



# Breaking the Stigma: Understanding Mental Health

## The Invisible Burden – Why We Need to Talk About Mental Health

### Breaking the Stigma: Understanding Mental Health in Our Union

In our line of work, we're tough. We face physical challenges, demanding schedules, and high-pressure situations. But there's another challenge we often overlook: mental health. Too often, we suffer in silence, afraid to admit we're struggling. It's time to break the stigma surrounding mental health and create a culture where we can support each other. This article will help you understand mental health, recognize the signs of struggle, and know that you're not alone.

#### Why the Stigma Exists:

For too long, mental health has been seen as a weakness. We've been told to "tough it out" or "shake it off." This attitude prevents us from seeking help and perpetuates the idea that mental health problems are something to be ashamed of. In our industries, where physical strength and resilience are often valued, admitting to emotional struggles can feel especially difficult.

#### Understanding Mental Health:

Mental health isn't just about the absence of mental illness. It encompasses our emotional, psychological, and social well-being. It affects how we think, feel, and act. Just like physical health, mental health <sup>1</sup> can fluctuate. We all have good days and bad days. But when the bad days start to outweigh the good, it's time to pay attention.

#### Common Mental Health Challenges:

- **Stress and Anxiety:** The pressures of our jobs and personal lives can lead to chronic stress and anxiety.
- **Depression:** Feelings of sadness, hopelessness, and loss of interest in activities.
- **Burnout:** Emotional, physical, and mental exhaustion caused by prolonged stress.
- **Substance Abuse:** Using drugs or alcohol to cope with difficult emotions.
- **PTSD (Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder):** Experiencing trauma on the job can lead to PTSD.



## Recognizing the Signs – When to Seek Help

### It's Okay to Not Be Okay: Recognizing the Signs and Seeking Support

#### Signs to Watch for in Yourself:

- **Changes in Sleep or Appetite:** Difficulty sleeping or significant changes in eating habits.
- **Persistent Fatigue:** Feeling constantly tired, even after rest.
- **Loss of Interest:** No longer enjoying activities you used to love.
- **Difficulty Concentrating:** Trouble focusing or making decisions.
- **Irritability or Anger:** Feeling easily agitated or experiencing frequent outbursts.
- **Social Withdrawal:** Isolating yourself from friends and family.
- **Thoughts of Self-Harm or Suicide:** If you are having these thoughts, seek help immediately.

#### Signs to Watch for in Your Coworkers:

- **Changes in Behavior:** Noticeable shifts in their usual demeanor.
- **Increased Absenteeism:** Frequent absences or tardiness.
- **Decline in Performance:** A drop in work quality or productivity.
- **Emotional Outbursts:** Uncharacteristic displays of anger or sadness.
- **Verbal Cues:** Statements that express feelings of hopelessness or despair.

#### Why Early Intervention Matters:

Just like with physical health, early intervention is crucial for mental health. Seeking help when you first notice signs of struggle can prevent problems from escalating and improve your chances of recovery.

## Building a Culture of Support – How We Can Help Each Other

### We're in This Together: Creating a Supportive Union Community

#### How to Break the Stigma:

- **Talk About It:** Openly discuss mental health with your coworkers, friends, and family.
- **Listen Without Judgment:** Create a safe space for others to share their experiences.
- **Educate Yourself:** Learn more about mental health and the resources available.
- **Challenge Stigma:** Speak up when you hear stigmatizing language or attitudes.
- **Share Your Story:** If you're comfortable, sharing your own experiences can help others feel less alone.

### How to Support Your Fellow Members:

- **Offer a Listening Ear:** Sometimes, just being there to listen is enough.
- **Encourage Professional Help:** Suggest they seek help from a mental health professional or utilize union resources.
- **Offer Practical Assistance:** Help with tasks or responsibilities that might be overwhelming.
- **Check in Regularly:** Follow up to see how they're doing and offer ongoing support.
- **Utilize Union Resources:** Know what resources your union provides, and help other members find them.

We're a union. We're a community. We're in this together. By breaking the stigma and supporting each other, we can create a healthier and more resilient union. Remember, it's okay to not be okay. And it's okay to ask for help.

**For more information, tools, resources, or app information, call your  
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