



Mental Health Awareness

Mental health and wellness may be one of the biggest safety issues on our jobsites today. When people who are struggling with substance abuse, depression, anxiety, and personality disorders show up to work they are likely to be distracted and fatigued and may have severely impaired judgment and perception. This could obviously result in incidents or injuries to themselves or someone else, or – at its worst case – self-inflicted injury or even death.

Construction is the second-leading industry at risk for suicide by men. Statistics show that rates of suicide thoughts, plans, and attempts are more than double that of the general population. Why does it hit us so hard? There are many factors of our jobs that have an impact. First, it is a high-pressure industry. We are driven by schedule, budget, and production demands. We are always pushing, and that can take a toll. Many construction workers travel regularly and are away from their families for extended periods of time. We deal with sleep disruption or deprivation due to shift work, and oftentimes manage seasonal or end-of-project layoffs. Many in our industry suffer from chronic pain that is the result of years and years of hard physical labor, and a high number of that population self-medicates with drugs or alcohol.

Last – but maybe most important, we are an “old school” and “tough” industry. This often prevents people from opening up, sharing shortcomings, or asking for help. This is what we need to fix. For many, a coworker could be a last line of defense. We need to educate ourselves and be on the lookout for warning signs, and we need to encourage people to open up and seek help when necessary. You must take care of yourselves, take care of each other, and know who to go to for help. We are all in this together, and together we can eliminate the stigma surrounding mental health and asking for help.

Discuss ways your team can prioritize the mental health of all employees and share resources for where help can be found for those who need it.

Ask group the following questions, allow time for response and conversation before sharing possible answers.

What are some warning signs?

- a. Increased or excessive use of drugs or alcohol*
- b. Anxiety*
- c. Difficulty sleeping or dramatic increase in sleeping*
- d. Lack of purpose or comments about having no reason to live*
- e. Withdrawal*
- f. Dramatic mood swings or uncharacteristic anger*
- g. Recklessness*

How can you be an active listener? (getting people to share their struggles)

- a. Watch non-verbal signs*
- b. Ask open-ended questions or prompt with "tell me more"*
- c. Make sure to remain non-judgmental, and resist offering advice*
- d. Reflect back key feelings or phrases to assure the person they are being heard*
- e. You do not have to wait for the perfect time.*