



Are you psychologically fit to work?

In the ideal world, we would all be able to leave our personal problems at the office door. But in reality some problems, bereavement or trauma, weigh so heavy on our minds that we find it difficult to think of anything else. When we're engulfed with a personal problem, it is almost impossible to focus on work.

It's important to realise that personal problems not only negatively affect you, but also your colleagues. The rest of the team either have to take over some of your responsibilities or carry you when you are not performing as you should or are frequently absent. It may also affect office morale and working relationships. In addition, depending on the nature of your job, you may also jeopardise your, or someone else's, safety.

What does it mean to be "psychologically unfit"?

Being "psychologically unfit" to work means that you have a behavioural, personal or psychological problem that is interfering with your ability to do your job safely and effectively under routine conditions, as well as in critical situations or under high levels of stress.

What kind of problems may make me unfit to work?

Someone may not be fit for work for a variety of reasons, including alcohol or drug abuse, recent trauma, stress, depression and anxiety (or other mental health problems), relationship problems, and financial worries. Even tiredness can affect your ability to work safely and well.

How do I know if I'm unfit to work?

It's not always easy to recognise, and admit, your own problems. You may not notice that your behaviour at work has changed, that you don't concentrate like you used to, make more mistakes, or that you overreact to criticism. If those around you tell you that you are behaving differently, look tired or troubled, comment about your productivity or accuracy, or ask if you are okay, pay attention to what they are saying.

They may notice something that you are not able to see. The sooner you recognise that you are psychologically unfit to work, the more quickly your wellbeing and capabilities can be restored. The keys are early recognition and action.

Some of the signs that may point to a possible problem are listed below. Pay attention if you feel:

- Very angry or irritable most of the time, cry a lot or overreact to things
- Tired or have little energy often
- Worthless or guilty a lot
- Anxious or worried a lot more than other people
- Grief for a long time after a loss or death
- Extremely fearful - have unexplained fears or more fears than most people
- Constantly concerned about physical problems or appearance
- Frightened that your mind is controlled or is out of control

Experience big changes, for example you:

- Make more mistakes at work than usual
- Are not as productive at work as before
- Encounter more interpersonal problems and conflict
- Take more frequent sick days
- Are often late for work or leave early
- Lose interest in things usually enjoyed
- Have unexplained changes in sleeping or eating habits
- Avoid colleagues, friends or family and want to be alone all the time
- Daydream too much and can't get things done
- Feel life is too hard to handle or talk about suicide
- Hear voices that cannot be explained

Are limited by:

- Poor concentration; can't make decisions
- Forgetfulness
- Inability to sit still or focus attention
- Worry about being harmed, hurting others, or about doing something "bad"
- The need to wash, clean things, or perform certain routines many times a day
- Thoughts that race almost too fast to follow
- Persistent nightmares

Behave in ways that may cause problems, for example you:

- Use alcohol or other drugs
- Eat large amounts of food and then force vomiting, abuse laxatives, or take enemas to avoid weight gain
- Continue to diet or exercise obsessively although thin
- Hurt other people, destroy property, or break the law
- Do things that can be risky or life threatening

These signs may indicate the need for a referral to the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) or outside counselling. However, this does not mean that you will exhibit these traits or behaviours if you are psychologically unfit to work. Nor does it mean that you are psychologically unfit to work if you do have these traits.

Most of us experience some of these behaviours, feelings or thoughts at some point. If they keep interfering with your ability to perform your job safely or well, you need to speak to your manager or wellness champion as soon as possible.

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