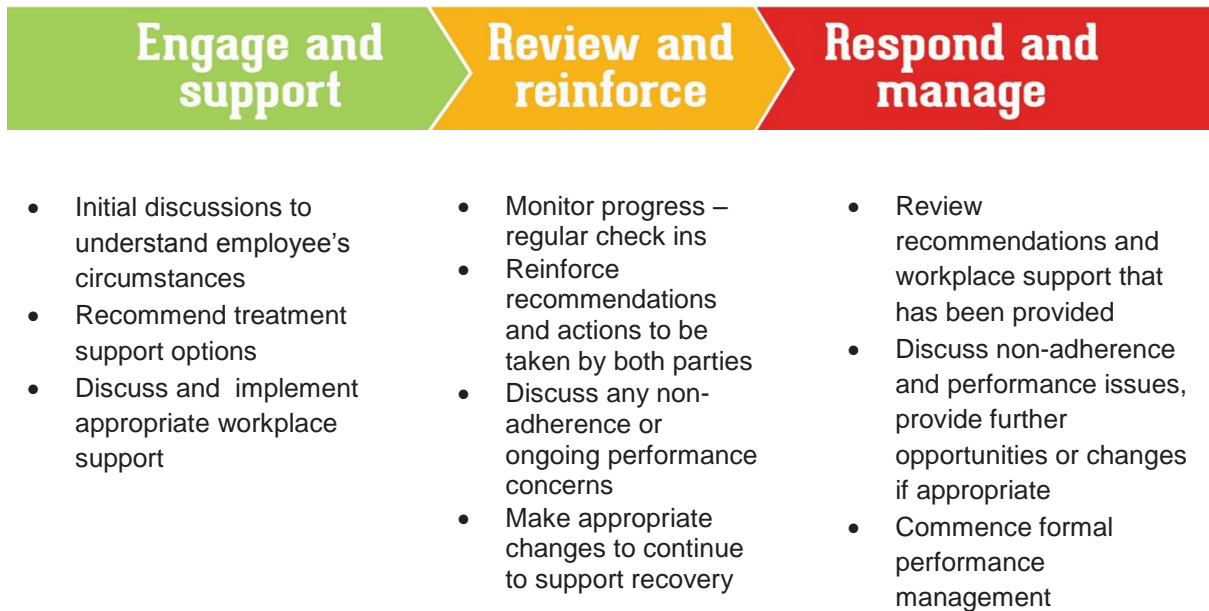
**Examples of how you might be able to support someone at work who is recovering from a mental health illness:**

Workplace Support Option	Examples
Flexible working arrangements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Adjustments to start and finish times</li><li>• Time off to attend treatment appointments</li></ul>
Variation of duties	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Remove specific tasks or responsibilities that may be difficult for the employee to complete at present, or that may exacerbate symptoms</li><li>• Introduce other tasks that may assist with cognitive re-conditioning (e.g. improved memory and concentration)</li><li>• Modify duties to better align with current level of functioning (e.g. limited periods of reading accommodate concentration difficulties)</li></ul>
Adjustments to the work environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Change of work location, office or site, as appropriate</li><li>• Re-arrange work set up to accommodate needs</li><li>• Change desk location to improve social inclusion or reduce distractions</li></ul>
Work aids	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Follow up emails or written work instructions to accommodate memory difficulties</li></ul>

For more information please review our Flexible Working Arrangement Policy located on the People page of the intranet.



### Managing Ongoing Issues with Performance



In a very small number of cases problems may persist or may escalate to the point where you are concerned that the employee is a danger to themselves or others. See the section **on dealing with a mental health crisis** at work for help with this.

### Managing a mental health crisis

#### What is a mental health crisis?

- A mental health crisis is where an employee is believed to be **at imminent risk** of hurting themselves or another person
- Urgent and responsive action is critical – many people who talk about their intentions do act on them
- The focus should be on the safety of the employee and others who may be considered at risk
- The service you call first will depend on the type of crisis or emergency situation and when it occurs.

#### When an employee is at risk of suicide

*SANE Australia* identifies **four basic steps** to assist in helping a potentially suicidal employee:

**1. Try to stay calm** and let them know you are concerned and that you are there to help. Ensure you are able to have the discussion in private.





**2. Assess the risk of suicide:** Is there an intention to follow through? Does the employee have a plan to follow through; if so is it thought out and specific?

