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# **Colleagues with a mental illness or stress**

## **Tips and guidelines for supervisors**

As of January 2024

# Recommendations for supervisors on how to deal with colleagues who are stressed or mentally ill

- Be alert! Speak to your employees if there is a sudden change in behaviour, productivity or personality.
- Observing and responding can prevent a worsening of the situation.
- There is no patent remedy or “one size fits all” solution for dealing with mental illness in the workplace.
- An open approach to mental crises and illnesses helps to removal of taboos.
- Please bear in mind that not every employee wants to disclose their private problems; this should be respected.
- However, if the daily business or the working relationship in the team is disturbed, you will have to act.
- Please take advantage of support offers within and outside TU Dresden (see last slide).



Image: Free-Photos on Pixabay

# H-I-L-F-E Concept



## H

### OBSERVE

- Discuss observed changes openly, clearly and without prejudice in a face-to-face discussion. It is best to use a list of issues and objectives for the conversation.
- Provide concrete examples of changes. Avoid interpretations, generalisations or accusations.
- Communicate that you are concerned about the health of your colleague and signal your willingness to provide help.
- If your colleague denies a change in behaviour, evades or tries to explain – offer to help them anyway.
- However, do not overburden yourself and do not get too deeply involved in the problems of the person concerned.
- Clarify burdening factors related to work: to what extent are they related to a possible mental illness? For example, concerns about temporary employment, time and deadline pressure, monotony, public business, bullying, ...

## I

### TAKE THE INITIATIVE

- If the situation does not change, you should take the initiative again.
- Talk to your colleague again about the change in behaviour. Discuss suitable solutions for their work situation, with the aim of helping them to stay at work despite a crisis situation.
- In agreement with your colleague, get support: using university and, if necessary, private resources (Occupational Health Services, interest groups, colleagues, family, friends, confidants, ...)

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# H-I-L-F-E Concept



L

## EXERCISE YOUR SUPERVISORY FUNCTION

- If the crisis is likely to continue for a longer period of time, you should agree on tangible work targets with the affected employee.
- You should clearly advise the colleague that they should seek help or treatment.
- Make it clear that it is the colleague's personal responsibility to maintain their health and work capacity as this is just as important as your offering to help!

F

## LEADERSHIP RESPONSIBILITY: ENCOURAGE & CHALLENGE

- Establish appropriate behaviour in dealing with the colleague: encourage them, but at the same time challenge them by considering the interests of the university.
- Encourage in this context means patience, understanding, care and flexibility.
- Challenge means to adjust the expectation of work efficiency, but to still maintain certain minimum requirements.
- Why is this important? You will continue to take your colleague seriously in their role and you will maintain the work requirement balance between too little and too much. Especially with those suffering from depression, the balance between maintaining a certain standard and providing care helps the recovery process - protection and low requirement are more likely to be harmful.
- Observe, describe and document changes. In this way, you make it easier for all those involved to keep track of agreements that have been made.
- Documentation of changes in work performance can also be important with regard to consequences under labour law if the employee can no longer fulfil their obligations stipulated in the employment contract but refuses to seek help.

Image: PublicDomainPictures on Pixabay

# H-I-L-F-E Concept



## E

### CONSULTING EXPERTS

- Consider consulting experts: the [Occupational Health Services](#) are available with occupational health physicians and psychologists; the city of Dresden offers a [social-psychiatric service](#) and a [psycho-social crisis service](#).
- Further help: [Directorate Personnel](#), [personnel representatives](#) (e.g. Personnel Representation Council, Representative of Employees with Disabilities), higher-level superiors, medical specialists, specialist integration services, relatives of the person concerned, support groups, further telephone hotlines such as [SeeleFon](#), ...
- Be mindful of the willingness and consent of the person concerned!
- Following a longer period of absence due to illness, a [Company Integration Management \(BEM\)](#) may be considered.

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### IN AN ACUTE EMERGENCY

- Acute emergencies can be, for example, psychotic crises with acute delusions or depressive crises of deep despair and resignation, the voicing of suicidal thoughts and/or plans, as well as endangering themselves or others.
- Try to remain calm and accept the person in their current situation. Take suicidal thoughts seriously. Explaining to them that their delusional ideas are nonsensical does not work. Do not leave the person unobserved; if possible, bring in trusted colleagues. Talk to the person concerned calmly and accept their fears. Contact the Occupational Health Services or accompany the person to the social psychiatric service, to the doctor or, after making an appointment by telephone, to the acute ward of the hospital.
- Do not be afraid to call 112.

Image: PublicDomainPictures on Pixabay

# What to do in case of illness and returning to work

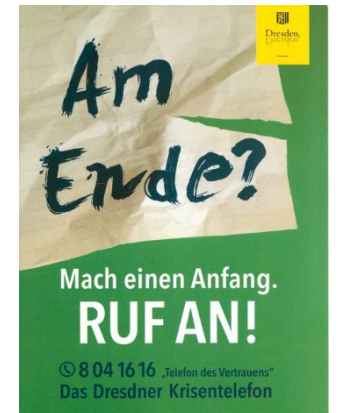
- If an employee decides to undergo inpatient treatment, they can also be visited in a psychiatric hospital, provided that they agree to the visit. If they refuse the visit, or if it is currently not possible for medical reasons, it may be requested from time to time.
- Encourage your colleague to be open about their illness and try to take away any shame that may be present. Discuss whether and to what extent this should be communicated to other colleagues.
- If the state of recovery of the colleague has already progressed, consideration can be given as to how and under what circumstances it is possible that they may return to work, whether changes are needed in the workplace, whether there are fears or concerns about returning to work, etc.
- Consider the possibility of gradual reintegration and a BEM (see slide 5). You are very welcome to contact the Occupational Health Services for help.
- An environment in which the affected person can talk openly about their illness makes many things easier.
- Prepare the employee by giving them information about any changes in the workplace and about who has been informed of their illness.
- Agree on rules of conduct if there are ever any signs of a relapse.
- If your colleague has another colleague as a confidant, you can agree with them who will assume which tasks.



Image: stokpic auf Pixabay

# Further contacts and links

- [Offers of the University Health Management](#)  
Please contact the Occupational Health Services on +49 351-463 36199 and we will help you to find the right contact person (occupational health physicians, psychologists, corporate integration management [BEM] representatives, interest groups...)
- [Social Psychiatric Service of the City of Dresden](#)
- [Psychosocial crisis service of the City of Dresden](#)
- [Call of confidence/ Dresden crisis line](#)
- [Search for doctors and psychotherapists in Saxony](#)
- [Counselling for relatives of those suffering from depression](#)



# Sources

- BKK Dachverband & Bundesverband der Angehörigen psychisch Kranker. 1.-3. Auflage. 2006-2015. Praxishilfe Psychisch krank im Job: Verstehen – Vorbeugen – Erkennen – Bewältigen.
- Unfallkasse Berlin. 2013. Psychisch auffällige oder erkrankte Mitarbeiter.