



mental health matters

{ handbook for employers & employees }

mental health matters

STATEMENT OF INTENT

Silver Ribbon (Singapore) is a non-profit organisation launched by Former President S R Nathan on 4 Feb 2006 to combat mental health stigma and encourage early treatment.

The contents of this publication are guidelines for promoting positive mental health at workplace so that employers and employees would be able to understand the importance of mental health, recognise signs and symptoms of mental health issues, encourage early treatment, and know where to seek help.

Adherence to these guidelines may not ensure a successful outcome in every case. These guidelines should neither be construed as including the best practice, nor exclude other acceptable types of management.

The mention of specific organisation or of certain mental health programmes/services does not imply that they are endorsed or recommended by Silver Ribbon (Singapore) in preference to others of a similar nature that are not mentioned.

The responsibility for interpretation and use of this publication lies with the reader. In no event shall Silver Ribbon (Singapore) be liable for damages from its use.

To learn more about Silver Ribbon (Singapore) and mental health issues, please visit www.silverribbonsingapore.com.

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FOREWORD

The World Mental Health Day (WMHD) is commemorated annually to promote greater awareness and understanding of mental health and mental illnesses.

I am happy to note that as part of its continuing efforts to promote awareness of mental health issues in the workplace, Silver Ribbon (Singapore) has launched this handbook on how to create a safe and supportive environment for employees with mental illnesses.

Employers are important partners in the prevention and early treatment of mental illnesses, and can play a key role in enabling the integration of individuals who have suffered from mental illnesses. Co-workers too can play a part by understanding and supporting their colleagues with mental illness so that they do not feel isolated at the workplace. Employees should also be encouraged to take responsibility for their own mental wellbeing, including learning to recognise symptoms, seeking timely treatment and continuing with their medication.

I sincerely hope that this handbook will be a useful resource for both employers and employees – all can play a part to promote positive mental health in the workplace.

Thank you once again to Silver Ribbon (Singapore) for doing its part to remove the stigma about mental illness and in the process helping to achieve our vision of building a more inclusive society.

Mdm Halimah Yacob
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INTRODUCTION

Mental Health at Workplace

Mental health is described by the World Health Organisation as:

"... a state of well-being in which the individual realises his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community."¹ In this positive sense, mental health is the foundation for the well-being and effective functioning of individuals and communities.

According to the Singapore Mental Health Study (SMHS) in 2011, which was spearheaded by the Institute of Mental Health (IMH), Major Depressive Disorder (MDD), Alcohol Abuse and Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD) emerged as the top three most common disorders in Singapore. One in 16 people in Singapore have suffered from MDD at some time in their lifetime, while Alcohol Abuse and OCD affected one in 29 and one in 33 people, respectively.²

However, that tells only one part of the story as it only identifies those who are diagnosed and have sought medical help. There are many others who display a host of behaviours that reflect poor mental

health. The effects of poor mental health can often leave people feeling confused, hurt or shut down. Dealing with different kinds of health issues is never a simple or straightforward matter.

In addition, a survey conducted by Health Promotion Board in 2012 had shown that working Singaporeans scored 13 per cent lower than the general population in terms of their mental well-being.³ In view of the finding, it is likely that a company would hire an employee with mental health issues at some point. And, he/she may experience mental health issues prior to employment or during employment while most could successfully cope without influencing their work performance.

Over time, unhealthy employees and workplace practices take their toll, leading to a host of outcomes, including mental health issues such as depression. Therefore, the cost of ignoring the problem is far greater than the cost of developing and implementing strategies to create a safe and healthy workplace.

Awareness, understanding and knowledge of mental health issues are the keys to moving towards achieving health and well-being for everyone at workplace.

INTRODUCTION

Reasons for introducing MENTAL HEALTH MATTERS: HANDBOOK FOR EMPLOYERS AND EMPLOYEES

Because a safe and healthy workplace is good for productivity and efficiency⁴

A safe and healthy workplace could be promoted by:

- Reducing costs associated with employee absence from work and high employee turnover.⁵
- Achieving greater staff loyalty and a higher return on training investment
- Minimising stress levels and improving morale of employees
- Optimising good delivery of goods and services and satisfaction of clients

Because society and workplaces are diverse

Today's workforce reflects the diversity of the local population. Diverse skills, abilities and creativity benefits the business by providing new and innovative ways of addressing challenges and meeting the needs of a similarly diverse customer population. Successful businesses and

managers recognise the contributions made by a diverse workforce, including employees with mental health issues, who still possess relevant skills, knowledge and attitude.

