

Language guide for talking to small business owners about mental health



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You may already be helping small business owners through training or resources in looking after their own or their employees' mental health. Or you may be an advocate for better mental health services for small business owners or be shaping policy to support them through better regulation, services or funding.

“Good mental health is good for small business, good for the economy and ultimately benefits the whole community.”

The way we communicate about mental health influences community perception. The language we use can:

- Perpetuate stereotypes (such as people with a mental illness are more violent)
- Reinforce common myths (such as everyone with a specific mental illness is the same)
- Reinforce a stigma (such as a negative stereotype), and
- Discourage help-seeking behaviour (such as talking to someone about how they feel or seeking professional support).

You can help small business owners by using our language sets, to guide your messaging. The language sets are context dependent, so whether you are providing assistance, or responding to a request for help, or feel someone is at a crisis point - there's suggestions on how to communicate about it.



Language guide

The Small Business Mental Health Working Groups developed the following language sets in consultation with small business stakeholders.



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Language guide

Providing assistance

Examples of language to use when providing assistance:

- Here to help
- Guidance
- Support
- Reach out
- Work with you
- Ask for help
- You are not alone.

Responding to a request for support

Examples of language to use when you're responding to a request for support:

- Stress
- Feeling overwhelmed
- Lack of control
- Falling behind
- Confused
- Unsure of what to do next
- Starting to withdraw
- Mapping out next steps
- Difficulty coping
- Going through a difficult time
- Seek business advice early
- Understand that running a small business isn't easy.

Promoting wellbeing

Examples of language when you are promoting wellbeing:

- Mental health
- Wellbeing
- Balance
- Planning for the future
- Looking ahead
- Wellness
- Resilience
- Easing of stress
- Positive, healthy functioning
- Personal wellbeing
- Mental health support services.

Crisis point

Examples of language for when you feel like someone has reached a crisis point:

- Mental ill-health
- Anxiety
- Depression
- Suicidal thoughts
- Mental health issues or concerns
- Withdrawal
- Drug and alcohol dependency
- Social withdrawal
- Sleeping withdrawal
- Physical illness
- Constant fatigue.



This toolkit is part of recommendations made by the Small Business Wellbeing and Support Policy Team (Department of Industry, Science, Energy and Resources), following collaboration with small business and mental health representatives.

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