

Fact Sheet

Mental health in Construction



This fact sheet provides basic information for employers and site supervisors on how to manage mental health hazards on construction sites.

The facts

Australian construction workers are six times more likely to die from suicide than an accident at work, with young construction workers more than two times more likely to take their own lives than other young Australian men. (source: [Mates in Construction](#))

Mental ill-health is a serious problem in the building and construction industry.

Whilst not all mental ill-health is caused at work, employers have responsibilities under work health and safety laws to ensure that work mental health hazards (also called psychosocial hazards) are effectively managed.

What are psychosocial hazards?

In construction, psychosocial hazards could include:

1. Unhealthy work relationships and interactions e.g. being bullied or harassed by supervisors or co-workers, supervisors not supporting workers, unreasonable or aggressive behaviour, workplace violence
2. The job being poorly organised e.g. too much work to do in not enough time, workers not having any say or control on how the job can be done best, lack of clarity of how or what to do for the job
3. The job being unsafe e.g. being asked to do tasks that are dangerous or where there is a physical safety risk, witnessing traumatic events.

Controlling the risk of psychosocial hazards

You need to **identify** the psychosocial hazards in your workplace, **consult** and communicate with your workers and put in place suitable **controls** to manage the risk. Here are some tips:

- **identify** any issues in your workplace that may be psychosocial hazards
- **consult** with your workers by holding our [Mental Health in Construction Toolbox Talk](#)
- **control** the psychosocial hazards, for example:
 1. relationships and interactions - don't tolerate bullying, aggression or violence, create a positive work environment, lead by example
 2. job organisation - plan ahead for the work, allow enough time to do the job, sequence your trades, allow workers to give feedback and have some control on the best and safest way to work, give clear instructions on how to get the job done
 3. job safety - ensure a physically safe working environment, including making sure you have the right safety equipment when you need it

It's also important to create a culture where mental health and well-being is included in safety conversations and to make sure workers know what they can do if they are experiencing mental ill-health, and where they can get help.

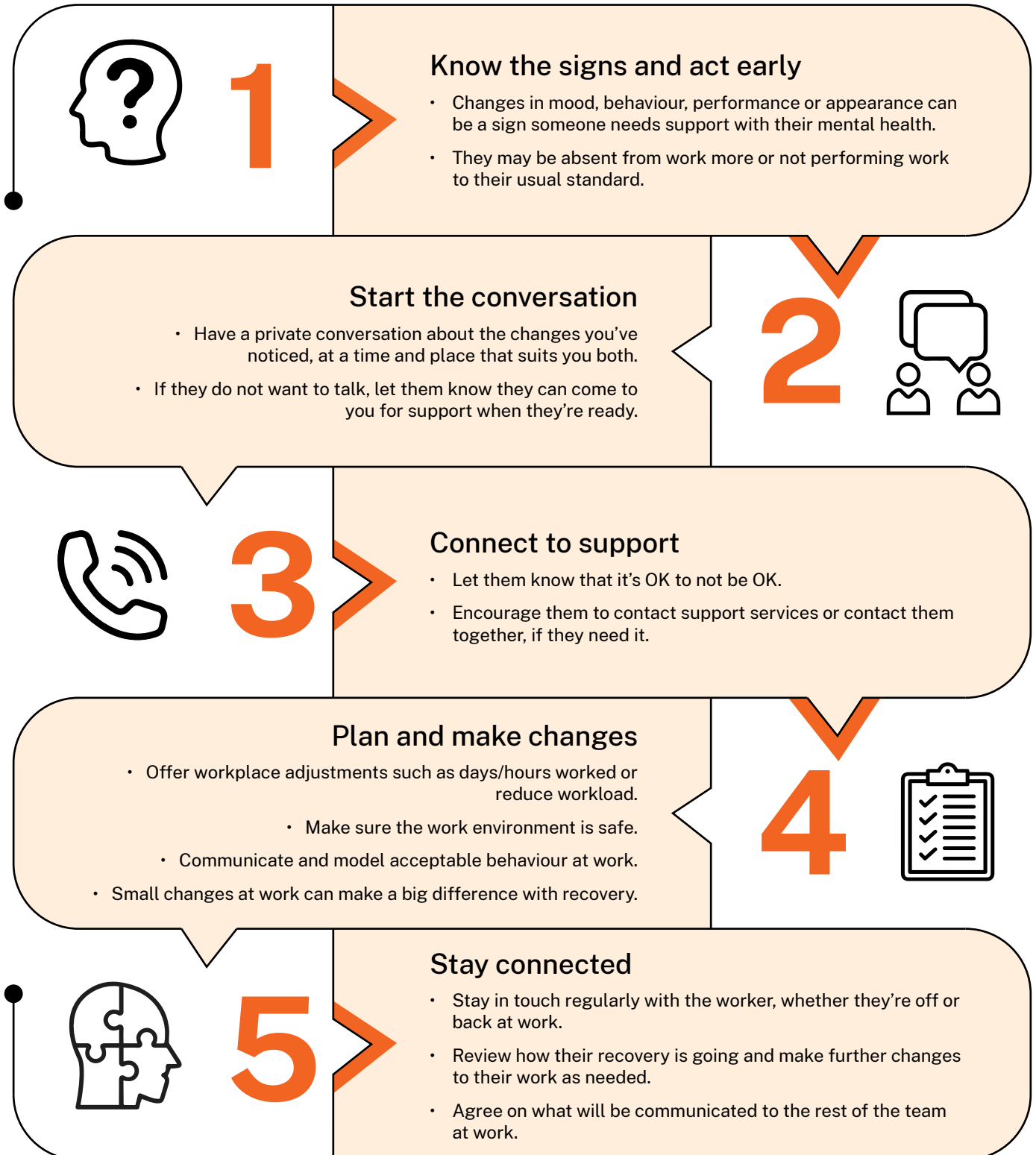
See the [Code of Practice for Managing Psychosocial Hazards at Work](#) for more information on employer responsibilities and how to manage the risks when it comes to mental health at work.

