



“Headspace for the Workplace” Mental Health Toolbox Talk and Microlearning Culture Change Program

A Manager’s Facilitation Guide

*Designed to Decrease Stigma, Increase Mental Health Literacy, and
Bolster Emotional Resilience for Individuals and Teams*



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A Note of Gratitude!

Thank you for all you are doing to help lead your teams through tough times! By stepping up to facilitate the Toolbox Talks and/or microlearning videos, you are demonstrating your commitment to your workers' well-being. By modeling your ability to talk about these tough subjects, you give others permission to do the same.

You don't have to be a mental health expert or counselor to make a big difference in the well-being of your team members.

Your bold leadership in opening the door to the conversation and being a bridge to resources will make a substantial impact.

Purpose of Facilitation Guide

During times of prolonged toxic stress, burnout is common. Many workers can find themselves overwhelmed, anxious, and even hopeless. Sometimes these challenges to well-being can even lead to significant mental health challenges like depression and crippling anxiety. Sometimes they turn into life-threatening mental health emergencies like overdose, the consequences of addiction, and suicide.

And yet, workers in the most at-risk industries are usually the least likely to reach out for support.

More than ever, workplaces are in a critical position to lead their workers toward individual and team resilience and drive a culture of care and psychological safety. At the same time, they can reduce stigma—or bias—related to mental health challenges, addictive behaviors, and suicide by empowering teams to have many small conversations about these topics.

What changes culture? Many small changes, consistently applied over time.

What reduces stigma—or bias—related to mental health? Sharing stories of struggle and recovery.

The implementation of the Toolbox Talks and microlearning videos provides for an opportunity to both change culture and reduce stigma while also increasing the mental health literacy of your workforce.

Aspects of Mental Health Literacy

1

Information about mental health challenges

- How and where to access and evaluate mental health information.
- Basic knowledge of symptoms and experiences related to common mental health challenges.

2

Basic coping and emotional regulation skills

- Knowledge of effective self-help tactics for mild to moderate emotional distress.
- Basic psychological first aid to help others.

3

Access to mental health supports and services

- Discern how to find appropriate and effective mental health resources.
- How to navigate many levels of mental health care: preventative, maintenance, crisis response.
- Improved help-seeking efficacy (feeling confident and competent) in knowing when to access professional care and how to do it.

4

Addressing stigma and bias, plus advocacy for positive change

- How to identify prejudicial attitudes and discriminatory behaviors related to suicide, addictive behaviors, and mental health.
- How to advocate for mental health improvements and human rights.

Tips for Facilitation Success

Below, you will find tips on how to facilitate the Headspace for the Workplace Toolbox Talks and Microlearning Videos program—implementation that will help decrease stigma while increasing coping, awareness, and peer support.

What makes for a good Headspace in the Workplace Toolbox Talk/Video Facilitator?

- Has a passion for better well-being for their team and loved ones.
- Offers combination of confidence in the cause and organization's approach with personal humility.
 - *"We are all learning here. I've certainly learned some lessons."*
 - *"This is important."*
 - *"Our organization is making this a priority."*
- Is gently and authentically curious into team members' experiences.
- Sets expectations for a no-judgement/learning zone and psychological safety.
- Keeps Toolbox Talks/video conversations short, direct, constructive, and positive.
- Remembers that they are the guide, not the hero or authority.

NOTE: Just reading the toolbox talk is impactful. By just taking that step you have made a huge difference. If you want to notch it up a level, these are tips and tools you can use to increase engagement.

Photo credit: Flickr NAVFAC



Tips to Engage Your Workers”. The rest of the guide is fine

Weekly Headspace for the Workplace Toolbox Talks and Videos are designed to keep the conversations going. Many 5–10-minute conversations over a long time will shift the mindset.

Here are some tips on how to increase engagement.



TIP #1

Share your story.