Because mental health issues can affect anyone

Mental health issues, especially depression and anxiety, are common in the community. Most of us will experience mental health issues at some time in our lives or be in close contact with someone who has mental health issues – a friend, colleague or family member.

UNDERSTANDING

MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES

Mental health issues do not arise by reason only of age, gender or occupation. They can strike at any time and are treatable. Early detection and treatment have been clinically established to be able to put them under control.

The aim of this chapter is not to encourage one to probe into other's personal life, to diagnose them, or act as their counsellors. Being aware of the signs that suggest someone may be experiencing mental health issues is important. The individual may be going through a particularly stressful time in their life for any number of reasons. Behaviour changes might indicate that the person is experiencing a mental health issue that goes beyond being "stressed-out" and that requires professional help.

Signs of Depression

People who are depressed may:

- Be tearful, nervous or irritable
- Have low confidence
- Lose interest in their work and find it difficult to concentrate
- Feel overwhelmed and unable to deliver what is expected of them
- Lose their appetite
- Get tired easily

At worst, they may feel suicidal.

Signs of Bipolar Disorder

Bipolar is also known as "manic-depression", and is characterised by the constant changing of moods. A person with bipolar experiences highs and lows, and the period vary from person to person. People with bipolar may experience:

- Extreme mood swings
- Rash spending sprees
- Poor concentration and easily distracted
- Poor appetite and weight loss
- Heighten sense of self-importance
- Lesser need for sleep

Signs of Anxiety

Anxiety takes many forms from general anxiety to anxiety triggered by a particular situation (a phobia). People experiencing anxiety may seem unusually worried or fearful in most situations. They may:

- Appear pale and tense
- Be easily startled by everyday sounds
- Have difficulty concentrating
- Be irritable
- Try to avoid certain situations

UNDERSTANDING

MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES

Panic attacks are usually a sign of anxiety and are common in the workplace. Someone experiencing a panic attack may breathe rapidly, sweat, feel very hot or cold, feel sick or feel faint. A task that other people consider simple may seem impossible to them. The symptoms of a severe panic attack can be quite similar to a heart attack, and someone experiencing one may be convinced that they are going to die.

Obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD) is a common form of anxiety involving distressing repetitive thoughts. Compulsions are the actions which people feel they must repeat to feel less anxious or stop their obsessive thoughts. For example, some people cannot stop thinking about germs and the diseases they could catch. To cope with this anxiety, they may start washing their hands over and over again. Compulsions commonly involve

checking, cleaning, counting or dressing rituals.

Signs of Schizophrenia⁶

Schizophrenia means “split mind”, it is a chronic and debilitating disorder characterised by the inability to distinguish between what is real and what isn't. From the eyes of an outsider, a sufferer's behaviour might seem odd or outrageous. They may be:

- Seeing, hearing, smelling, feeling things that isn't really there
- Showing no emotion or expressing inappropriate affect (e.g. giggling at a funeral)
- Showing little interest or drive in daily activities
- Exhibiting disorganised speech and behaviour
- Unable to remember things
- Unable to process information and make decisions

UNDERSTANDING MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES

Signs of Relapse⁷

Just as there are warning signs of mental health issues, there are warning signs to its relapse – it does not happen in a whim. A percentage of relapse is to be expected, recognising early signs and being proactive can help prevent or minimise a relapse. Prior to a relapse, people will often experience changes in their feelings, thoughts and behaviours. Here are some observable signs that can be taken note of:

- Loss of interest/motivation
- Difficulty sleeping or change in sleeping habits
- Neglect personal care and seem to be more distant
- Alcohol/drug use
- Extreme anger outburst
- Changes in work performance

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RECOMMENDATION FOR EMPLOYERS

Mental Health Awareness at Workplace

To develop a culture in your organisation where you and your employees gain awareness and understanding of mental health in the workplace⁸, you could work closely with a local mental health organisation to provide education and information.

