Leader Tool – Supporting the mental health of your people through COVID-19

As a manager, you are in a unique position to promote positive mental health at work during COVID-19. Given the prevalence of mental health issues in Australia, it is likely that at any given time, someone in your team will either be experiencing symptoms or vulnerable to developing symptoms. This is likely to be higher as we have all been impacted by COVID-19. The pandemic and what we are all going through has the potential to dominate our thoughts 24/7. Data and research indicate that during times of crisis, people are less likely to reach out for mental health support as they focus on their immediate and pressing day to day needs.

- **Have a Conversation** - if you notice behaviours which concerns you, initiate a private, confidential and supportive discussion with the employee. Create a comfortable space where they will be able to have an honest conversation about what they are experiencing. It's always ok to ask "R U Ok?", especially through COVID-19.

- **Respect Privacy** - ensure that any information an employee shares with you about mental health symptoms is not disclosed to anyone else without their consent. Even if the employee takes some sick leave due to mental health symptoms, they must be the one to decide what is said to their colleagues about their absence from work. Be mindful that due to the uncertainty about COVID-19 and fears about job security that some people will be reluctant to share their issues or experiences.

- **Make Adjustments and a Plan** - if someone is experiencing mental health symptoms, don't assume that they shouldn't be at work. Work provides purpose and meaning and a sense of achievement. See if you can slightly adjust their tasks or working hours to help them remain at work. Involve them in the plan.

- **Use Non-judgemental Language and Stay Calm** - be aware and sensitive around the language that you use regarding someone's mental health. If someone feels judged about their mental health, this may stop them from getting help, so try and keep your language supportive and positive. Lower your voice, listen and stay calm. Remember, we are all getting through COVID-19 together. Be kind to yourself and others. You cannot solve other's problems but can guide them to get the support they need.

- **Focus on Strengths** - people who live with mental health symptoms are and have the potential to be effective and productive members of their family, community, and workplace. Recognise your team members for what they contribute and the strengths they bring to their role at work. Remind them that we all getting through this together.

It is important to recognise the important role you play in supporting the mental health of your people. We are engaged with new ways of work, including communicating in the workplace via technology. You can adapt the ways you would have conversations about mental health in the workplace. We encourage you to practice the skills that work for you in times like this when we are all impacted by COVID-19.

To have a confidential conversation with one of our experienced clinical team about how you can support mental health in your people or get ideas of how to have the conversations, please call **1800 818 728**. As always we are here to support you so that you can better support your people.