

# WORKSHOP

## CHALLENGES AND CHANCES IN CASE OF MENTAL ILLNESS

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### WHY FINDING A NEW APPROACH IS SO IMPORTANT

☹️ Currently: Insecurities, lack of knowledge, prejudices cause that people affected by mental illness are avoided or treated in a special way

- Those who are affected feel even more excluded and misunderstood
- Affected persons do not admit it to themselves and hope that it will go away by itself
- Affected persons try to hide their mental illness and do not seek for help

😊 New approach: Culture of openly talking about mental issues

- Affected persons feel accepted and can participate in working life
- Enables timely prevention for everyone e.g. in times of high work-load
- Enables searching for help and thus treatment early in the course of a mental illness

### TYPICAL SIGNS OF PSYCHOLOGICAL STRAIN

- ! **In general: Changed behavior - always in comparison to before**
- ! Social withdrawal
- ! Unannounced absence from meetings, frequent tardiness
- ! Accumulation of mistakes that did not happen before
- ! Difficulties in dealing with others – e.g. easily irritated, suspicious, pessimistic, judgmental
- ! Avoidance of certain social situations e.g. elevator, cafeteria, meetings, ...
- ! Frequent physical symptoms such as headaches, back pain, ...
- ! Change in appearance, facial expressions, gestures and flow of speech
- ! But also: increasing overtime hours, working very late or early without reason

## WORKING TOGETHER WITH UNDERSTANDING

- Do not treat affected people differently. Keep communication open, normal and respectful
- Ask the affected person specifically what is helpful, relieving or counterproductive to them
- Never attack the person personally, but instead address what you have specifically observed in a situation - never generalize your observation
- Consciously reflect on whether you are able and willing to help
- Respect your own limits and needs - clarify your own need for counseling
- Always talk about needs and limitations of individuals, never about diagnoses

## ADDRESSING MENTAL STRAIN EMPATHICALLY

- **Create the right frame for a private conversation**  
i.e. in private with enough time, in a quiet place
- **Be aware of the goals and emotions you bring into the conversation**  
e.g. am I concerned or am I upset that the colleague has become less reliable?
- **Describe concrete observations from your own perspective**  
also share your insecurities: "I have the impression that..., but I am not sure..."
- **Make your motivation for the conversation transparent**  
Do you want to offer help, or do you just worry about the person?
- **Ask open questions instead of assuming or implying anything**  
Always ask for the person's perspective with open-ended questions: "How do you see that?"
- **Listen patiently**  
Try to really understand the other person and show compassion

## WHAT REALLY HELPS

- ✓ Do not impose your support, simply offer it
- ✓ Know different possibilities for professional help and reflect together what could be helpful considering individual needs and conditions
- ✓ Explore private resources (social support, physicians, ...)
- ✓ Point out resources at the workplace - if available e.g. medical officer
- ✓ Avoid unsolicited advice, assumptions and generalizations
- ✓ Talk about psychological stress and mental illness consciously and sympathetically, even when talking to third parties

## FINDING THE RIGHT WORDS

### Addressing the matter

"It seems to me that lately you've been... . I don't know if that's how you perceive your own behaviour. That's why I wanted to talk to you about it."

"I definitely want to offer you my support if anything is bothering you." (e.g., support to seek help).

"I've noticed that you're behaving differently than usual... Is there something that is making your work / everyday life more difficult lately?"

### Working together more empathically

"Is there anything that could help take some pressure off you?"

"I have only had little direct contact with mental illness so far. I feel insecure about behaving appropriately. It would help me if you could tell me what would help you, so we can work well together."

"What is helpful, what is counterproductive for you in our everyday work?"

### At the end of the conversation

"I can understand that you don't want to talk to me about this right now. Are you okay with me asking you again in two weeks?" (instead of pushing or ignoring it completely)

"This sounds really burdensome. Thank you for sharing that with me."

"That really sounds like a lot. Have you thought about seeking professional support?"

## CONTACT POINTS FOR PROFESSIONAL HELP

- Physicians (general practitioner, medical officer, psychiatrist for physical assessment and medical treatment)
- Psychological or medical psychotherapists
- Psychiatric and psychosomatic clinics for severe levels of illness
- Counseling centers for temporary crises and problems e.g. Caritas, Malteser, Diakonie
- Telephone numbers: Telephone counselling (0800 / 111 0 111),
  - patient service: 116 117, addiction hotline (018 05 / 31 30 31)
- Websites: [www.psych-info.de](http://www.psych-info.de), [www.therapie.de](http://www.therapie.de)
- Self-help groups for patients and their relatives