Confidentiality

The extent to which you have the right to information of an employee's mental and physical help is restricted, unless he/she is contractually obligated to reveal such information. Information acquired regarding the mental health issues of your employees is normally given in confidence, and thus you have the duty to maintain the confidentiality of this information. To prevent any dispute, it is advisable to obtain the consent of the employee if you are to disclose this information to third parties.

A supportive environment for employees with mental health issues can be achieved by reassuring confidentiality of their information.

Communication

You might feel uneasy talking to an employee who exhibits signs pertaining to mental health issue as listed on pages 10 & 11 due to various reasons such as unpleasant experience in the past or the media representation of people with mental health issues as unpredictable and violent. Generally, they are no more dangerous than those in the general population. However, with the presence of certain disturbances, he/she might believe that someone wants to harm him/her, thus act on the delusion and take action against certain people.

He/she is more likely to take up an offer of services listed on pages 32 – 34 if given assurance that the interest lies in helping them to continue working effectively and the discussion is kept confidential. As stigma surrounding mental health issues is one primary reason employees do not seek help, be prepared to accept that he/she may or may not choose to make use of those recommended services.

RECOMMENDATION FOR EMPLOYERS

By talking to employees, you can learn more from their point of view, recognise any underlying cause of unhappiness or stress, determine ways to manage them and deal with problems that may arise with other employees.

In most cases, the best approach is to meet with your employee privately as he/she might become emotional during the discussion. Having a one-to-one conversation requires a great deal of sensitivity and empathy, it would be helpful if you:

- Stay calm: It would put your employee at ease and allow him/her to speak easily of concerns he/she might have.
- Focus on the issue: Talk about any concerns you may have on his/her work-related performance.
- Listen to what he/she has to say and refrain from interrupting his/her sentences or getting into an argument with him/her.
- Maintain eye contact during the conversation would show that you care and is completely focused.
- Paraphrase what he/she has shared would demonstrate to your employee

that you heard and understood his/her message. If it has not been adequately understood, it also gives an opportunity for your employee to repeat his/her concerns.

- Engage your employee in exploring possible solution to address the issue.
- Avoid making snap decisions: Even though the solution may seem obvious at first, you may wish to discuss with your team and consider the possible consequences before getting back to your employee.⁹

Accommodation

Mental health can be affected by many factors and some of them are within your control. If your company has the practice of offering flexible work environment to employees with physical illnesses to handle lighter work, take time-off, adjust working schedule or allow them more time to adapt to the working environment, then it is recommended that similar arrangements to be extended to an employee with mental health issues as well. This accommodation may be considered on the basis of factors such as the employee's performance and valid certification of his/her condition.

RECOMMENDATION FOR EMPLOYERS

Termination of Service

While the employee with mental health issues ought to take responsibility for his/her mental health issues, the company could play a part by creating a discrimination-free environment.

Unless the employee is certified unable to perform work task, it is not recommended to terminate his/her service simply because he/she has mental health issues or the colleagues refuse to work with him/her as mental health issues are not transmittable. You may wish to keep a detailed documentation to show that all of the options for retention and possible redeployment have been considered.

Labour-Management Relations

Management in your company could work together with unions in regard to issues arising from mental health issues. Such co-operation helps to prevent irrational fears and prejudices arising and avoid any souring of labour-management relations.

Adopting Buddy System

If you have sufficient manpower and resources, you might wish to consider introducing buddy system for all employees entering a new working environment. These buddies could be a group of existing employees who volunteer to serve in their capacity, or they could be appointed to the role as an acknowledgement of their good interpersonal skills and abilities. The goal of this personal adjunct to usual workplace operation is that it would help new employee to integrate comfortably into the work culture and guide them on essential aspects such as organisational values, informal policies, and norms.

ROLE MODELS FOR EMPLOYERS

Silver Ribbon (Singapore) introduced SILVER RIBBON CHAMPION OF MENTAL HEALTH AWARD in 2009 to acknowledge and recognise individuals and organisations for their committed efforts in mental health advocacy and promotion.

Here is a compilation of nominators' comments on winners of SILVER RIBBON CHAMPION OF MENTAL HEALTH AWARD under Organisation Category from 2009 to 2012.

