

Be a Champion Ask Twice

The average person in Britain says "I'm fine" at least 14 times a day, according to research conducted by the Mental Health Foundation, but how often do we actually mean it?

"While it may appear that most of us are happy openly discussing feelings, our results reveal that many of us are really just sticking to script—in truth we are unable to say how we are feeling."

Jenny Edward—CEO of the Mental Health Foundation

With 1 in 4 people experiencing a mental health problem this year alone, if a workmate or team mate says they're fine – they might not be.

And despite progress in public attitudes and behaviours, strongholds of men are still not hearing messages about mental health and are likely to avoid mental health – as a topic of conversation, or more literally if they find out a friend, family member or colleague has a mental health problem.

"Hi, my name is Andrew. I must admit I don't know much about mental health, but considering the stats above, I do want to take action because the one thing I do know is that I care about the people around me. That is why I will take the first step of asking a colleague I notice doesn't seem themselves – not once but twice – if they are ok."



"I don't know anything about mental health. It's not the sort of thing I think about really. If it happened to me, or my wife, or my kids, I'd probably look into it then. But there's no history of it in my family."

"Talking about feelings can be a bit awkward, and asking for support is a bit embarrassing too – even when things get pretty tough"

This is particularly concerning when you consider the statistics below:

- **One in five (20%)** of men said workplace stress had put a strain on their marriage or relationship with a significant other.
- **46% of men** said not getting enough support from managers was 'fairly stressful' or 'very stressful'.
- **31% of men** said they wouldn't feel able to talk openly with their line manager if they were stressed.
- **29% of men** said they wouldn't feel able to talk openly with their line manager if they were diagnosed with a mental health problem.
- **One in seven men** will develop depression within six months of unemployment
- In the UK men remain **three times as likely** to take their own lives than women, and in the Republic of Ireland **four times as likely**
- The **highest suicide rate in the UK** was for **men aged 45-49**. Men are more likely to say that mental illness is the result of a lack of self-discipline and will power

"I've seen a few men go downhill after a divorce, and have heard about men topping themselves. I hadn't made the connection with depression, though. Yeah, that might make you think."

This year, we're asking everyone to "ask twice."

Why? When we're asked how we are, the usual and expected response is "Fine, thanks". Asking someone how they are a second time - this time with interest - shows you're asking for real and willing to hear the response. It's a very simple action to remember if you find you're worried about a friend, family member or colleague.

What if I ask someone if they are ok twice and they respond that they aren't ok - what do I do?

Andy - at point of considering registering as a Time to Change Champion

We know that asking someone if they're OK can be nerve wracking - you might not want to appear intrusive, you might not know them well, it might seem awkward or you might worry that you don't have the time to deal with their response there and then - so to help you initiate a conversation with someone you think might be struggling, we've compiled some top tips to get you started.

Taking just 10 seconds to ask twice is a simple way to start a conversation and check in on your colleagues that might not only change, but save someone's life.

Like Andy, why not find out more about the role of a Time to Change Champion this World Mental Health Day by visiting the Time to Change website here.

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Tips for responding back to someone who isn't ok.



- A simple "I'm sorry to hear that" shows that you are willing to listen and that you care. You might follow this up with "would you like to talk about it" if it's a convenient time for you both - however if it isn't (and it may well not be) you can always agree a time and place that is more suitable and convenient for the both of you.
- When people are struggling they often don't notice that there may be changes in their mood or behaviour - so it might help to highlight the changes you have noticed as kindly as possible. For example if someone appears more withdrawn than usual, or if they have been more frustrated or irritable than usual.
- Sometimes it's hard to find the words to describe how we're feeling, harder still to find a time to talk it through with someone. So rather than talking across a table it may be worth having a conversation whilst doing something - anything really - especially if it involves your hands such as building something, sorting, or even walking because sometimes people find it easier to talk when they are doing something.
- Often in the workplace our mind-set is to provide answers and solutions to the problems that we might come across. However on this occasion it might be more useful to take a step back, listen and ask more questions because it gives your colleague a chance to reflect and think about what they are struggling with. Remember it is not your responsibility to solve problems your colleague may be experiencing - instead by listening, you show that you care and that you are ready to help.
- If a colleague says they're fine, when you're concerned they might be struggling, let them know that they can approach you if they want to talk. Reinforce that offer by email or text. This shows that your door is open, that they needn't feel alone and could approach in future if they needed to.
- If a face to face conversations is too much for you - send them an email. Ask if they're OK and highlight that you've noticed they don't seem themselves. This gives your colleague a chance to reflect and think about it. They may or may not get back to you, but whatever they choose to do - you'll have helped them to realise that maybe they're not OK and that realisation may help them to seek out the help and support they need.

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