

"For safety's sake—do something."

Protecting Your Own Safety: Knowing the Signs of Declining Mental Health

During times of extreme stress, being aware of declining mental health is really important. Many people are able to see others decline much sooner and more clearly than they may see themselves. It is normal during stressful events to feel some sadness, fear, and anxiety however, if these feelings are left unaddressed for too long, they can lead to more significant problems such as suicidal thoughts, violence, and addiction. It is important that we learn as much as we can about the signs to watch for because we are more socially isolated and people are not spending time with us to help keep us in check.

Things to look out for regarding thoughts of suicide.

- Feelings of hopelessness and helplessness.
- A family history of suicide.
- Recent significant losses due to death, divorce, separation, or other life changes.
- Avoiding people more than usual.
- Giving away things that are important to you.
- In the United States, there is a national suicide prevention lifeline 1-800-273-8255.

Since the pandemic started, there has been an increase in domestic violence, speeding, and drug and alcohol use. Decrease your chances of taking your depression and anger out on others.

- Stay away from substances that increase your anger or irritability. Anger may be harder to control when under the influence of alcohol or drugs.
- Do not get behind the wheel if you are having a strong emotional reaction to something or someone. Wait until you have calmed down.
- Use a daily mood chart to note triggers to your anger and help you realize what situations to avoid until you can handle anger better.

- Practice relaxation techniques such as deep breathing and meditation to calm down and delay taking action when anger.
- Make sure you are communicating with positive people, those coping in healthy ways. Catch yourself when you overgeneralize such as using words as “always” or “never”. For example, “why are things always so bad? Things never go the way I want them to. I will never feel happy again”. Learn to stop your thinking and reword your thoughts to include, this is temporary, there will be a solution.
- Read positive books, articles, listen to podcasts, or watch youtube videos that inspire and promote positive thoughts.

Buddy system. Pair up with another employee. Set regular times to check-in with one another. Keep an eye on each other and give feedback if you notice something changing. Ask about workload to ensure your coworker is not getting too overwhelmed. Finally, do little random acts of kindness to keep one another's spirits up. It will help the person receiving, but will also help the person giving!

In a profession where safety and helping others is the center of your work, it may be easy to put yourself last. Take time to check-in with yourself. How are you dealing with difficult emotions and dramatic world changes? If you notice signs of emotional trouble in yourself, reach out for help and seek professional assistance if needed.

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