Model disclosure by sharing your own stories of how you have lived through challenging experiences. You don't have to share all of your most personal details, just whatever you're comfortable with to let others know you have some insight into distress. If you are sharing a story about a loved one's struggles, be sure to ask their permission first or refrain from including any identifying information. Use trauma-informed language (e.g., no graphic details of suicide or overdose) and focus mostly on what helped you or your loved one heal.



TIP #2

Pose polling questions.

Ask people to raise their hands or conduct online polling about how mental health issues have shown up for people. This helps show commonality and validates people's experiences. NOTE: People are more likely to be truthful when they feel the poll is anonymous and confidential. If you ask for a show of hands, make sure the questions are easy to say “yes” to.

- *Who here would want to help someone who is experiencing depression?*
- *Anyone stressed?*
- *Anyone feeling overwhelmed?*
- *Anyone have a loved one they are worried about?*



TIP #3

Small group discussions

Open-ended questions in small group discussions reinforce engagement. After you read the Toolbox Talk or show the video, have people get into groups of three and talk about it. Ask just one of these questions for one Toolbox Talk. Give them 3 minutes to chat and then ask them to report out on common themes.

- *What is the thing that is causing you the most distress right now?*
- *What is the one thing that you want more than anything right now to improve your well-being?*
- *What is the one thing that would be helpful to your mental health more than anything right now?*
- *What is the biggest barrier you have to accessing mental health support for you or your loved ones?*
- *This week's well-being theme is XYZ. What sticks out to you when we bring this topic up in our community?*



TIP #4

Mix it up

People get bored of the same format week over week. Try different approaches to engagement.

- **Brainstorm** a list of ideas related to the topic. Give a prize for the small group with the best or the most ideas.
- **Sticky notes.** Pose a question or a prompt on a whiteboard or flip chart. Then, have people put answers on sticky notes and paste them on the board.
- **“Give yourself a grade.”** Evaluate yourself on how well you or the team are doing in this area of well-being and ask: How can we improve our grade?
- **Round-robin.** Give everyone in the group a chance to give a brief answer to questions such as, “Give me one word that comes to mind when you hear (fill in the blank).”
- **Pair and share.** Have the group split up into pairs and talk about a topic, then share their themes with the larger group.



TIP #5

Practice reflective listening and encourage elaboration.

- *“That seems like it was really (frustrating/tragic/sad).”*
- *“Your (family/success/time off) is really important to you.”*
- *“Let me see if we heard you right...(summarize what you just heard them say).”*
- *“That was a difficult thing to talk about. Thank you for sharing.”*
- *“Tell us more about what you learned about this resource. What did you find helpful.”*
- *“Share more about what you mean by that comment.”*



TIP #6

Keep your eye on the time.

What makes these Toolbox Talks/videos effective is that they are “small drips over time.” Each one should take no longer than 5-10 minutes.

7-minute sample. 1 minute: Here’s what we are talking about today and why it matters. 2 minutes: Read the Toolbox Talk. 3 minutes: “Pair and share”—what is the biggest myth about this topic? 1 minute: Recap, recognize and reward.



TIP #7

Recognize and reward.

Give public kudos to team members who are fully engaged or who are helping to lead the effort. Shine a light of praise for those who courageously share their experiences. Give a monthly “Well-being Award” for a team member who has done something extraordinary to help themselves or help another. Nominate team members to facilitate the next week’s Toolbox Talk and frame it as a leadership reward.



TIP #8

Evaluate and adjust.

After the first month, and once a quarter thereafter, check in with the team.

- “How are these Toolbox Talks/videos going?”
- “What would you like more of/less of/to keep the same or to stop?”



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Frequently Asked Questions and Concerns

✓ **What if I get asked a question about mental health and I don't know the answer?**

- Relax—it's okay. You are not a mental health expert and you're not expected to know everything.
- Say: "That's a great question, and I'm not sure I have a good answer. Can I check into it and get back to you?"
- Check in with your mental health point of contact (e.g., your benefits person) to get more information.