If someone needs mental health support

You don't have to be an expert to address mental health hazards or talk with your workers about mental health.

At any given time, 1 in 5 people are experiencing mental ill-health (Source: [Aust Inst of Health and Welfare](#)). This can increase the risk of harm from mental health hazards when workers are younger, older, new to the organisation, those with diverse language literacy or cultural backgrounds or those who have experienced a traumatic event. Supervisors need to know how to have the early conversations and when to get help.

Here's an action plan for employers or supervisors to help workers who need mental health support.



Encourage workers to take up positive coping strategies such as exercise and activities they enjoy. Using alcohol or drugs as a crutch will only make things worse and may increase the risk of injuries on your work site.

Where to get help for workers

Larger businesses may have policies or support services in place for workers such as employee assistance programs.

Whilst it is the responsibility of employers to manage psychosocial hazards in the workplace, workers can access free help 24/7 through:

- [Lifeline Australia](#) – 13 11 14
- [Beyond Blue](#) – 1300 22 4636
- [MensLine Australia](#) – 1300 78 99 78
- [Suicide Call Back Service](#) – 1300 659 467
- [NSW Health Mental Health Line](#) – 1800 011 511
- [Kids Helpline \(for under 25s\)](#) – 1800 55 1800
- [Mates in Construction](#) – 1300 642 111
- [SafeWork NSW “Speak Up Save Lives” app](#) – to report unsafe work

Other options could include:

- a General Practitioner (GP), psychologist or psychiatrist
- a manager, friend or family member.

Support, coaching and resources for site supervisors and small business

Visit mentalhealthatwork.nsw.gov.au for more information and resources on promoting, managing and supporting workplace mental health and your duties.

Beyond Blue also offers free and confidential support for small business owners via beyondblue.org.au

See safework.nsw.gov.au for more information or call 13 10 50.



Disclaimer

This publication may contain information about the regulation and enforcement of work health and safety in NSW. It may include some of your obligations under some of the legislation that SafeWork NSW administers. To ensure you comply with your legal obligations you must refer to the appropriate legislation.

Information on the latest laws can be checked by visiting the NSW legislation website

www.legislation.nsw.gov.au

This publication does not represent a comprehensive statement of the law as it applies to particular problems or to individuals or as a substitute for legal advice. You should seek independent legal advice if you need assistance on the application of the law to your situation.

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