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**Toolbox Talks**

It is important to acknowledge the mental and physical stressors and challenges faced by all of us in the entertainment industry and offer your team tools to help them deal with and respond to these challenges. We know that the last months in particular have been very stressful and returning to work is bringing a new set of concerns for everyone. Many people are struggling with anxiety, grief, feeling overwhelmed, inability to concentrate, changes in appetite or sleep, changes in drinking or substance use patterns, or others issues affecting daily functioning.

In this document, we discuss **why it’s important to talk about mental health and psychological safety** (page 2) and what your Toolbox Talk can look like (starting on page 3). We suggest topics and sample language you can tailor to fit your focus and needs in each of these areas:

* **How to talk about Mental Health and Psychological Safety – page 3**
* **Acknowledge stressors and challenges in the workplace – page 4**
* **Let people know “It's OK Not to Be OK” – page 5**
* **How to take action and provide support – page 6**
* **Set guidelines for team interactions – page 7**
* **Foster a positive environment – page 8**

*This information is meant to be incorporated into your current safety or toolbox talks and is not meant to replace other safety briefings.*

**Why it’s important to talk about Mental Health and Psychological Safety**

* **Good mental health improves productivity**Workers who are experiencing distress either from issues in the workplace or at home can be distracted to the point of creating a hazard. Having resources to deal with these stressors can help maintain a safer workplace and improve productivity.
* **Leaders talking about mental health de-stigmatizes it**Lead by example. If you talk about mental health without shame or fear of reprisal, they can too. By incorporating language about mental health into your toolbox talk, you are making clear that workers’ mental health and psychological safety are equal priorities. This conversation encourages workers to feel safe discussing mental health concerns in the workplace - a key part of a safe job site.
* **Discussing the organization’s commitment to mental health and wellness lets people know it is important to the organization**

Communicating the organization’s commitment to creating a positive mental health work environment provides a sense of safety and encourages people to take their own mental health seriously, as well as to support their co-workers.

* **Offering anonymous ways of seeking support fosters the sense of security you are trying to create**

No matter how supportive an organization is, people might still feel self-conscious about sharing personal issues or struggles in the workplace. Protecting confidentiality encourages people to speak up.

* **Encouraging feedback and suggestions to improve the mental health environment raises awareness and participation**

Provide verbal, electronic and written mechanisms for both anonymous or signed feedback and suggestions.

**Sample Text for Toolbox Talks**

Examples of language on each of the topics are shown in the next pages.   
Select the topics and statements that are appropriate for your workplace.

Use the statements as written or put them into your own words.

**How to talk about Mental Health and Psychological Safety**

* **Explain why mental health awareness is important in the workplace**

*Examples:*

* We want you to feel safe working here, and to do that you need to be both physically safe and psychologically safe.
* Working to protect your mental health is as important as protecting you from physical injury.
* Stress can contribute to accidents
* Talking about mental health challenges isn’t easy, but we have to start somewhere.
* **Describe Psychological Safety**

*Examples:*

* Psychological safety means being able to:
  + - Make mistakes and receive constructive feedback, not be ridiculed or punished
    - Say “I don’t know” or “I don’t understand”
    - Have a voice regardless of your position
    - Feel respected and valued
* Psychologically safe teams accept and respect all their members.

**Acknowledge stressors and challenges in the workplace**

* **Talking openly about potential stressors and anxiety triggers can lessen their impact**

*Examples:*

* Today is going to be long with a lot of stress and we’ve all been working long hours and we’re tired. This can negatively affect your mental and physical health.
* If you don’t feel physically or psychologically up to a particular task, tell your supervisor or someone you trust. It’s better to say something than to hurt yourself or someone else.
* We understand that coming back to work right now is especially challenging for all of us because our workplace looks and feels different than when we left it and we may be nervous working around other people. Excessive stress is normal right now.
* **Excessive and/or sustained pressure can result in stress that is harmful**

*Examples:*

* We all feel stress on the job and some days are worse than others. Everyday stress can be helpful in motivating us on the job, but when it’s unmanageable it can be dangerous for ourselves and others around us.
* This work can be really stressful, if you start feeling overwhelmed let somebody know.
* **Take a 90 second “time out”** *Examples:*
* If you are feeling overwhelmed, angry, or things are really tense, take a 90 second time-out if it’s safe and walk away. It just takes 90 seconds to reset your brain’s stress levels.
* If you can, take a 90 second break to help reduce your stress level.
* **Offer tools and tips**

*Examples:*

Here are a few things to do to help you if you are struggling. Pick the one that works best for you:

* Take a few deep breaths – and make your exhale longer than your inhale
* Use a calming exercise such as observe and name 5 objects around you
* Think of a place that brings a sense of calm and go there for a moment
* Close your eyes, start breathing deeply, and mentally walk the path to your nearest emergency exit.