✓ **What if someone approaches me after and needs help?**

- Thank them for trusting you and for reaching out.
- Let them know you have their back and will help them find the right resource.
- Check in with your mental health point of contact (e.g., your benefits person) to get more information.

✓ **Will these conversations increase the risk of liability for the organization?**

If you have concerns about liability in any given situation related to mental health mental health literacy efforts at work, you should talk with legal counsel, as these are general guidelines. That said, because the toolbox talks and videos are for informational purposes only, the liability issue should not be a concern.

Again, you are not a mental health provider and you are not offering therapy. You don't have a "duty to care" and you are not dispensing specific advice to a specific person's situation.

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It's just like learning CPR: You are not a heart surgeon, but you provide "Good Samaritan" support for your fellow human being. If anything, NOT doing the work of providing any basic information about mental health and resources is near negligent, given the high rates of suicide in many industries. If you have further questions about this, discuss them with your HR/Employment Law team or review this free white paper: "A White Paper for HR Professionals and Employment Lawyers: Mental Health Promotion and Suicide Prevention in the Workplace — Policy and Response Recommendations to Help Employers Positively Impact Workers and the Work Environment" [downloadable from www.WorkplaceSuicidePrevention.com resource section].

✓ **What if someone in the team talks for too long or tries to derail the conversation?**

- *"I'm wondering what others think about this topic."*
- *"I'm curious to hear from this part of the group."*
"We only have a couple of minutes here; I'd be happy to chat more when we're done."

✓ **What if someone in the team never engages?**

- *This is where small groups, pair-and-share, and round-robin techniques help.*
- *If you feel comfortable, you can call on them: "XYZ, your thoughts and experiences matter here. What do you have to say on this topic?"*



Additional Reminders

✓ **Belonging and Purpose**

The workplace may be a person's primary place to connect with meaning and purpose, through shared goals. For those feeling isolated, reaffirming your shared values and goals can offer comfort that, "I belong." Use these Toolbox Talks/videos as opportunities for authentic connection at the team level.

✓ **Put the Oxygen Mask On First**

How you model resilience is probably the most important communication you will be giving. Dedicate time to find things you are grateful for and focus on acknowledging gratitude for things around you. Proactively prioritize your well-being—physical, emotional, social, and spiritual. Ask for (and accept!) support when you need it. Self-compassion can help you through frustration, annoyance, and anger. If you feel like you're entering a high-risk head space, actively seek help.



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Resources

National Strategy for Workplace Suicide Prevention

www.WorkplaceSuicidePrevention.com



Construction Working Minds

www.ConstructionWorkingMinds.com



Construction Industry Alliance for Suicide Prevention

<https://preventconstructionsuicide.com/>



988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline

<https://988lifeline.org/>



Man Therapy

<https://www.mantherapy.org/>



About Dr. Sally



Dr. Sally Spencer-Thomas holds a deep commitment to not only help prevent suicide, but also encourage people to sustain a passion for living. As a clinical psychologist, mental health advocate, and researcher, she sees the issues from many perspectives. Her heart, however, is called and her dedication to the mission unwavering due the suicide death of her brother. Her goal is to give voice to people who've lived through depression, addiction, and the impacts of suicide and leverage their wisdom to develop bold, gap-filling strategies and programs—approaches that empower cultural and systems change in our workplaces, education systems, and communities.

Changes that support people into recovery and a life worth living.

Sally is the lead author on the National Guidelines for Workplace Suicide Prevention and president of United Suicide Survivors International. She is an accomplished speaker with a popular TEDx talk and a White House address to her credits. Her construction clients past and present include JE Dunn, Hensel Phelps, Sundt, Ames, Granite, Mortenson, Whiting-Turner, Quanta Services, the United Association, the SMART Union, and many others.

For this work, she was recognized as one of ENR's top 25 Newsmakers in construction in 2021.

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