2009

Horsburgh Engineering (F.E.) Pte Ltd

"Due to the strong stigma attached to psychiatric illness, many individuals with psychiatric conditions face tremendous challenges in getting and keeping a job. This is so even in individuals with a high functioning level. The widely held misconception about individuals with psychiatric conditions by the general public is that they suffer a permanent loss of their full capabilities to be productive once they are diagnosed with a psychiatric illness. Hence, this becomes a major barrier for individuals with psychiatric conditions in their recovery process and in gaining independence through vocational pursuit.

In 2002, Horsburgh Engineering (F.E.) Pte Ltd initiated a partnership with us to provide employment opportunities to individuals with psychiatric conditions. The partnership proved to be fruitful as the company is very open to employing our clients. Horsburgh Engineering offered wages at market rate to our clients who were successful in gaining employment with them.

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Since the company established a partnership with us to provide employment opportunities for individuals with psychiatric conditions, we have placed almost 140 individuals as their staff over the years. The company's supervisors work very closely with our staff on each individual from the first day of work, and help them to adapt to the work environment.

Supervisors are taught not to discriminate against individuals with psychiatric conditions in the recruitment process. At the same time, they are also advised to be flexible and accommodating towards the clients whom we placed and allow time for them to settle down in the work environment. The company also respects the confidentiality of the clients' medical condition by not divulging their psychiatric condition unnecessarily.

Over the years, the company has been supportive in responding to our referrals to job place our clients with them. All individuals with psychiatric conditions referred by us to work with the company are given a job interview. So far, the company has successfully employed more than 95% of the individuals that we have sent for interviews. In July 2009, one of the individuals whom we referred to the company was even nominated to be promoted to the position of supervisor. In addition, our clients employed by the company receive similar treatment as their colleagues, including remuneration, opportunities for upgrading and promotion prospects.

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The company's supervisors proved that they go the extra mile to assist individuals with psychiatric conditions in the social aspects as well. We had placed a client to work as a dish collector at Newton food market. This particular individual had been rejected by his family, is not intellectually bright and is diagnosed with a psychiatric illness.

Furthermore, he was homeless and had problems living within his means. The company employed him and extended him help beyond the workplace. One of his colleagues helped him to plan a budget based on his salary so that he can resolve his financial problems. His supervisor also ensured that he was not taken advantage of by other colleagues.

In view of the support given by the company and their efforts in assisting individuals with psychiatric conditions in their employment, we strongly feel that the company is a role model in supporting people with mental illness.”

2010

Xin Wang Hong Kong Café

“It is a widely held misconception that people with a psychiatric condition have substantially lost their functional capabilities. In addition, the stereotypical image of a person with psychiatric condition is that of an unkempt and isolated individual which render him/her unsuitable to take up customer service or frontline jobs. Hence, in the earlier days, only companies from the cleaning industry came forward to become our

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partner-employers since cleaner jobs are often at the back end and do not require much interaction with others. Many companies which provide frontline customer service may be apprehensive to employ people with psychiatric condition as they are fearful that the person's behaviour in public may tarnish the reputation of the company. This is one of the reasons why we were not able to recruit companies other than cleaning and dish collecting into the employment scheme in the earlier years.

Till date, we have recommended 21 individuals with psychiatric conditions to work at Xin Wang Hong Kong Cafe since the partnership was formed in August 2007. Out of these 21 individuals, 16 of them were successfully job placed. A few of the individuals from the pioneer batch being job placed are still employed.

Xin Wang Hong Kong Cafe management has been very accommodating and has exercised flexibility in handling the employment issues of individuals whom we have placed with them. In addition, they had gone the extra mile by bringing the individual's social issues to our attention, even if these are not employment-related. Hence, the nominated company stands out to be an outstanding partner with us in providing jobs from the F&B industry.

A recent job placement with the nominated company involved an individual with a diagnosis of Bipolar Disorder who worked previously as a restaurant manager in another company. After interviewing him, the

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Company offered him a salary of \$1,400+ which commensurate with his experience. This is unlike the traditional train-then-work concept where some companies offer an entry-level remuneration or some sort of training allowance to people with psychiatric condition in the beginning, regardless of past relevant work experience, because they still have doubts that people with psychiatric condition can perform the normal duties undertaken by people without psychiatric condition. Such companies then promise to peg their remuneration to the market rate if the individual is able to "perform". Yet, sometimes there is a lack of objective evaluation in deciding whether the individual is able to perform in the job. Hence, the non-discriminatory practice of the nominated company is praise-worthy.

