A SUICIDE PREVENTION TOOLKIT
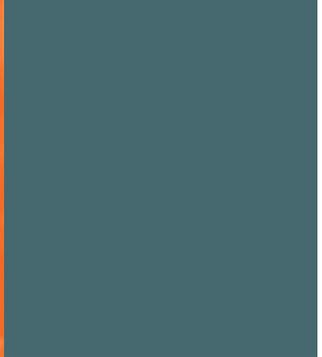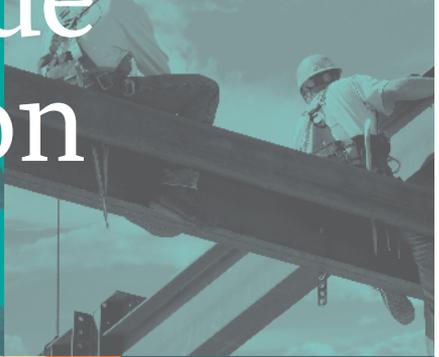
The workplace and suicide prevention

centre *for*
suicide prevention

IN THIS TOOLKIT

The workplace is a major part of the lives of most Canadians. Many of us spend upwards of 60% of our waking hours at work (Canadian Association for Suicide Prevention, 2016). Therefore, when a colleague dies by suicide the emotional and financial costs are enormous not only to family members, but to co-workers and the organization itself. Workplaces need to have measures in place to inform and educate about suicide. It is an issue that cannot be ignored.

This toolkit is a collection of facts, figures, and best preventative practices regarding suicide in the workplace.

Workplace warning signs

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People who are suicidal typically exhibit warning signs. In the workplace, these changes may be identified as a person:

- Being very happy after a period of depression;
- Acting more aggressive or stressed out than usual (e.g. lashing out at people);
- Commenting on being tired all the time, being noticeably fatigued;
- Commenting about being a burden to others (e.g. "Everyone would be better off if I wasn't here");
- Not showing up for work as often or being absent for long periods of time (absenteeism); and
- Not being as productive as usual, being un-motivated (presenteeism).

Some warning signs require more immediate action than others. If someone is exhibiting the following warning signs, call 9-1-1:

- Talking about wanting to die or kill oneself; and
- Looking for a way to kill oneself or already having a plan (American Association of Suicidology, 2017).

OCCUPATIONS WITH HIGH SUICIDE RATES

People in occupations where some of the following factors are present generally have higher suicide rates:

- easy access to lethal means (e.g. guns, pesticides);
- exposure to chemicals (e.g. pesticides) that can cause mood or behaviour impairments;
- high workplace stress (e.g. trauma, dangerous working conditions);
- job insecurity (e.g. contract work);
- low wages;
- stressors related to gender imbalance (women working in traditionally male-dominated industries);
- inconsistent work schedule (e.g. shift work) which can cause a disruption of family routine, inconsistent sleep patterns and other challenges; and
- isolation in the workplace.

OCCUPATIONS WITH THE HIGHEST RATES OF MALE SUICIDE INCLUDE (PER 100,000):

- Farming, fishing, and forestry (84.5);
- Construction (53.5); and
- Installation, maintenance, and repair (47.9).

OCCUPATIONS WITH THE HIGHEST RATES OF FEMALE SUICIDE INCLUDE (PER 100,000):

- Police (14.1); and
- Firefighters (14.1) (Centre for Disease Control and Prevention, 2016; Institute for Work and Health, 2010; Woo & Postolache, 2008).

More research is needed to understand occupation-specific risk factors and develop evidence-based programs for the workplace (Tiesman, et al., 2015).

Statistics and facts

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$1,795,379
IS THE AVERAGE COST OF ONE SUICIDE (USD) (SUICIDE PREVENTION RESOURCE CENTER, 2015).

IMPROVING MENTAL HEALTH IN THE WORKPLACE CAN DECREASE LOSSES TO PRODUCTIVITY BY AS MUCH AS

30%

(UK NATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR HEALTH AND CLINICAL EXCELLENCE).

$811 million
IS THE ESTIMATION OF DIRECT AND INDIRECT COSTS OF SUICIDES IN ALBERTA IN 2015 (ANIELSKI, 2015).

FOR EVERY

1%

INCREASE IN UNEMPLOYMENT

THERE IS A

0.79%

INCREASE IN THE SUICIDE RATE (STUCKLER, ET AL., 2009).

