

Signs an Employee might be Suffering from a Mental Health Issue

Given that over 45% of Australians will suffer from a mental health condition at some point in their lifetime, it should come as no surprise that the negative characteristics associated with mental illness often reveal themselves in the workplace.

When someone is suffering from poor mental health, it usually manifests in atypical behaviour, or sometimes misconduct or poor work output, which inadvertently alerts management to a notable change and potential performance issue.

Despite what we know about mental health, when an employee starts demonstrating uncharacteristic signs of unusual behaviour, misconduct or poor performance, the usual knee-jerk reaction for management can be to performance manage or discipline the person.

However, it's important to recognise that these behavioural or performance changes can often be caused by a mental health issue. The quandary for managers is knowing when these issues are caused by mental health problems and when they are not; when to act and when to observe and gather data a little longer.

→ **Tip:** Before investigating any behavioural changes, it's important to know the difference between a mental health condition and a personality-driven behaviour.

The former is reflected in changed behaviour, while the latter is continual, unchanged and often unchangeable. In other words, you're looking for a change in the norm when deciphering whether or not a colleague is suffering from a mental health issue. When the misconduct has always been there, it is less likely to be mental-health-driven.

CHARACTERISTIC CHANGES TO LOOK OUT FOR

Unfortunately, it's often difficult to know for sure if someone is suffering from a mental health issue unless they tell you themselves. But there are several things to look out for to help you reach this conclusion.

- **Changes in work habits**
- **Changes in physical appearance**

- **Increased absenteeism or tardiness**
- **Changes in demeanour**
- **Increased outbursts and mood swings**
- **Avoiding interaction**
- **Uncharacteristic behaviour that their peers and colleagues find unusual or are worried about**

Let's take a closer look at each one:

Changes in work habits →

- Does the person appear to demonstrate a lack of motivation?
- Are their concentration levels and productivity lower?
- Is the productivity/behavioural problem a change, or has the problem always been there?

Changes in physical appearance →

- Has there been a sudden change in the person's appearance?
- Are they unkempt when they normally wouldn't be (lack of personal grooming)?
- Are they wearing clothing that differs from their normal dress standard for work?

Increased absenteeism or tardiness →

- Does the person turn up late for work consistently?
- Are they regularly late for meetings or do they forget meetings altogether?



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- Are they taking more unplanned leave or not turning up to work?

Changes in demeanour →

- Does the person appear more nervous or distracted talking to colleagues/clients?
- Do they appear more restless or irritable?
- Are they more erratic in their behaviour?
- Do they complain about aches and pains, excessive fatigue, or general tiredness consistently?

Increased outbursts and mood swings →

- Have you noticed more angry outbursts from the person?
- Is the person demonstrating more exaggerated swings in emotion and mood?
- Have they been flouting rules?
- Are they more aggressive/defensive than they used to be?

Avoiding interaction →

- Is the person not communicating like they once were?
- Do they suddenly avoid joining with colleagues or socialising as they may have in the past?
- Do they avoid communicating through group calls or even emails?

Uncharacteristic behaviour that their peers and colleagues find unusual or are worried about →

- Are people close to the person concerned about them also?
- Is the person distancing themselves from those they normally would be open with or close to?
- Is other data about the individual coming to light from concerned colleagues?
- Have colleagues started approaching HR or managers about their concerns?

Once you believe someone is potentially suffering from a mental health condition, the next stage is to get a plan sorted out ahead of offering support. Although this can seem daunting, you don't have to tackle this alone.

Converge's **Manager Support** program can help each manager develop a plan of approach through all stages of the support process, from identifying changed behaviour, having the important conversations and progressing discussions to ensure improvement and eventual recovery for the employee. Call one of our friendly team on **1300 667 197** to learn more about how we can help.



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