Also, in many instances, the nominated company allows the individuals the flexibility to transfer to other lower-traffic outlets if these individuals face challenges to cope with the work tasks. Some of the clients who were job placed by us often struggled in the initial period of work due to their inadequate confidence level and even a volitional condition caused by the psychiatric condition. However, the nominated company has shown enormous patience and accommodation in providing an opportunity for individuals with psychiatric condition to return to the workforce and eventually on their recovery journey.

In all, we truly appreciate their efforts in providing employment opportunities for our clients with psychiatric condition and we feel that they are a role model for other socially responsible employers."

ROLE MODELS FOR EMPLOYERS

2011

Sunlove Abode for Intellectually Infirm Ltd

"We have partnered with Sunlove Home on job training and employment opportunities for a period of time. They have played a pivotal role in giving hope to our clients by providing continuous support by providing the jobs and allowing the Occupational Therapists to be on-site to provide assessment and training in their recovery phase.

People with mental illness experience high levels of rejection or struggle with sustaining jobs and barriers to employment including anxiety, an interrupted work history and stigma. We have found Sunlove Home to be very understanding and enduring to work with as they make provisions by allowing the healthcare professional to do the training and aid the clients with the integration. The process begins with close job support by the Occupational Therapist and slowly fading to promote independence.

Their openness to allow clients to take small steps brings confidence and comfort to the clients who are placed for supported employment. The clients' struggles are well understood and integration is paced and that brings success and hope.

First and foremost, they must be selected for their "never give up or lose hope" attitude in rendering assistance to our clients for over 4 years. They did not stigmatized our clients by offering them only the lower end jobs but respected their qualifications and capabilities by offering job

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placements to even administrative positions available in Finance or Human Resource Departments where suitable.

Not only does Sunlove Home respect the clients, they will take our recommendations seriously and allowed us to exercise what we have recommended in terms of modifications of the working hours within their system.

In addition, Sunlove Home have respected the client's confidentiality by not wanting to know too much of their psychosocial background and are happy to hear what our staff deems necessary to feedback. Despite their busy schedule, Sunlove Home staffs have always made time to have a session with our team with regards to the client's work performance.

Even though some of the job placed clients' performance may not be up to the mark initially, they encouraged them by providing remunerations proportional to the amount of work that the client does. Moreover, they also provide free meals to job placed clients who may initially not be financially adequate to buy lunch. If employers of this virtue increase in number in the community, vocationally rehabilitating our clients would be a smoother and faster process!"

Louisiana QSR Pte Ltd

"Louisiana QSR Pte Ltd initiated partnership with us since 2010 to provide job opportunities for clients with mental illness. The partnership proved to

ROLE MODELS FOR EMPLOYERS

be fruitful as the company is very open to employing our clients. Over the last 3 years, a total of 23 clients have been successfully employed at selective Louisiana QSR Pte Ltd outlets as food service crew. In addition, Louisiana QSR Pte Ltd remained open in making specific job modifications to promote clients' success in sustaining work. Job tasks were introduced at a gradual basis and direct one-on-one guidance was given to cater to the slower learning speed and lower stress threshold of clients. Louisiana QSR Pte Ltd's managers and supervisors are always ready to go extra mile to assist our clients in adapting to the work environment and demonstrated patience and tolerance to our clients in their guidance of our clients. Counselling support was also provided by on-site managers alongside us to ensure emotional and psychological well-being of clients. Louisiana QSR Pte Ltd also respects the confidentiality of the clients' medical condition by not divulging their psychiatric condition unnecessarily. These have helped in job sustainability for our clients, which further lead to their improved quality of life and self-esteem.

Louisiana QSR Pte Ltd has shown exceptional efforts to promote the psychological, social and financial well-being of people with psychiatric illness by remaining open to hire them so that they can regain roles as productive members of the society. Despite stereotypical image of a person with psychiatric conditions, widely held misconception that people with psychiatric condition will have potential loss in work productivity, Louisiana QSR Pte Ltd remained tireless in working closely with us to provide necessary workplace adjustments so that people with mental

ROLE MODELS FOR EMPLOYERS

illness can work in a supportive and stable work environment. Louisiana QSR Pte Ltd's management actually took time off their busy schedule so that they could attend a workshop in April 2012 to provide feedback on our clients and learn new strategies to effectively support clients at work.