70%

OF ALL SUICIDE DEATHS IN CANADA ARE AMONG WORKING AGED ADULTS (AGES 30-64) (MUSTARD, ET AL., 2010).

BUSINESSES IN CANADA LOST

$6 billion

IN PRODUCTIVITY DUE TO POOR MENTAL HEALTH IN 2011 (MENTAL HEALTH COMMISSION OF CANADA, 2013).

Suicide prevention at work

PREVENTION MEASURES

- Employee assistance programs or human resource departments are available to help employees access mental health services (SPRC, 2013).

- Promotion of mental health (such as paid mental health days, sufficient vacation time, benefits that acknowledge both physical and mental health services).

- Suicide prevention awareness and training.

- Fostering a culture where help-seeking is encouraged.

HOW TO TALK TO A CO-WORKER YOU THINK MAY BE SUICIDAL

- Mention you have noticed changes in their behaviour and that you are concerned about them:

  Hey, you seem to be a bit overwhelmed with all the work you've been getting lately. I notice you are a bit more distracted than usual and I'm a bit worried about you. Are you okay?

- Ask them directly if they are having thoughts of suicide and if they a plan to kill themselves:

  Sometimes when people feel overwhelmed they think of any way possible to escape their situation. Sometimes they even think about killing themselves. Are you thinking about suicide?

- Connect them with resources in your organization (e.g. human resources, the employee assistance program or another mental health professional) or resources in your community (Suicide Prevention Resource Center, 2013).

After a suicide at work

When a suicide occurs in the workplace people in leadership roles need to respond swiftly and appropriately.

Immediately after a suicide, leadership should:

- send their condolences to the deceased person's family;

- ask family members if they are comfortable with the leadership acknowledging the death as a suicide to other members of the organization;

- communicate the death to employees while respecting the family's wishes; and

- follow any existing crisis response policy guidelines.

In the days and weeks following the suicide, leadership should:

- identify those employees most impacted by the death and ensure they receive the grief support they need;

- offer psychological resources and supports to all employees; and

- decide whether or not to memorialize the deceased.

In the months and years following the suicide, leadership should:

- ensure preventative measures (previously listed) are put in place (Carson J. Spencer Foundation, 2013; Canadian Association for Suicide Prevention, 2016).

RESOURCES

- **Breaking the silence in the workplace: A guide for employers on responding to suicide in the workplace.** Irish Hospice Foundation http://bit.ly/2pmZ2QJ

- **Critical Incident Stress Debriefing.** http://bit.ly/2oNVtRl

- **A Manager's Guide to Suicide Postvention in the Workplace: 10 Action Steps for Dealing with the Aftermath of Suicide.** Carson J. Spencer Foundation http://bit.ly/1z8N1d2
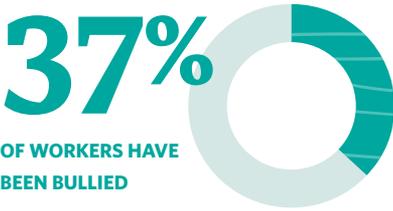
Bullying in the workplace

**WORKPLACE BULLYING
CAN CAUSE:**

- anxiety;

- panic attacks;

- depression; and

- increased suicide risk for those already at risk.

37%

**OF WORKERS HAVE
BEEN BULLIED**

72%

**OF THE PEOPLE
BULLYING OTHERS
HOLD AUTHORITATIVE
POSITIONS (WORKPLACE
BULLYING INSTITUTE, 2007).**

BULLYING INCLUDES:

- repeated intimidating or abusive behaviour;

- assertion of power through aggression; and

- calling attention to or mocking a person's perceived shortcomings (including psychological or physical disabilities).

BULLYING DOES NOT INCLUDE:

- expressing differences of opinion;

- offering constructive feedback, guidance, or advice about work-related behaviour; and

- reasonable management actions (e.g. managing a worker's performance, disciplinary actions, assigning work) (Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety, 2017; Workplace Mental Health Promotion, 2017).

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We are the Centre for Suicide Prevention, a branch of the Canadian Mental Health Association. For 35+ years we have been equipping Canadians with knowledge and skills to respond to people at risk of suicide.

We educate for life.

Canadian Mental Health Association
Mental health for all