Black Dog Institute

Workplace Mental Health Toolkit

Practical guide and resources for employers and employees

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About Black Dog Institute

Black Dog Institute is a global leader in mental health research and the only Medical Research Institute (MRI) in Australia to investigate mental health across the lifespan.

Areas of strength include suicide prevention, digital mental health, workplace mental health, novel treatments and prevention in young people. Our unique translational approach to research allows us to quickly turn our world-class scientific findings into clinical services, educational programs and e-health products that improve the lives of people with mental illness.

We join the dots, connecting research answers, expert knowledge and the voice of lived experience, to deliver solutions that work across the healthcare system for patients and practitioners alike. The Institute is proud to be a trusted partner of government, universities, health services, clinicians, industry, workplaces, schools and philanthropists across the country.

Science. Compassion. Action.

Born from science – Our research identifies the scientific evidence that creates the foundations for us to develop practical programs that work in the real world.

Driven by compassion – We listen and learn from those with first-hand experience of mental illness, and to our partners and peers, to guide and inform everything we do.

Results in action – By connecting the dots what starts in research results in action. We develop programs and tools that can: reduce suicide rates across communities, improve symptoms for individuals, prevent problems before they start and help people to live their best possible life.

Mental health and the workplace

What is mental health?

Mental health Is defined as *'a state of well-being in which every individual realises his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully and is able to make a contribution to her or his community'* (World Health Organisation, 2010).

Mental illness is different to mental health. A mental illness impacts how a person feels, thinks, and behaves. There are different types of mental illness Including depression, anxiety, and bipolar disorder which can range in varying degrees of severity.

Achieving and maintaining good mental health and wellbeing is important for everyone.

Why is mental health relevant to the workplace?

It is estimated that, at any point in time, 1 in 6 Australian workers will be suffering from mental illness. A further one-sixth of the population will be suffering from symptoms associated with mental illness, such as stress and fatigue, which, while not meeting criteria for a diagnosed mental illness, will be affecting their ability to function at work.

Mental illness is one of the leading causes of sickness absence and long-term work incapacity in Australia and is one of the main health related reasons for reduced work performance.

Research shows that absenteeism, reduced work performance, increased turnover rates and compensation claims as a result of mental illnesses, such as depression and anxiety, cost Australian businesses up to $12 billion each year.

Employers and workplaces can play an active and significant role in supporting the health and wellbeing of their workers as well as assisting in recovery from mental illness.

Every dollar spent on effective mental health actions returns $2.30 in benefits to the organisation.

1 in 6
Australian workers will be suffering from mental illness[1]

$12 billion
mental illness costs Australian business per year[2]

$2.30
R.O.I.[2] for every dollar spent on mental health actions

What is the role of work in mental health and wellbeing?

Creating a mentally healthy workplace has many benefits for both employers and employees. From an organisational perspective, addressing mental health in the workplace can increase productivity and employee engagement. For the individual, it means a healthy, balanced life and psychological wellbeing.

Increasing knowledge and understanding of mental illness is the first step to reducing stigma and improving wellbeing in the workplace. Throughout this toolkit we have provided a range of information and resources to help you create a mentally healthier workplace.

1. Lelliott P, Tulloch S, Boardman J, Harvey S, Henderson M, Knapp M. Mental Health and Work. London: Cross Government Health Work and Well-being Progamme (2008)
2. National Mental Health Commission (2014)

Breaking down stigma

Myths and misunderstandings about mental illness can lead to stigma and can be extremely damaging.
Reducing stigma through understanding the truth about mental illness leads to better outcomes for everyone.

Fact	Fiction
Mental health issues are common: one in five Australians will experience a mental illness	Mental illness only affects a few people
Mental illness is not a character flaw. It's caused by a range of genetic, biological, social and environmental factors	Mental illness is caused by weakness
Mental illness isn't caused by weakness and it's not 'cured' by just being strong either	People with a mental illness can 'pull themselves out of it'
With appropriate treatment, many people can – and do – recover from mental ill-health	People with a mental illness never get better
When a person experiences mental ill health they may not be as productive as usual. But recovery generally means they will return to their full capacity at work.	Mental illness permanently reduces a person's capacity to function at work

Stress, depression and anxiety

What is stress?

Stress is our body's response to a demand placed on it. Stress is often confused with anxiety, but stress is not a diagnosable mental illness.