Remember:

- Talking about suicide will not make them take action
- Asking shows that you care, listen without judging
- Asking will help them talk about their feelings and plans – the first step to getting help

**3. Take action to get help now,** respond according to the *level of risk* – high, moderate or low

- Tell them that there are other options to suicide
- Don't agree to keep their suicidal thoughts or plans a secret
- Don't assume they will get better without help or that they will seek help on their own

Level of Risk	High	Moderate	Low
<b>Factors</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• An intention and a plan to follow through with suicide</li> <li>• You believe that their plan is able to be acted on (e.g. access to means and likelihood of fatality is high)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• An intention to follow through with suicide</li> <li>• No current plan or access to means</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No plan or intention to follow through with suicide</li> <li>• Reports suicidal thoughts</li> </ul>
<b>Response</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Contact your Regional Manager or People Representative as soon as possible</li> <li>• If unable to reach them contact Emergency Services immediately and/or your local Crisis Assessment Team</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encourage doctor attendance and offer to arrange the appointment, and for someone to accompany them</li> <li>• Recommend suicide helpline services (listed on Page 9)</li> <li>• Recommend EAP services</li> <li>• Follow up the next day Ensure to advise your Regional Manager and or People Representative</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encourage doctor attendance</li> <li>• Recommend suicide helpline services (listed on Page 9)</li> <li>• Recommend EAP services</li> <li>• Follow up the next day</li> <li>• Ensure to advise your Regional Manager and or People Representative</li> </ul>





### ***If an employee is thinking about suicide, encourage them to:***

- Make an appointment with a doctor or medical professional – offer for someone to go along with them
- Contact a counsellor or EAP, family member or friend
- Contact a specialist helpline for information and advice, listed on Page 9

### ***If they have made a plan to end their life:***

- Check if they are able to carry out this plan. Do they have a time, place or method?
- Contact your Regional Manager and or People Representative immediately
- If you are unable to reach your Regional Manager or People Representative contact the police on 000 (AU) or 111 (NZ) and the Psychiatric Emergency Team (PET)/Crisis Assessment Team (CAT) or Mental Health Crisis Assessment Team (NZ) at the local hospital and:
  - Report that the person is suicidal
  - Has made a plan and you fear for their safety
  - Stay with the employee or arrange for someone to stay with them until they are linked with appropriate professional help

### **4. Take care of yourself:**

- Make sure you are safe
- It is emotionally demanding to support someone who is suicidal, find someone to talk things over with, including family, friends, your manager, or a helpline or EAP service

### **When a person is at risk of harming others**

A very small number of people with mental illness may become aggressive. If an employee shows aggressive behaviour in the workplace it is important to:

- Stay calm
- Talk in a calm, slow but firm manner
- Keep at a reasonable distance
- Suggest the worker sits down to help them feel more at ease; you should also sit down and not stand over them
- Try to calm the situation and create some trust by offering a cup of tea or coffee
- Give a firm command, such as 'stop please'
- If they do not stop, leave the worker alone in a safe environment where they are not at risk to themselves or others, until they have calmed down
- Take any threats or warnings seriously
- Contact the police or security if you are concerned about the safety of the worker and/or co-workers; tell them the person has or may have a mental illness and requires medical help.

Ask them to send a plain clothes police officer if available, so the person will feel less threatened

### **Family and Domestic Violence**

#### ***What is Family and Domestic Violence?***

Family and Domestic Violence (FDV) involves the regular abuse of power whereby the perpetrator participates in physical, emotional, sexual, social economic and psychological abuse against a (current or former) intimate partner, family member and/or children.

Family and domestic violence is about power and control and there are many ways that this control can be expressed. Intimidation, coercion and violence are all examples of behaviours that can be experienced by the victim (see below for further descriptions of types of violence). Even if the person experiencing it does not label the behaviour *Family or Domestic Violence*, FDV is a crime and the perpetrator can be prosecuted under various Australian and New Zealand laws.

Many people think that FDV is a private matter, something that happens in the home, but abusive behaviours can easily cross the boundary between home and workplace.

FDV can affect anyone, but it is worth noting that there is evidence that women's and men's experiences of family and domestic violence are different. It should also be recognised that there can be additional issues for employees because of their gender identity, ethnic background, religion, age, sexuality or disability.

#### **Types of Family and Domestic Violence:**

Below are some of the forms of family and domestic violence:

**Physical** – For example choking, beatings, pushing and threatening harm to self, family or pets.

**Sexual** - Acts of sexual violence, forced sex or forcing someone to do sexual acts they don't wish to do

**Emotional** – Name calling and put downs, disrespectful treatment that chip away at a person's feelings of self-worth and independence. In an emotionally abusive relationship, a person may feel that there is no way out of the relationship or that without their partner they will have nothing

**Economic** - Having money and being able to make decisions about it, is one means of being independent. If someone is controlling a person's money, keeping a person financially dependent, or making a person ask for money unreasonably, then this is a form of abuse

**Social** – Social violence occurs in relationships that often include other forms of violence. If someone is insulting a person or teasing them in front of other people, keeping them isolated from family and friends, controlling what they do and where they go, then they are being violent



**Spiritual** - This type of abuse involves a situation where a person is not allowed to have their own opinions about religion, cultural beliefs, and values, or their spirituality is manipulated to keep them feeling powerless.

