

Emotional Health in the Workplace



Embarrassed. Afraid. Don't know where to find help. These are sometimes the feelings that stop people from seeking help for emotional concerns. Fortunately, many companies now recognise that emotional health is integral to the physical health of staff, and these companies are actively adopting whole-body wellness programmes.

According to Dr Cindy Chan, a registered clinical psychologist, work, family problems, health issues, relationship, financial burden and a Type A personality are common factors contributing to stress responses, which may in turn result in different types of emotional disturbances, such as anxiety disorder and depression.

The symptoms of anxiety disorder include panic attacks and sleeplessness, while people suffering from depression are sometimes negative and self-critical, accompanied by sleeplessness, as well as loss of concentration and appetite. Physical and mental symptoms may also develop.

"Self awareness is very important in early detection of emotional disorders. Be sensitive to any emotional, cognitive and behavioural warning signs and equip yourself with some coping strategies. If the signs persist for two weeks, it is a warning signal. Seek professional help if you experience the symptoms described above for over four weeks," said Dr Chan.

“ Self awareness is key to detect emotional disturbance early. Be sensitive to your own emotion, cognitive and behavioural warning signs. ”



Dr Cindy Chan
Registered Clinical
Psychologist

Dr Chan cited the example of a patient who was overwhelmed by work stress. "She was a good performer but did not know how to say no to any job including those that were not within her duties. After a few years, her workload became too much and she started having panic attacks. Even after treatment the symptoms came back and she started developing stomach problems. Sadly because of delayed treatment, she can no longer work."

If you get angry easily and become emotionally unstable, it is a sign to watch out for. Emotional disturbances also manifest cognitively such as forgetfulness, short attention span and negative thoughts. The tendency to be absent or late for work, or even carelessness are also signs that may point to underlying emotional problems.

Coping Strategies

Dr Chan explained, "There are several coping strategies for emotional disturbances but first of all you need awareness. Any emotional or behavioural change can be a signal, whether it's feeling down or a sudden shopping addiction."

Mindfulness meditation has proven to be a useful way to improve mental health. She said, "Mindfulness aims to cultivate and sustain attention in the present without judgment. It requires practice but research has shown that it is effective in reducing stress."

Behavioural strategies such as muscle relaxation also bring similar benefits. Abdominal breathing, imagery relaxation, cardio exercises and even tai-chi can help regulate your mood.

She said, "There are also cognitive strategies that you can use. Learn to change your perspective and be less negative. Try to take a step back and look at the situation differently."

Emotional Wellbeing in the Workplace

Companies will benefit from having a workforce that is in a state of robust physical and emotional health. It is not difficult for companies to foster a work environment that is conducive to the emotional wellbeing of employees.

Dr Chan suggests engaging staff in sessions on how to manage stress, while having each level of supervisory staff be alert to any irregular emotional or behavioural signs that their staff may exhibit. "Showing support to staff will boost morale, and enhance organisational identity and productivity."

Supportive Environment

When it comes to an individual staff experiencing emotional issues, companies need to respect and adhere to the principle of strict confidentiality. Nonetheless, a company culture that promotes acceptance, tolerance and peer support will generally help a colleague make a faster recovery.

To help companies identify and meet the challenges posed by emotional disturbance in the workplace, some private healthcare providers in Hong Kong, such as Matilda International Hospital, offer tailor-made corporate health assessment plans that include mental health screening. After all, emotional health is part and parcel of physical health.



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