Stress is a normal condition, experienced by everyone. It involves an emotional, physical or mental response to events that cause bodily or mental tension. It can be thought of as a state of readiness – the 'fight or flight' response.

A small amount of stress from time to time is not a problem, it can even motivate us to get things done. But when stress is intense and ongoing, it can start to impact our physical and mental health.

What is depression?

We all have times when we feel low, have a drop in our self-worth and feel somewhat depressed. In most cases, we 'bounce back'. People with clinical depression, however, experience these feelings intensely, for long periods of time and sometimes, for no apparent reason. And they can't just snap out of it: the strategies we usually use to lift our mood simply don't work. Depression influences not only how we feel, but also how we think, behave and interact with others. Someone with depression can start to feel isolated and withdrawn from what's going on around them.

Depression influences not only how you feel but also how you think, behave and interact with other people.

Common signs of depression include:

- lowered self-esteem or self-worth,
- changed sleep patterns, insomnia or broken sleep,
- changes in appetite or weight,
- reduced ability to control emotions like pessimism, anger, guilt, irritability and anxiety, fluctuating emotions throughout the day (such as feeling worse in the morning and better as the day progresses),
- reduced energy levels,
- reduced capacity to experience pleasure: not enjoying what's happening now nor looking forward to anything,
- reduced pain tolerance and sometimes a host of new ailments,
- reduced or absent sex drive,
- poor concentration and memory, and
- reduced motivation: things seem meaningless and not worth the effort.

If these signs persist for most of the day for most days over a two week period, and they interfere with your ability to manage at home and at work, then you might benefit from getting an assessment by a skilled professional.

Brad's experience

'I was first treated for depression and anxiety in my early 20s, but it wasn't until another 15 years later that I became more open and started to heal. It was good to know that I was feeling the way I did because of a medical reason. There was a reason, and there was hope. It wasn't until I opened up that I was actually able to become well. Being more open with family and friends is the most important thing I do to stay well now too. I let people know how I'm feeling and what's going on inside my head. Hiding things from those close to you is bloody hard work, and tiring.'

DEPRESSION SELF-TEST

Complete five quick questions to give you an idea of the likelihood that you are dealing with depression.

What does depression feel like?

Produced by Matthew Johnstone for WHO

What is anxiety?

Just as there are times when you might feel down, but are not clinically depressed, there are times when you will feel anxious, but do not have an anxiety disorder. It's normal to feel anxious in high pressure situations such as a job interview, when you're speaking in public, or when you're experiencing change in your life or work environment and you're uncertain what the future will hold. To a degree, this anxiety can help us, making us stay focussed and alert.

Anxiety becomes a problem when you start to feel anxious most of the time and about even minor things, to the point where your worry is out of control and interfering with your day to day life.

Anxiety disorders are a mix of:

- psychological symptoms: frequent or excessive worry, poor concentration, specific fears or phobias e.g. fear of dying or fear of losing control
- physical symptoms: fatigue, irritability, sleeping difficulties, general restlessness, muscle tension, upset stomach, sweating and difficulty breathing
- behavioural changes: including procrastination, avoidance, difficulty making decisions and social withdrawal

To be diagnosed with an anxiety disorder, a combination of symptoms is present on most days for more than six months and interferes with your ability to function at work or at home.

It is common to experience a low mood secondary to excessive worry and the two conditions - clinical depression and anxiety disorder can occur at the same time.

Damien's experience

'My first experience with anxiety was in 1999. I had the sweats, panic attacks, I couldn't breathe, and I was hyperventilating. By 2012 I was travelling 40 weeks of the year for work. I was constantly jet-lagged and exhausted. I was having panic attacks, I was down and I felt hopeless.

It was these times in my life when the anxiety and depression were burning so strongly I found myself in a state where I couldn't get the fire under control. Having the courage to seek help, everyday life became manageable again. Communication is the key thing for me, speaking with a psychologist, friends and family, because I believe nothing good comes from keeping it inside.'

ANXIETY SELF-TEST

This quick self test can give you an understanding of the likelihood that you have an anxiety disorder.

What does anxiety feel like?