**Let people know “It's OK Not to Be OK”**

* **We are here to support one another**

*Examples:*

* Know that it’s ok to not be ok. If you need a moment – and it’s safe – you don’t need to explain why.
* We have to work closely with each other. If one of us is having any kind of difficulty, the safety of everyone depends on both offering and asking for support.
* **Acknowledge it can be difficult to talk about**

*Examples:*

* Lots of us find it hard to talk about what’s bothering us.
* We may not be used to sharing our thoughts and feelings but sometimes it’s important for our safety and the safety of others.
* **Try not to suffer in silence**

*Examples:*

* It takes a lot to speak up. You don’t have to bare your soul but getting something off your chest can go a long way for you and those around you.
* Suffering in silence takes a greater toll on your mental and physical health. You are not alone.

**How to take action and provide support**

* **Be alert to signs of distress in yourself and others**

*Examples:*

* + Remember we all experience and deal with stress and anxiety differently. You can’t tell by looking at someone how they’re feeling.
  + Be aware of how you’re feeling on a daily basis and check-in with your co-workers – take time to ask how they’re doing and LISTEN to what they say. You don’t have to have solutions – listening is the key.
* **Be discreet and respect confidentiality**

*Examples:*

* + Respect confidentiality – unless it involves someone’s safety.
  + Discretion is critical when someone share’s their feelings.
* **Show compassion and respect**

*Examples:*

* Show compassion and respect for your co-workers - listen, don’t judge
* It might not be your thing – but don’t dismiss a co-worker who wants to talk about their mental health.
* **If you don’t know how to help it’s ok to ask someone else**

*Examples:*

* We don’t expect you to be therapists, just caring coworkers. If you don’t know what to do in a situation, get help.
* You can find information about mental health resources on the [call board/call sheet/etc].
* There’s a great org called Behind the Scenes - specifically for folks like us in the industry - that has resources.
* I’m always here if you need a resource or help with a tough situation.

**Set guidelines for team interactions**

* **Encourage respectful interactions or behavior**

*Examples:*

* If you are unsure if a comment, joke or behavior is ok, chances are you have already answered your own question.
* Have fun - enjoy yourself at work, just not at someone else’s expense.
* **Identify bullying, harassment and intimidation and its impact**

*Examples:*

* Let’s watch our interactions and behavior - we want an environment where people feel comfortable - any type of bullying, harassment or intimidation can affect all of us and our mental health.
* Incidents of bullying and harassment can be subtle but can have a real impact on those experiencing and witnessing it.

\*If you need more information, examples of, or a sample policy on bullying, harassment and intimidation visit btshelp.org/stopbullying

* **Define the consequences of inappropriate behavior**

*Examples:*

* We take bullying, harassment, intimidation and inappropriate behavior very seriously and **all** incidents will be dealt with accordingly.
* We will not tolerate inappropriate behavior and will deal with it seriously.

**Foster a positive environment**

* **Talk about what can positively impact mental health and contribute to psychological safety at work** *Examples:*
* There are different ways we can make this a positive work environment. Treat others with respect and be supportive to coworkers who are struggling.
* Don’t underestimate the affect you have on others - your outlook and approach does have an impact on your co-workers.
* **Acknowledge a job well done or moments of fun and joy** *Examples:*
* Acknowledge when someone’s doing a good job – it can really make their day.
* Celebrate small accomplishments and find the fun in the work.
* **Encourage feedback and participation**

*Examples:*

* I want to hear from you – your feedback is important - let’s work to make this a healthy work environment.
* If you have any suggestions on how we can make this a better work environment let us hear from you.