In many instances, Louisiana QSR Pte Ltd demonstrated flexibility in transferring our clients to lower-traffic outlets if they face challenges in coping with the workload of busier outlets. There was a client who was unemployed for a long time but with the support of Louisiana QSR Pte Ltd, he was placed as a lobby crew since 2011 and is currently a trainer overseeing the training of new workers in Louisiana QSR Pte Ltd.

Louisiana QSR Pte Ltd has shown great patience and accommodation in allowing our clients to return to work during the occasions when our clients need to be excused from work due to their inadequate confidence or avolition caused by the psychiatric condition.

In view of the support given to individuals with psychiatric conditions during their employment, we strongly feel that Louisiana QSR Pte Ltd is an outstanding champion in promoting the integration of people with psychiatric conditions back into the community."

RECOMMENDATION FOR EMPLOYEES

HELPING YOURSELF

Mental health issues affect the way you think, feel and behave, which can be diagnosed by a doctor, not personal weaknesses.

As an employee, it is important for you to possess a positive outlook, acquired skills related to the job position, and perform the essential job tasks to the acceptable standard. While the company is playing its part to create a discrimination-free environment, you could consider the following recommendations to address your mental health issues.

Seeking Help on Mental Health Issues

Everyone feels stressed or anxious from time to time. However, if the feelings continue for more than two weeks, prevent you from eating, sleeping or working, interfere with the quality of your relationship, or if you want to harm yourself, you should seek help from those mental health services listed on pages 32 - 34.

Managing Mental Health Issues

- Work closely with your doctor by taking medication as directed and

updating him/her on any side-effects you may experience. Refrain from discontinuing their medication and/or reducing your dosage at your own accord when you are experiencing side-effects of the medication or feel that you are doing well.

- Create your own circle of support at work – having friends at work means being a friend at work.
- Be clear of your job scope and what is expected of you.
- Be realistic – knowing your own limits.
- Sign up for mental health workshops, attend mental health events, or join a support group to understand and manage mental health issues better.
- Watch out for early warning signs that may indicate a relapse which could be prevented if you are to seek help immediately.

Disclosing Mental Health Issues

It can be very stressful to be in a situation where you feel that you must hide your mental health issues. You will need to consider disclosing your mental health issues to your employer and/or colleague if:

RECOMMENDATION FOR EMPLOYEES

- You have one that could affect your ability to do your job
- You have regular medical appointments that conflict with your work schedule
- You found out that the physical setting for work has distractions that interfere with your concentration.⁹

They may then be able to provide you with support and assist you effectively if you were to fall ill while at work, due to your mental health issues or from the side-effects of medication.¹¹

Thus, if you feel ready to talk about your mental health issues, here are a few points to help you out...

- Be prepared for different reactions, positive and negative, that the person may have.
- Choose a time and place when you feel comfortable and ready to talk.
- Consider connecting without sharing private details and keeping workplace relationship friendly, warm and professional.
- Be ready for lots of questions...or none as the person might require further information to help them understand.
- Give them time: The person may initially react in a way that's not helpful

– maybe changing the subject, using clichés rather than listening.

- Keep it light: We know that sometimes people are afraid to talk about mental health because they feel they do not know what to say or how to help.
- Take up opportunities to talk: If someone asks you about your mental health, do not shy away, be yourself and answer honestly. Acknowledge their concern and share how you can or had overcome your difficulties. You may choose to explain your situation at your own pace; by first saying that you have “a problem with stress,” then call it a “psychiatric condition” or even name the diagnosis if you feel it is necessary.
- Courage is contagious: Often once mental health is out in the open people want to talk. Do not be surprised if your honesty encourages other people to talk about their own experiences.

Managing Side-Effects of Medication

People respond in different ways to medications, and no one can tell beforehand how a person will respond. Sometimes a person needs to try several

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medications before finding the right one.¹² Instead of discontinuing your medication or adjusting your dosage, it is advisable to update your doctor on those side-effects you are experiencing.

Managing Relapse

Some may have a relapse – the symptoms come back or get worse. Usually relapse happens when one discontinues their medication or reduces their dosage at their own accord. You should consult your doctor if you exhibit signs of relapse found on page 12.