Produced by BeyondBlue

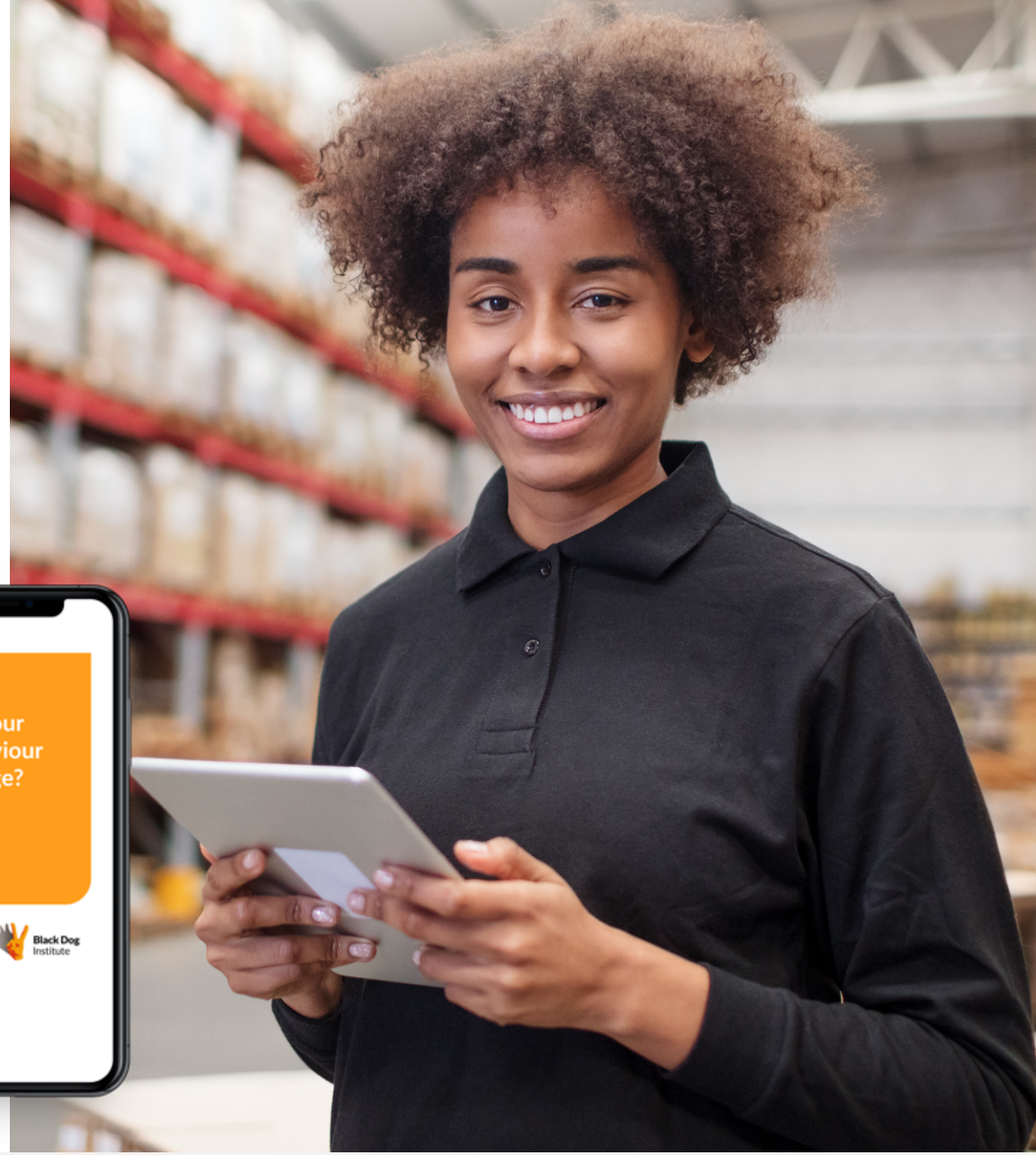
Changes in behaviour

If you notice any change in behaviour or performance in yourself, a colleague, friend, or family member consider whether it may be due to a mental health issue.

The types of changes in behaviour could include some of the following:

- change in routines (stopping participation in sport, social activities)
- talking about unusual/disturbing thoughts
- reporting or demonstrating symptoms associated with high levels of anxiety and/or lowered mood
- lowered concentration and performance
- reduced motivation
- increased absenteeism
- social withdrawal or isolation
- decreased personal care
- use of drugs (illegal and/or legal) or alcohol
- reduced activity and energy
- high levels of irritability or aggression

If you see changes like these, and you feel you can talk to the person because you know them well or you have some responsibility for them, don't be afraid to ask if things are OK. They might want to talk – or they might not – but just letting someone know that you've noticed and that you care can make an enormous difference.