### ***How can we support an employee who might be experiencing family and domestic violence?***

#### **Recognise the problem, look for:**

- Sudden changes in behaviour and/or changes in the quality of work performance for unexplained reasons despite a previously strong record
- Changes in the way an employee dresses i.e. excessive clothing on hot days, changes in the amount of make-up worn
- Repeatedly having bruises, broken bones, or other injuries claimed as the result of falls or other accidents
- Often being absent or late to work or cancel meetings with you at the last minute
- Withdrawal - stop seeing or speaking with you, friends and family
- Saying their family constantly follows, rings or texts them wanting to know where they are, what they are doing and who they are with
- Saying their family controls the money (i.e. gives them none or not enough and makes them account for every cent that is spent)
- Notable changes in self-esteem, which might include inability to make eye contact or looking away or at the ground when talking
- Someone taking all of the blame for things that go wrong. An employee may share a story about something that happened at home and then take all of the blame for whatever occurred. If you notice this happening a lot, it may be a sign that this person is being experiencing emotional abuse
- Saying their family is jealous and possessive and accuses them of having affairs with other people
- Saying their family constantly follows, rings or texts them wanting to know where they are, what they are doing and who they are with
- Referring to a family member having a bad temper or being moody, especially when they have been drinking

Further information on the signs of Family and Domestic Violence can be found under the wellbeing tab in the Leadership toolkit

#### **Respond**

- Listen without judging
- Believe an employee if they disclose they are experiencing domestic abuse, do not ask for proof
- Reassure an employee that the organisation has an understanding of how family and domestic violence may affect their work performance and discuss their options for support (the David Jones and Country Road Group Family and Domestic Violence Policy covers the options available to employees)



### **Provide Support**

- Divert phone calls and email messages and look to change a phone extension if an employee is receiving harassing calls (if appropriate)
- Agree with the employee on what to tell colleagues and how they should respond if their family telephones or visits the workplace
- Ensure the employee does not work alone or in an isolated area and check that staff have arrangements for getting safely to and from home
- If there are consistent unwanted visits, phone calls or any incidents of abuse that occur in the workplace, be sure to keep a record of the time and dates that these occurred
- Make available contact numbers of helplines, such as 1800 Respect who specialise in providing family and domestic violence advice and support.

### **Refer to the appropriate help**

- Have a list of the support services offered in your area that are easily accessible and refer employees to appropriate organisations that deal with domestic abuse.
- Provide the employee with the details of the respective DJs and CRG EAP provider



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### Contacts

#### General Mental Health Advice & Support Contact Numbers

##### Australia

**David Jones EAP:** Drake Workwise

Ph: 1300 135 600

**CRG EAP:** Optum

Ph: 1300 361 008

**Politix EAP:** Converge International

Ph: 1300 687 327

##### **SANE Helpline**

1800 18 7263 - weekdays, 9am-5pm  
AEST

<https://www.sane.org/>

##### **Beyond Blue:**

1300 22 4636 – 24hrs/7 days

##### New Zealand

**David Jones EAP:** Drake Workwise

Ph: 0800 452 521

**CRG EAP:** Optum

Ph: 0800 155 318

**Politix EAP:** Converge International

**Ph:** +61 3 8620 5300

##### **The Depression Helpline**

0800 111 757

<https://depression.org.nz/>

##### **Healthline**

0800 611 116

<http://www.health.govt.nz/your-health/services-and-support/health-care-services/healthline>

##### **Lifeline**

0800 543 354

[http://www.lifeline.org.nz/corp\\_Home\\_378\\_2001.aspx](http://www.lifeline.org.nz/corp_Home_378_2001.aspx)

##### **Youthline**

0800 376 633

<https://www.youthline.co.nz/contact-us/>





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### Mental Health Crisis Contact Numbers

#### Australia

**Emergency: police and ambulance**  
000 (24 Hrs)

**Lifeline telephone counselling**  
13 11 14 (24 Hrs)

**Suicide Call Back Service**  
1300 659 467 (24 Hrs)

**Kids Helpline**  
1800 55 1800 (24 Hrs)

#### New Zealand

**Emergency: police and ambulance**  
111 (24 Hrs)

**Lifeline NZ telephone counselling**  
0800 543 354 (24 Hrs)

#### Samaritans

0800 726 666 (24 Hrs)

### Family and Domestic Violence Contact Numbers

#### Australia

**Emergency: police and ambulance**  
000 (24 Hrs)

**Safe Steps** – Family Violence Response  
Centre

1800 015 188 - 24 hrs/7 days

<http://www.safesteps.org.au/>

**RESPECT** – National Sexual Assault,  
Domestic Family Violence Counseling Service

1800 737 732 – 24hrs/7 days

<https://www.1800respect.org.au/>

#### Mensline Australia

1300 789 978 - 24hrs/7 days

<http://www.mensline.org.au/>

#### New Zealand

**Emergency: police & ambulance**  
111 (24 Hrs)

#### Women's Refuge

0800 733 843 – 24hrs/7days

<https://womensrefuge.org.nz/>

#### Are you Ok?

0800 456 450 - 24hrs/7 days

<http://areyouok.org.nz/family-violence/>

**Shine** - provides information to victims of family  
violence and to those worried about a friend or  
family member who might be experiencing  
family violence

0508 744 633 – 9am to 11pm, 7 days

<http://www.2shine.org.nz>

