

How to Tell Your Co-Workers You're Struggling with Mental Health

For many of us, work is a big part of our lives that we dedicate a great deal of time towards. Yet, even at the best of times, work can be demanding, with our stressful deadlines, different personalities to navigate and a general expectation that we're able to give our undivided attention and focus to the task at hand – regardless of the kind of mood we're in. (And hey, isn't everyone entitled to an off-day every now and then?)

But, it's even more of an issue now, when the barriers between work and home life have all but disappeared.

If you're struggling with mental health problems, and your off-days feel more like every day, you certainly aren't alone.

For many, the idea of sharing their condition with their employers and co-workers may seem like a daunting and embarrassing ordeal. But it doesn't have to be that way. If you're interested in sharing your struggles with your co-workers and employer, here are some tips to do just that in a way that builds empathy and understanding.

Identify the support you're looking for

Before you start the conversation, it helps to consider your ideal outcome. What does a 'better solution' look like to you? Do you know what your company's existing mental health policies are? If you believe that you will benefit from extended deadlines, different working hours, a supportive ear, or even more privacy, then it's important to make note of these factors ahead of time.

Find a private place to talk

Talking about our mental health can be daunting. When you're ready, find a time of day that isn't typically busy, and reach out. When we're back in our regular work places, you may want to consider doing it nearby – a café, for instance, is noisy enough that you won't have to be concerned with other people hearing. For now, that might be an early-morning virtual chat before everyone gets too into their day.

Bring along some important facts

Mental health is being discussed more and more in the Canadian workplace, and that's great, but there are still many misconceptions about conditions like depression. After you've opened up about your struggles, there may be questions – and that's totally fine! The more we all know, the more empathetic we can become. Consider bringing along some important information, like how mental illness can actually affect people of all ages, incomes and cultures. Or even how, by the age of 40, half of the population will be struggling (or will have already struggled) with a mental illness.

Keep your work in perspective

As much as your mental health has an impact on your life, it's important to keep in mind how it may affect your performance – especially when working in a team setting. Let them know that your performance still matters to you, and that your best-case scenario involves coming up with a plan together so that productivity won't be impacted.

Telling someone at your workplace about your mental health challenges may feel like a big step, but as long as you're prepared, comfortable and ready to begin the conversation, then consider it just another important step on your journey towards feeling better.

These days, it's more important than ever to find the right balance between work and home life. So, tell your team how you're feeling. You might just find out that you're not alone in those thoughts and feelings.