Lived experience with mental health and how their behaviour changed

Produced by Black Dog Institute

Having a conversation about mental health

Keeping in touch

Regular, simple, informal conversations help build a sense of belonging and connectedness which has been shown to promote wellbeing. Find the time to ask about the weekend, have a chat about what you watched last night, ask how the holiday went or just ask how things are going.

Checking in regularly with colleagues, friends, and family also means that we are more likely to notice when things are different or their behaviour changes. It can make the person we're talking to more open to sharing information with us, and make a 'difficult' conversation easier because you've already shown that you're interested and care.

Having the conversation

If you notice any changes in behaviour or performance in yourself, a colleague, friend or family member, consider whether this is a mental health issue. Starting a conversation with someone whom you're concerned about can help them open up, share their worries with you, and seek further support if necessary.

Talking to someone about their mental health isn't always easy, but it could help them get better. Here are some key points to help you start a conversation:

- Choose a good time and place to talk where you are both comfortable and relaxed.
- Mention the change in behaviour you've noticed and add something positive, e.g. 'I've noticed that you've been.... You're usually so...'
- Encourage the person to talk by using open-ended questions, e.g. 'What's on your mind?' If the person is reluctant to talk, ask more questions, don't give up.
- Listen actively, giving the person time to talk without interrupting or giving advice. Avoid the temptation to fill the silences.
- Reflect back some of the things you've heard to show you understand.
- Encourage them to talk to their GP or another health professional if they need help.

"I was afraid I wouldn't be believed. That people wouldn't understand. That they'd think I was weak or crazy. In reality, when the time came to tell people about my illnesses, I was not only believed but received an enormous amount of support from family and friends."

Craig, Lived experience presenter

Top tips for having a conversation

Produced by Black Dog Institute

Download factsheet

How to help when you're worried about someone's mental health

Mental illness at work – Rights and responsibilities

Both employers and employees have formal rights and responsibilities under discrimination, privacy, and work health and safety legislation.

Employers

Under the Work Health and Safety Act 2011 workplaces need to prevent harm to the health and safety of workers. This includes physical and mental health. Under the Act, an officer is a person who makes, or participates in making decisions that affect the whole, or a substantial part, of a business or undertaking.

Officers have a duty to be proactive and continuously ensure that the business or undertaking complies with relevant duties and obligations.

An employer must not discriminate against, harass or victimise a person in employment because they have a mental illness.

Did you tell someone about your mental health issues?

Produced by Black Dog Institute

Try the Heads Up tool

Weigh the pros and cons of telling your employer or co-workers about your situation

"I feared I'd be treated differently and overlooked for promotion. That my career prospects would be affected. The reality was that people at work were supportive and understanding and it gave them understanding of my behaviour."

Wayne, Lived experience presenter

Employees

What are my rights?

Protection from discrimination

If you have a mental health condition, certain laws protect you against discrimination in the workplace. The Australia-wide Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (Cth) and equivalent state and territory laws make it unlawful to discriminate against, harass or victimise people with disabilities – including in an employment context.

Privacy

Your right to privacy is covered by the Australia-wide Privacy Act 1988 (Cth) and similar legislation in some states and territories. If you tell your employer you have a mental health condition, they can't disclose this information to anyone without your consent. They can only use this information for the purpose for which you told them, such adjusting your role or working environment to make allowances for your mental health condition.

A healthy, safe workplace

Workplace health and safety legislation requires employers to ensure that workplaces are both physically and mentally healthy for all employees. This means steps must be taken to ensure that the working environment does not harm mental wellbeing or aggravate an existing condition.

Under each state's work health and safety (WH&S) legislation, your employer is obligated, so far as is reasonably practicable, to provide a safe and healthy workplace. This means they must take action to prevent or lessen potential risks to the health and safety of you and your colleagues, including your mental wellbeing.

What are my responsibilities?

If your mental health condition does not affect how you do your job, you have no legal obligation to tell your employer about it. This applies whether you are a current employee, or a potential employee going through the recruitment process.

WH&S laws protect your right to a safe workplace, but you also have responsibilities under the same legislation. You must take care of yourself and others and cooperate with your employer in matters of health and safety. This applies to all workers, whether they have a disability or not.

