

# MENTAL HEALTH IS PART OF SAFETY



American Foundation for Suicide Prevention

Matt is one of the most experienced workers on the jobsite. Lately, Matt has not been acting like himself. He's missed a couple of steps in his morning prep, seems distracted around heavy machinery, and is quick to snap at coworkers. No one wants to say anything because they figure it's just stress or a bad week.

On this jobsite, being mentally distracted or emotionally overloaded isn't just a personal issue—it's a critical safety risk. Mental health isn't just about how someone feels—it affects how we focus, react, and stay alert. Distraction, fatigue, irritability, and emotional distress can all lead to errors in judgment and accidents.

## WHAT YOU CAN DO

We all have mental health. According to a recent survey, 91% of people believe mental health is just as important as physical health.<sup>ii</sup> Caring about our team's mental health on the jobsite is part of being a responsible, safe worker. We all have a responsibility to:

- **Recognize the Risk:** Mental health conditions like depression are common - as is substance use and misuse. These are health conditions are also very treatable. But if left unchecked, they can lead to negative outcomes.
- **Watch for Signs:** Changes in behavior—like seeming withdrawn, mood swings, or uncharacteristic mistakes—can be early signs of a mental health issue which might affect job performance and safety.
- **Speak Up:** You don't have to solve someone's problems—just checking in when you see something you're concerned about can make a huge difference. Say something like, "You don't seem like yourself. Want to talk?"

## JOB SITE DISCUSSION STARTERS

Mental health can be discussed just like fall protection or ladder safety. Encourage the same proactive approach for both. This might look like taking an extra minute during a safety meeting to ask how people are doing, carefully listening to their responses, and responding thoughtfully to signs of mental distress. Mental health discussions should be as regular as safety reminders.

1. Does it surprise anyone that 91% of people believe mental health is just as important as physical health?
2. What are some things we can do to make mental health a part of safety?

## THE BOTTOM LINE

Being willing to check in, talk about stressors and how we're doing, and follow up on what you're hearing makes the whole crew safer, and helps the person who may be struggling. Caring about each other's mental well-being is an important part of jobsite culture. There's a broad spectrum of how changes in our mental health changes can show up. The earlier we see a problem, the better we can turn it around. But it's also important to act quickly if a crisis is brewing. If you or someone you know is in crisis, call, text, or chat with the Suicide and Crisis Lifeline at 988 which is available in both English and Spanish.

*Don't forget to mention your company's mental health resources or local service options.*

<sup>ii</sup> Suicide Prevention Now. (n.d.). Suicide Prevention Now. Retrieved July 14, 2025, from <https://suicidepreventionnow.org/>