HELPING YOUR COLLEAGUES

When you first realise that someone you work closely with has a mental health issue, it may be alarming for you. You may have fear where this may lead or how it would affect you in the workplace.

There are subtle signs and symptoms that you can help look out for on pages 10 & 11. However, remember that you cannot fix his/her work performance problems. It is more important for you to respond sensitively to someone who seems troubled.

Confidentiality

There is no obligation for your colleagues to disclose or discuss their mental health issues with you unless it is likely to affect their performance or ability to meet the requirements of the job, or their ability to work safely. If this is the case, they are generally only obligated to inform your employer.

Meanwhile, if a colleague reveals it to you, please treat the information with respect and refrain from discussing their illness with others unless you have been given permission.

RECOMMENDATION FOR EMPLOYEES

Communication

At times, it can seem easier to ignore the situation than to try to provide support. Here are a few steps for your consideration although you may not be able to solve your colleague's problems for them:-

- Treat him/her with respect and dignity.
- Find out how he/she would like you to support them.
- Be open and tell him/her that you care.
- Let him/her know that you are there if he/she wants to talk about it.
- Allow him/her to share as much or as little as they want to.
- Ask questions to help you understand what he/she is going through .
- Keep your open-ended questions such as "Why don't you tell me how you are feeling?" rather than "I can see you are feeling very low", and try to keep your language neutral.¹³
- Give him/her time to answer and try not to grill him/her with too many questions.
- Listen carefully to him/her without making judgment and repeat what he/she has said to ensure you have understood it.

- Do not reinforce or dismiss his/her experiences, but acknowledge how they are making him/her feel.
- Do not recommend religious solace when he/she is not ready yet.
- Recommend those mental health services as listed on pages 32 - 34 and respect his/her choice.

Keeping in touch

To avoid having awkward feelings for your colleagues who are hospitalised or taking medical leaves, you could explore the following ways which you would do to your colleagues with physical illnesses too:-

- Invite him/her out when staff are spending leisure time together. They may decline, but still appreciate being asked.
- Send cards.
- Give him/her a call to provide updates on your workplace.

RECOMMENDATION FOR EMPLOYEES

Returning to work

Resuming duties after a break due to mental health issues can be exhausting for your colleagues, especially when they are adjusting to their medication, experiencing side effects of their medication or worrying about the acceptance by other colleagues.

If your company has the practice of offering flexible work environment to employees with physical illnesses to handle lighter work, take time-off, adjust working schedule or allow them more time to adapt to the working environment, then your employer might recommend that similar arrangements to be extended to your colleagues with mental health issues.

Supportive colleagues can play an important role in the mental health recovery process. In this case, your understanding, encouragement, and patience would be deeply appreciated.

While walking this journey with your colleague, you can also play a part by looking out for signs of relapse found on page 12 and recommend those mental health services listed on pages

32 - 34 when you observe or they share that they have discontinued their medication or reduced their dosage at their own accord.

Self-Care

While you are handling your personal issues, it could be a struggle for you to provide support to your colleague at the same time. You may comfort yourself that you have done your best at your own capacity and acknowledge that there are situations which are not within your control.

If you find yourself in any doubts or feeling overwhelmed, you may refer to those mental health services listed on pages 32 - 34 for advice.

INTERVIEW

WITH AN EMPLOYEE

Peter, 30, Manager, Private Sector

- **Can you share with us on your experience coping with mental health issues?**

I had my first episode in Dec 2001 and experienced a relapse in Feb 2004. Life was very challenging after that relapse as it took me almost 8 months before securing a job. But even then, I was still sensitive to stress, and had difficulty holding on to a job. It was only in 2006, that I knew things were more stable and that I had more mental resilience, especially in employment. In 2008 I found my current job, and have been working here since.

Presently, I would take 1 mg of risperidone before going to bed daily.

Besides medication, spiritual support plays an important role during the process of rehabilitation.

- **Do you find your mental health issues an obstacle during job hunting? Why?**

Yes, in a way. I can't reveal my past condition when applying for jobs because that will seriously diminish my chances of getting a job. Also, I had some difficulty explaining the lapses in my employment record. Employers do not like applicants who seem to be 'job hopping'.