As well as this, under the Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (Cth) your ability to work safely is an 'inherent' or essential requirement of any job. If your disability could reasonably be seen to create a health and safety risk for other people at work, then your failure to tell anyone about that risk could be a breach of your obligations under WH&S legislation.

You need to tell your employer when your mental health condition:

- affects how you carry out the inherent requirements of your job. In this context, the purpose of providing the information is to enable your employer to identify reasonable adjustments that might assist you to perform your role.
- affects your health and safety and/or the health and safety of colleagues.
- is affected or could be affected by the nature of your work. A failure to disclose a mental illness may disentitle an employee to workers compensation should they suffer any recurrence, aggravation or exacerbation of a pre existing mental illness.

Reasonable adjustments

Employers have a legal obligation to make reasonable adjustments to help a person maintain their mental wellness to remain at work.

Reasonable adjustments are changes to a job, which can be made to enable a worker to perform their duties more effectively. Reasonable adjustments include things like change to your tasks, work environment, hours or how much supervision or support you need.

Some examples of reasonable adjustments are:

- allow personal phone calls for emotional support
- flexible start and finish times
- schedule time for medical/psychological appointments
- switch to smaller tasks

Employers must make such adjustments, unless:

- the worker couldn't or can't satisfactorily perform the essential requirements of their job even after the
- reasonable adjustments are made or,
- making the adjustments would impose an unjustifiable hardship on the employer.

A failure to make reasonable adjustments for a worker or prospective worker experiencing mental illness can constitute discrimination.

Employers are required to make reasonable adjustments for workers experiencing a mental illness, unless:

- the employee could not or cannot adequately perform the inherent requirements of the employment even after the adjustments are made; or
- making the adjustments would impose an unjustifiable hardship on the employer.

Staying at work

It may seem that taking time off work is the best solution, but that's not always the case. Most people with mild to moderate mental health issues can function at work (perhaps with some reasonable adjustment to their duties) and benefit from being there.

The benefits include:

- a sense of belonging, which is an important part of resilience, and avoiding isolation at home,
- maintaining productivity and a sense of achievement,
- having a healthy distraction,
- maintaining a routine,
- being better able to track progress,
- receiving support from peers and employer,
- resolving factors that cause or worsen issues, leading towards less 'mental scar tissue' at work
- removing fears that can arise after some absence, like the possible reactions of co-workers,
- increased commitment to work for an employer who's actively trying to help.

An employee should take time away from work, however, if they're:

- at risk of self-harming or suicidal behaviour,
- a danger to others or behaving in a way that's significantly affecting other employees, and reasonable,
- adjustment is impossible or doesn't improve the situation, showing signs of psychosis (e.g. delusions of grandeur, paranoia or hearing voices),
- suffering from very deep depression, often characterised by psychomotor slowing, which severely impacts upon concentration, motivation, productivity and capacity to control emotions, and
- very agitated and unable to control their emotions.

Six ways employers and people leaders can help make workplaces mentally healthier

1. Smart work design

- Establish flexible working hours.
- Address workplace culture of when, where and how you work.
- Involve staff in deciding how work is performed.
  Listen to people's ideas about how to get their work done.
- Monitor staff workloads.
- Ensure your physical work environment is safe and encouraging.

2. Building personal resilience

- Provide stress management and resilience training for those in high-risk jobs, such as emergency service workers exposed to significant levels of trauma or stress.
- Use evidence-based approaches such as cognitive behaviour therapy.
- Provide and encourage regular physical activity opportunities like lunchtime yoga, jogging or meditation.
- Encourage mentoring and coaching.

3. Building better work cultures

- Learn how to have conversations with people you're concerned about and encourage all staff to look out for each other.
- Provide mental health education to the whole team.
- Reduce stigma. Speak openly about mental health conditions.
- Ensure senior staff are engaged in mental health promotion and providing a safe and positive workplace.
- Implement a mental health policy including zero tolerance of bullying and discrimination.

