

# How to identify someone who is struggling

By understanding common signs and symptoms of mental health issues, you will be in a better position to identify and help a colleague in need. Below are some common signs to look out for.



## Examples of common changes in mood & behaviour

Change in emotional reactions	Change in thinking	Change in behaviour
<p><i>Increased:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• fear and anxiety</li> <li>• anger and irritability</li> <li>• sadness and despair</li> <li>• emptiness or hopelessness</li> <li>• disconnectedness</li> <li>• withdrawal from favourite activities</li> <li>• lack of involvement or enjoyment</li> </ul>	<p><i>Increased difficulty:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• concentrating</li> <li>• following complex instructions</li> <li>• remembering</li> <li>• communicating</li> <li>• conversing, including hesitation, silence and broken sentences</li> </ul>	<p><i>Includes:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• withdrawing from others</li> <li>• being unavailable</li> <li>• being overprotective</li> <li>• startling easily</li> <li>• denying and avoiding</li> <li>• taking greater risks</li> <li>• abusing substances</li> <li>• speeding or careless driving</li> </ul>

Source: [www.mentalhealth.org.nz](http://www.mentalhealth.org.nz)

### Talk

**Talking is the best way to identify if someone you work with may be struggling.**

Encourage open conversation and check in with employees regularly—whether or not you are currently concerned about them. Many people have a long delay between developing a mental illness and receiving appropriate treatment and support. The longer the delay, the more difficult their recovery can be. By making mental wellbeing an everyday topic, it will be easier to raise issues when you do have concerns, and employees are likely to feel more comfortable sharing problems.

## Mental health issues: key signs & symptoms

### Depression

- Loss of enjoyment and interest in activities that used to be enjoyable
- Lack of energy and tiredness
- Feeling worthless, or feeling guilty when not really at fault
- Difficulty concentrating or making decisions
- Moving more slowly or sometimes becoming agitated and unable to settle
- Difficulty sleeping or sometimes sleeping too much
- Loss of interest in food or sometimes eating too much
- Weight loss or weight gain as a result of changes in eating habits.

### Anxiety

- Mind racing or going blank, decreased concentration and memory, indecisiveness, confusion, vivid dreams
- Unrealistic or excessive fear and worry about past or future events, irritability, impatience, anger, feeling on edge, nervousness
- Avoidance of situations, obsessive or compulsive behaviour, distress in social situations, sleep disturbance
- Increased use of alcohol or other drugs
- Pounding heart, chest pain, rapid heartbeat, blushing or rapid, shallow breathing and shortness of breath
- Dizziness, headache, sweating, tingling and numbness
- Choking, dry mouth, stomach pains, nausea, vomiting and diarrhoea
- Muscle aches and pains (especially neck, shoulder and back), restlessness, tremors and shaking.

### Substance abuse

- A lot of time spent obtaining the substance, using it or recovering from its effects
- Craving (ie, a strong urge) to use the substance

- Repeated use that affects ability to fulfil work or home responsibilities—for example, repeated absences from work, poor work performance, neglect of children or household
- Repeated use despite this causing ongoing problems with other people—for example, arguments, fights
- Repeated use in situations where it is physically hazardous—for example, driving a car or using machinery while affected by a substance
- Continued use despite knowing the substance is causing a mental or physical health problem.

### Stress overload

- Anxiety or panic attacks
- Irritability and moodiness
- Physical symptoms, such as stomach problems, headaches, or chest pain
- Allergic reactions, such as eczema or asthma
- Problems sleeping
- Drinking too much, smoking, overeating or drug use
- Sadness or depressed feelings.

### Suicide

- Threatening to hurt or kill themselves
- Looking for ways to kill themselves: seeking access to pills, weapons, or other means
- Talking or writing about death, dying or suicide
- Rage, anger, seeking revenge
- Acting recklessly or engaging in risky activities, including increasing alcohol or drug use
- Withdrawing from friends, family or society
- Anxiety, agitation, inability to sleep or sleeping all the time
- Dramatic changes in mood (including sudden improvement in mood following an episode of depression).

This is a summary guide only. It is intended to assist with finding the right care for the person and to help them feel supported. It is not conclusive advice. It should be considered alongside individual workplace policies and procedures and, of course, medical and specialist services.