



TOOLBOX TALK:

Mental Health (General Awareness)



MENTAL HEALTH (GENERAL AWARENESS)

STANDUP

Instructor Notes: Before delivering this toolbox talk, gather information on resources available to workers on site, such as an Employee Assistance Program (EAP) or benefits provided through a health and welfare fund or the employer directly. National resources available to all workers are listed at the end of this document. Before you start, know exactly what your company offers and who a worker should contact. Have that information physically available or accessible by QR code.

What we're going to discuss today is not easy to talk about, especially here, but we need to address this head-on.

Construction workers are known for their strength, grit, and get-it-done attitude. But beneath the surface of our hard hats, there's an issue that doesn't get talked about very often—mental health.

Some of the highest rates of depression, anxiety, and substance abuse exist within the construction industry. In fact, **nearly two-thirds (64%) of U.S. construction workers surveyed said they've experienced anxiety or depression in the last year.**

The industry also has a suicide rate of **4x** that of the general population and an opioid overdose rate **6 to 7x** higher than workers in other industries.

Think for a second about someone you know who's struggling with mental health, alcohol, drugs, stress or burnout. Most of us probably don't have to think very long.

Mental health belongs in the safety conversation for the same reason fatigue, distractions and impairment do. If your mind isn't on the task because you're dealing with something at home, haven't slept, are overwhelmed, or are trying to numb something, that doesn't stay in the parking lot. It comes onto the jobsite with you. Around heights, equipment, electricity, traffic and other people, being mentally checked out can get somebody hurt.

We're not here to diagnose anybody. We're talking about recognizing when somebody on our crew isn't acting like themselves, or when we ourselves might need to make a change.

We are seeing a shift around this conversation in real time. Mental health is just as much a part of the safety conversation as physical health, and that's a good thing.

Today we're going to focus specifically on symptoms of depression, which can look like:

- Feeling hopeless and helpless
- Losing interest in friends, activities and things you used to enjoy
- Acting more irritable, short-tempered or aggressive than usual (especially for men)
- Consuming more alcohol, engaging in reckless behavior or self-medicating
- Feeling restless and agitated
- Having difficulty concentrating or a decline in productivity at work
- Having an increase in negative thoughts

On a construction crew, those signs may look like:

- Snapping at coworkers, having a short temper over minor issues, starting arguments
- Withdrawing from the crew, eating lunch alone, pulling away from buddies
- Showing up late, missing shifts, falling behind on tasks
- Losing focus, making careless mistakes, near misses
- Backaches, joint stiffness, headaches
- Relying heavily on alcohol, painkillers, or energy drinks to get through the day or numb feelings
- Complaining of severe fatigue or looking worn down from a lack of sleep

Since symptoms experienced more often by men – such as irritability and anger – aren't usually associated with depression, the condition is often overlooked in men. Left untreated, depression can become a serious health condition and can lead to suicide, but **the average delay between the first signs of mental health symptoms and getting treatment is 11 years.** We have an opportunity here to help people out and help prevent years of unnecessary suffering.

Creating an open dialogue helps people get safe support early. That's why we're talking about mental health today and asking you to watch out for each other. If you notice someone who's usually locked in seems to be off, or someone who's usually calm suddenly has a short fuse, don't just ignore it.

- Pull them aside when you can.
- Ask if they're okay.
- Help them call 988 or find resources if they need additional help. You don't need to be a doctor or a therapist; you just need to give a crap.

Checking in on each other and making sure someone knows they are not alone can be a gamechanger. It's a simple action that can have a big outcome.

We're responsible for more than watching each other's backs when we're on a ladder or under a load. We need to watch each other, period. You know the people you work beside every day. You know who's normally joking around. You know who's normally early. You know who's normally locked in. When that person changes, pay attention.

You don't have to diagnose them. You don't have to fix them. Just care enough to ask.

And if you're the person struggling, saying something gives the people around you a chance to help.

We don't walk past unsafe conditions on this jobsite. We shouldn't walk past people who might need us either.

I'm going to ask everyone to pull out their phone right now and put 988 in your contacts.

- 988 is a 24/7 hotline called the Suicide and Crisis Lifeline.
- If you ask someone how they are and they are not in a good place, calling 988 with them is a great next step.
- Calling 988 connects you to a trained counselor. There's no judgment, no HR and it's 100% confidential. 988 counselors can help when things are feeling bleak, if you just need some support and don't know where else to go or if you don't feel like talking to anyone you know.

Discussion Questions:

1. What can we do to promote a healthy mindset on the jobsite?
2. Who can offer help when they notice someone struggling?
[Answer: anyone]

Additional Resources:

988 Helpline

A nationwide, 24/7 hotline that provides support to individuals in mental health, substance use, and suicidal crises.

Call, text or chat 988

Depression Hotline

866-903-3787

If you feel that you are struggling with depression, you don't have to struggle alone. You can call The National Mental Health Hotline to speak to a professional about depression and get help with mental health resources.

Disaster Distress Helpline

1-800-985-5990

National hotline provides year-round disaster crisis counseling. Toll-free, multilingual, and available 24/7 to all residents in the U.S. and its territories experiencing emotional distress related to natural or human-caused disasters.

FindTreatment.gov

A confidential and anonymous resource for persons seeking treatment for mental and substance use disorders in the U.S. and its territories.

NAMI Helpline

Free, confidential nationwide service that provides one-on-one emotional support, mental health information and resources to tackle tough challenges that you, your family or friends are facing.

Call 1-800-950-NAMI (6264)

Text NAMI to 62640

SAMHSA's National Helpline

A free, confidential, 24/7, 365-day-a-year treatment referral and information service in English and Spanish for individuals and families facing mental and/or substance use disorders.

1-800-662-HELP (4357)