4. Increasing awareness of mental health

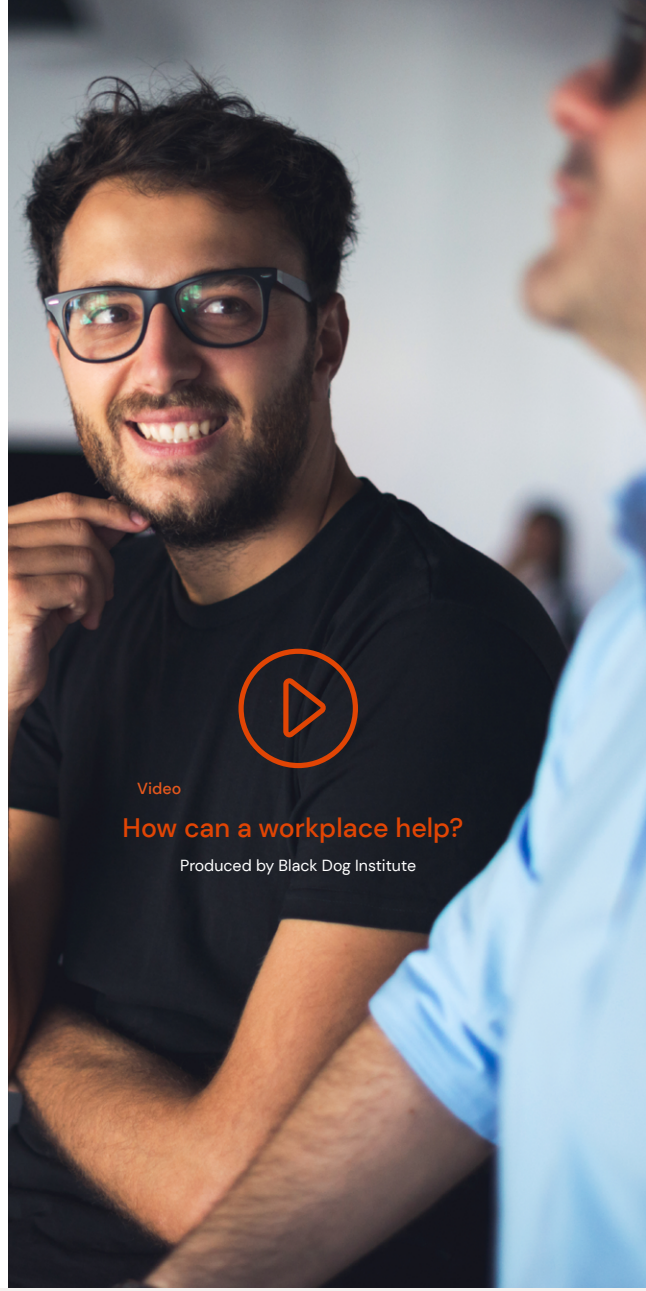
- Provide access to mental health information.
  Leave brochures about mental health on team notice boards.
- Talk openly about mental health at work.
- Conduct mental health awareness programs and mandatory training.
- Include mental health development in staff induction and development.

5. Supporting staff recovery from mental illness

- Provide supervisor training on how to support workers recovering from mental illness and stressful life events. Facilitate flexible sick leave.
- Modify duties and work schedules when appropriate.
- Provide a supportive environment and ensure no discrimination or bullying occurs.

6. Early Intervention

- Encourage staff to seek help early.
- Consider wellbeing checks once appropriate supports are in place.
- Provide mental health training so staff can support each other.
- Provide a peer support program for staff.



Five ways to wellbeing

A healthy mind is just as important as a healthy body for your overall wellbeing.

Based on international research, these 5 ways to wellbeing Include simple and effective ways to improve your psychological and emotional health day-to-day.

Connect | Be active | Be aware | Keep learning | Help others

Connect

Connect with people around you; with family, friends, neighbours or people you meet, at work, school or at the shops. Think of these social connections as important in your life and spend time developing them. Building these relationships will support and strengthen you every day.

Ways to connect: Catch up for a drink or meal, ask people how they're going and really listen to the answer, schedule a time of the week to talk to someone (it can be face-to-face, over the phone or emailing).

Be active

Keep your mind and body active. Find something you enjoy and do it regularly. Exercising makes you feel good and helps to clear your mind.

Ways to be active: Have walking meetings, play a sport, try gardening, step outside and go for a walk or run.

Be aware

Take time to stop and be aware of your surroundings and the moment you are in, paying attention to your thoughts and feelings. Doing this can positively change the way you feel about life and how you approach life's challenges.

Ways to be aware: Notice the smells, sounds, and sights around you, try practicing meditation and mindfulness exercises, notice how you feel at different times, keep a journal.

