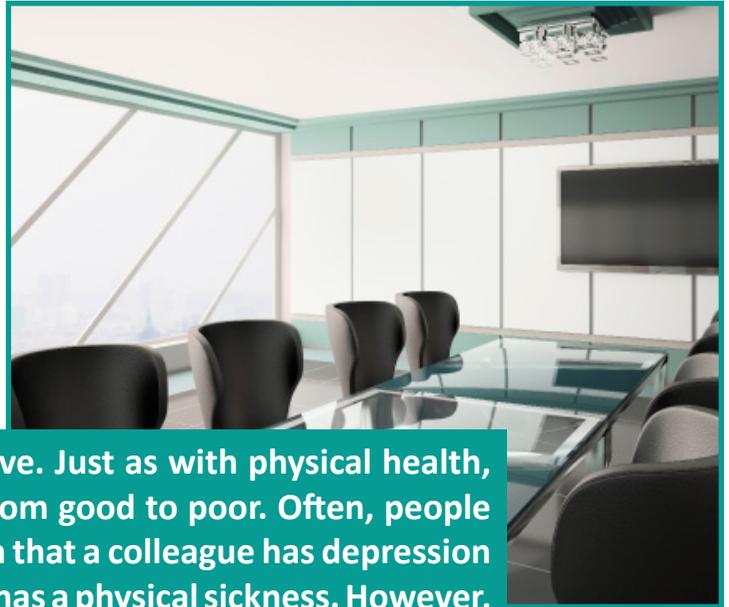


Mental health in the workplace



Mental health is something we all have. Just as with physical health, a person's mental health can range from good to poor. Often, people react more negatively when they learn that a colleague has depression than when they learn that a colleague has a physical sickness. However, it is important to realise that good mental health is essential to overall good physical health and should not be stigmatised.

What can you do to support someone with a mental health issue?

The support of co-workers plays an important role in mental health treatment and recovery. If someone close to you has mental health issues, you can make an enormous difference by helping that person find the right treatment, obtain benefits, and cope with symptoms. You can also play a crucial role by encouraging your colleague and offering support as they embark on their journey to recovery.

If someone close to you has mental health issues, you may be struggling with any number of difficult emotions yourself, including fear, guilt, anger, frustration, and hopelessness. The illness may be difficult for you to accept – you may feel helpless in the face of their symptoms or you may be worried or confused by strange behaviours you don't understand.

How can you cope if a colleague has mental health issues?

- **Separate the person from the disorder.** You can respect the person, even if you disrespect the disorder. Also, separate medication side effects from the disorder/person.
- **You may need to revise your expectations.**

Acknowledge the remarkable courage your colleague may show dealing with a mental disorder.

- **Accept 'strange' behaviour.** This is a symptom of the disorder so try not to take it personally.
- **Set boundaries.** You have a right to ensure your personal safety. It is important to have boundaries and set clear limits.
- **Educate yourself.** Learning about mental health issues and their treatment will allow you to gain important insights into the daily struggle of someone diagnosed with mental illness.
- **Reduce stress where possible.** Stress can cause mental health symptoms to flare up, so it's important to create a structured and supportive environment for your co-worker. Avoid putting excess pressure on them or criticising perceived shortcomings.
- **Empower your co-worker.** Be careful that you're not taking over and doing things for them that they are capable of doing themselves. Try to support your colleague while still encouraging as much independence as possible.

Recognising that a person has limited capabilities should not mean that you expect nothing of them. Keep a positive outlook and make sure you turn to fellow co-workers or a counsellor if you need help coping with a situation.