- **How long have you been holding onto your current job?**

It will be four years this August.

INTERVIEW

WITH AN EMPLOYEE

- **Are your mental health issues affecting your work performance? If yes, how do you address it?**

Not at all right now.

- **Do you find employment important to you?**

Of course. I need the money and wish to feel useful in the family and to society.

Employers should not ask whether the job applicant has a history of any mental health issues but should ask whether any previous illness would affect their work performance.

This would reduce discrimination. Employers, who are understanding towards their employees with a history of mental health issues, would gain the loyalty of these employees and enjoy their many years of faithful service.

I am not sure whether my current employer is aware of my condition. Even though I did not declare in my job application, they might obtain information from my previous employer. To date, nobody has questioned me about it.

I am thankful to my supportive family, good friends, and spiritual support.

RESOURCES

ASSESSMENT & TREATMENT

- Polyclinics
- General Practitioners
- Hospitals
- Private Psychiatrists

COUNSELLING SERVICES & HOTLINES

Care Corner Counselling Hotline	1800-353-5800
Clarity Singapore Limited	9710 3733
Institute of Mental Health Crisis Helpline	6389 2222
Samaritans of Singapore	1800-2214-444
Silver Ribbon (Singapore)	6386 1928
Singapore Association for Mental Health	1800-2837-019

MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

Agency for Integrated Care

No. 5 Maxwell Road, Tower Block,
MND Complex, #10-00
Singapore 069110
Tel 6603 6800
<http://careinmind.aic.sg>

Caregivers Alliance Limited

Blk 707 Yishun Avenue 5, #01-36
Singapore 760707
Tel 6753 6578
www.cal.org.sg

RESOURCES

Caregivers' Association of the Mentally Ill

84 Riverina Crescent

Singapore 518313

Tel 6782 9371

www.cami.org.sg

Chong Pang Social Service Hub

Blk 126 Yishun Ring Road, Street 11, #01-431

Singapore 760126

Tel 6100 1201

www.thkmc.org.sg/chong-pang-social-service-hub

Clarity Singapore Limited

Church of our Lady Star of the Sea

10 Yishun Street 22

Singapore 768579

Tel 9710 3733

www.clarity-singapore.org

Health Promotion Board

3 Second Hospital Avenue

Singapore 168937

Tel 6435 3500

www.hpb.gov.sg

Institute of Mental Health

Buangkok Green Medical Park

10 Buangkok View

Singapore 539747

Tel 6389 2000

www.imh.com.sg

OcTAVE@IMH and Job Club

Buangkok Green Medical Park

10 Buangkok View, Blk 1

Singapore 539747

Tel 6389 2678

www.jobclub.sg

OcTAVE@Bt Batok

Bukit Batok Polyclinic, Level 3

50 Bukit Batok West Ave 3

Singapore 659164

Tel 6566 7462

OcTAVE@Cantonment

25 Cantonment Road

Singapore 089744

Tel 6225 0781

RESOURCES

O'Joy Care Services

Blk 5 Upper Boon Keng Rd, #02-10

Singapore 380005

Tel 6749 0190

www.ojoy.org

Singapore Anglican Community Services

Simei Care Centre

10 Simei Street 3

Singapore 529897

Tel 6781 8113

www.sacsscc.org.sg

Hougang Care Centre

20 Buangkok View, Blk 4

Singapore 534194

Tel 6386 9338

www.sacshcc.org.sg

Community Rehabilitation and Support Service (CRSS)

Blk 267 Bukit Batok East Ave 4, #01-206

Singapore 650267

Tel 6562 4881

Blk 707 Yishun Avenue 5, #01-36

Singapore 760707

Tel 6753 5311

Blk 534 Pasir Ris Drive 1, #01-266

Singapore 610534

Tel 6584 4633

Temasek Cares Employment Support Services

Blk 534 Pasir Ris Drive 1, #01-266

Singapore 610534

Tel 6584 4633

Silver Ribbon (Singapore)

Blk 616 Hougang Ave 8, #01-386

Singapore 530616

Tel 6386 1928

www.silverribbonsingapore.com

Singapore Association for Mental Health

139 Potong Pasir Avenue 3

Singapore 350139

Tel 6283 2140

www.samhealth.org.sg

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mental health matters.