Keep learning

Try something new or rediscover a past interest. Learning is about challenging ourselves to do something in a different way to what we've done before. It can give you a sense of achievement and build your confidence.

Ways to keep learning: Read a new book, take on a new role at work, learn to play a musical instrument, try something artistic, or do a new course.

Help others

Helping others can give you a sense of purpose and belonging, build friendships and make your community a better place. Do something kind for a friend or stranger. It can be as simple as sharing your appreciation, giving your time, knowledge, or goods to others.

Ways to help others: Volunteer in your community, make a donation, or share your skills through a mentoring program or helping out on a project.

Source: 5waystowellbeing

What help is available?

GP

Building a team to support you is key to managing mental illness and the first step is to book an appointment with your GP. They can provide accurate diagnosis, referral to a psychologist or psychiatrist, and develop a Medicare mental health care plan.

- Book a long consultation
- Get your symptoms assessed
- You may be referred for expert advice or therapy
- You may need medication
- Persist until you find a GP you click with

Employee Assistance Program

An Employee Assistance Program (EAP) is a work-based preventive and proactive intervention program designed to enhance wellbeing of all employees in dealing with personal and/or work-related concerns that may impact wellbeing, work performance or health and safety.

Programs include a range of counselling services, assessments, referrals and resources for all employees, and also work in a consultative role with managers and people leaders to address organisational challenges and needs.

Workplaces should regularly promote their EAP internally to encourage employees to utilise their services.

If your workplace is not currently using an EAP, you can contact a provider to contract their services.

Phone Lines

Lifeline	13 11 14
Kids Helpline	1800 551 800
MensLine Australia	1300 789 978
Suicide Call Back Service	1300 659 467

Websites

Black Dog Institute	www.blackdoginstitute.org.au
Sane	www.sane.org
Beyond Blue	www.beyondblue.org.au
Reach Out	www.reachout.com.au
Head to Health	www.headtohealth.gov.au

"I went and saw a local doctor and said look I'm really struggling and he got me in to where I needed to go. The phone services are amazingly available all the time, so I would definitely use them again if I had to."

Wayne, Lived experience presenter

Emergency support

If you or someone is in crisis and you think immediate action is needed, call emergency services (triple zero - 000), contact your doctor or local mental health crisis service, or go to your local hospital emergency department.

Emergency contact information - 24 hours

If you or someone you know needs help, call:

- Emergency 000 (or 112 from a mobile phone)
- Lifeline 13 11 14
- Kids Helpline 1800 551 800
- MensLine Australia 1300 789 978
- Suicide Call Back Service 1300 659 467

Resources

Online clinic

The Black Dog Institute's online clinic takes you through a range of clinical assessments for common mental health conditions. It's a simple and anonymous way to check in on your mental health and provides you with a personalised report with recommendations and support services.

READ MORE

MyCompass

MyCompass is a personalised, online self-help treatment program for stress, anxiety and depression. It includes 14 different interactive program activities which provide you with skills and strategies to make positive changes in your life. The myCompass lifestyle tracking feature allows you to track your thoughts, feelings and behaviours and provides graphical feedback to help you recognise unhelpful patterns and possible triggers.

READ MORE

HeadGear

HeadGear is a free, easy-to-use smartphone app that guides you through a 30–day mental fitness challenge designed to build resilience and wellbeing and prevent depression. HeadGear features a range of simple engaging daily activities to help reduce and manage stress, improve sleep, connect better with friends and deal with difficult situations.

Download on the App Store

GET IT ON Google Play

Wellbeing Plan

The wellbeing plan template can be used to guide conversation with your with your work, family, or friends. Work through it together to develop a plan that works for all of you. Your support team can help refine the plan too if you need help: take it along to your next appointment. Review it regularly and keep it updated, and remember it's a guide only – adapt it to suit your needs.

READ MORE

Fact sheets

The Black Dog Institute have a range of evidence-informed fact sheets which cover a range of Information about mental health conditions, treatments and wellbeing.

READ MORE

Workplace programs

The Black Dog Institute strives to make Australian workplaces mentally healthier through the translation of research into practical interventions.

Black Dog Institute's workplace training programs are designed to have a lasting, positive impact on the productivity of your business and the lives of the people working around you. Each of our programs can be tailored to suit your objectives and budget.

Our programs are:

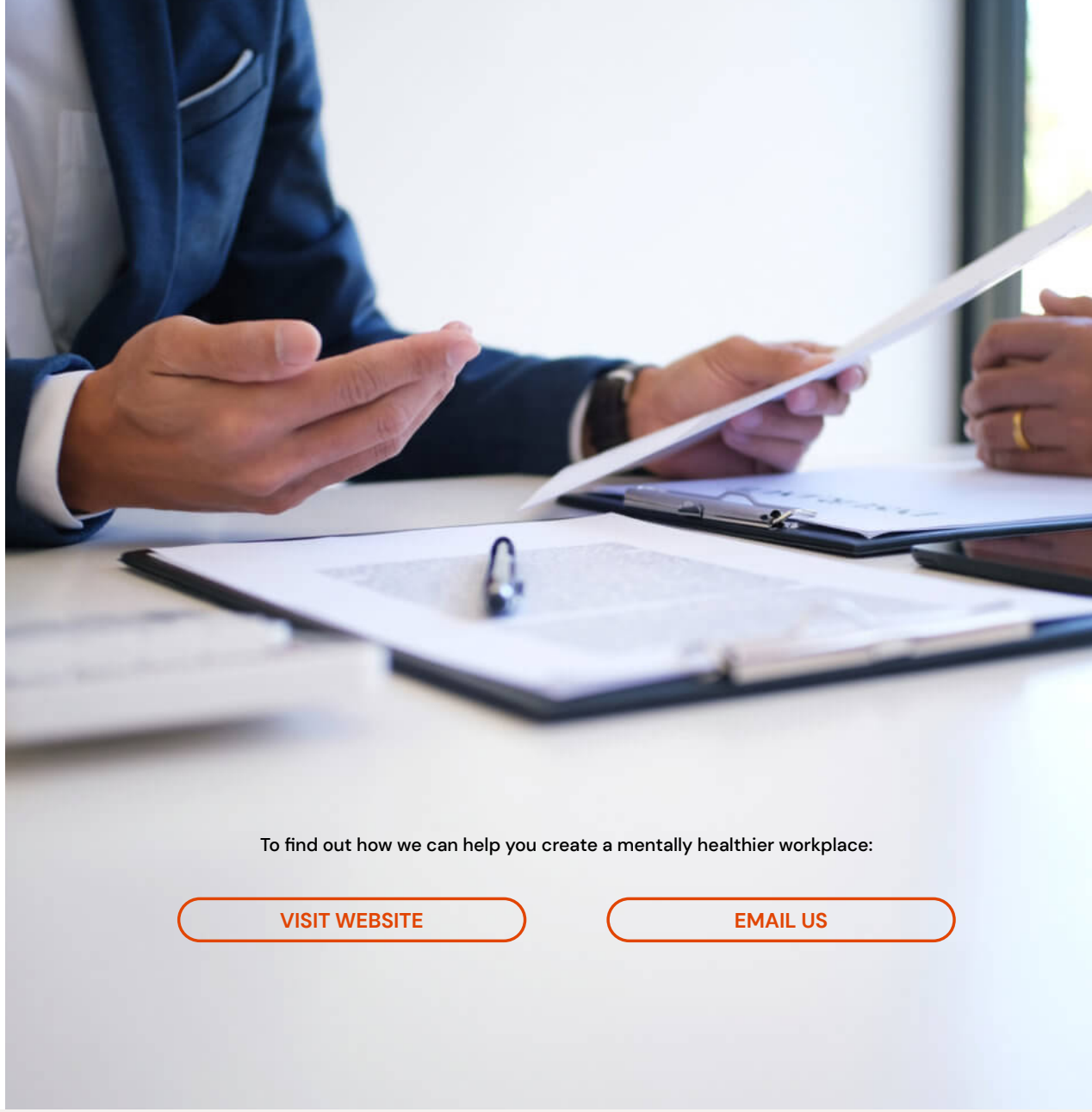
- built on current, proven research to ensure accuracy and relevance
- customisable to adapt to your business needs
- delivered by qualified facilitators
- focused on achieving sustainable outcomes for your business.

We can help workplaces:

Increase productivity

Reduce absenteeism

Improve overall wellbeing



To find out how we can help you create a mentally healthier workplace:

VISIT WEBSITE

EMAIL US

We’re here to help.

Get in touch to ind out how we can help improve wellbeing at your organisation.

Contact: **corporatepartners@blackdog.org.au | www.blackdoginstitute.org.au**

Black Dog Institute