

AASHTO Committee on Construction – Addressing Mental Health Initiative

Conversation Starters: *Intro for Meeting Leaders*

This program provides short scripts and optional question prompts to help open or close your monthly virtual meetings with a moment of reflection on mental health and well-being. These topics can be sensitive, and that's okay—there's no one right way to approach them. Use the script, the questions, or both—whatever feels most comfortable. The goal is to simply create space for conversation.

You're encouraged to tailor the approach to your group. If you're not sure how to begin, consider asking a colleague to present the topic, or try reading the script as-is to start the discussion. Participation is voluntary, and engagement will grow over time as the space becomes familiar and trusted. Take a moment to celebrate successes. No matter how small or large the success, they should be recognized to aid with building comradery and trust. Whether it's a single prompt or a shared story, an acknowledgment can aid in an individual(s) sense of inclusion and well being.

A Leader Preparation Guide has also been prepared for each discussion topic to help you as a discussion leader be more prepared. Just know you don't have to be a mental health expert to make a difference.

Let's take care of ourselves—and each other.

Awareness and Recognition - Stress Management

Script for Discussion Leaders

Topic #1 in the Mental Health and Suicide Awareness Campaign

Opening (1–2 minutes)

Good [morning/afternoon], and thanks for being here today. This month, we're focusing on something that affects all of us—stress, and how we manage it—not just for ourselves, but also for the teams who look to us for support.

Leadership in this space comes with a lot on our shoulders: tight deadlines, tough decisions, high visibility programs, and often, hard conversations. It's understandable that this takes a toll. And while we may power through it, stress has a way of showing up—whether we admit it or not.

Today's discussion is about acknowledging that reality. Creating space for ourselves and others to be human. We'll also talk about how confidentiality and inclusivity matter when people open up—because they will, when they feel safe.

Discussion (5–7 minutes)

In our roles, we're often juggling complex budgets, multiple contractors, interagency priorities, and political scrutiny. These demands create stress—for us and for our teams.

We don't always talk about it, but stress shows up in very real ways:

- Physically—tension, insomnia, rapid heartbeat, headaches, upset stomachs
- Emotionally—irritability, anxiety, withdrawal, even depression
- Behaviorally—difficulty focusing, delayed decisions, or constant worry

None of this makes someone 'bad at their job.' It makes them human. And if we expect our teams to bring their best, we have to care about what weighs them down.

Here is a list of helpful ideas:

- Recognize it: Look for common signs and symptoms.
- Delegate: Trust your team—you don't have to carry it all.
- Prioritize: Not everything needs to be done today. Help your teams focus on what matters most and break down complex tasks.
- Peer Support: Lean on one another. Even just a five-minute conversation with a colleague who gets it can change your day.
- Healthy Habits: Sleep, movement, unplugging—even short breaks help.

- Professional Help: And when stress starts to erode your daily life, talk to a doctor or counselor. That’s not weakness—it’s wisdom.

Engagement Questions

- “Has there been a time when stress at work felt overwhelming for you?”
- “What did you do in that moment to manage or cope?”
- “How do you help your teams manage their stress?”

Optional resource sharing discussion

Various first responder teams across the nation have started using a simple tool by Responder Alliance called —the stress continuum (responderalliance.com).

INDIVIDUAL STRESS CONTINUUM

GREEN READY	YELLOW REACTING	ORANGE INJURED	RED CRITICAL
Healthy Sleep	Sleep Loss	Sleep Issues/ Nightmares	Insomnia
Healthy Personal Relationships	Distance From Others	Disengaged Relationships	Broken Relationships
Spiritual & Emotional Health	Change In Attitude	Feeling Trapped	Intrusive Thoughts
Physical Health	Fatigue	Exhausted	Anxiety & Panic
Emotionally Available	Avoidance	Physical Symptoms	Depression
Gratitude	Short Fuse	Emotional Numbness	Feeling Lost or Out of Control
Vitality	Criticism	Suffering	Thoughts Of Suicide
Room For Complexity	Lack of Motivation	Isolation	Blame
Sense of Mission	Cutting Corners	Burnout	Hopelessness
	Loss of Creativity		
	Loss of Interest		

ADAPTED FROM COMBAT AND OPERATIONAL STRESS FIRST AID BY LAURA MCGLADREY | RESPONDERALLIANCE.COM

Team members carry a card with this on it and can simply ask, ‘What color are you today?’ It opens the door to honest, supportive conversations without pressure or judgment.

Closing (1–2 minutes)

In closing, stress is real, it’s common—and it’s okay to talk about it. Taking care of ourselves is a professional responsibility, not a personal indulgence.

If you’re looking for additional resources, I encourage you to check out www.responderalliance.com, allonehealth.com, or mantherapy.org. These can offer practical

tools, humor, and honest conversation starters. See the quick resources guide I will drop in the chat (or hand out).

Let's keep checking in with one another—not just about projects, but about people. Thanks for showing up to lead today—and for helping build a healthier culture across AASHTO and your organization.

Stress - Quick Guide to Helpful Resources

The Stress Continuum

Stress Continuum — Responder Alliance | Resources for the responder community

—
<https://www.responderalliance.com/stress-continuum>



Stress Response Related to an Incident

AllOneHealth-StressResponse.pdf —
<https://allonehealth.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/AllOneHealth-StressResponse.pdf>



Experiencing Financial Stress

AllOneHealth-FinancialStress.pdf —
<https://allonehealth.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/AllOneHealth-FinancialStress.pdf>



Dealing with Stress for Men, by Men

Mantherapy.com - Stress —
<https://mantherapy.org/explore-topics/gentlemental-health/19/stress>



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988suicidepreventionlifeline.org —
<https://988lifeline.org>



Awareness and Recognition - Anxiety

Script for Discussion Leaders

Topic #2 in the Mental Health and Suicide Awareness Campaign

Opening (1–2 minutes)

Good [morning/afternoon], and thank you all for taking time to be here.

This month, we're continuing our focus on mental health by talking about something many of us—and many of our team members—experience but don't always recognize or talk about: **anxiety**.

Anxiety isn't just nervousness before a big presentation. For some, it's a constant current of worry that makes it hard to concentrate, sleep, or show up as their full selves at work.

In our roles, where so much is expected of us—often with little margin for error—anxiety can easily take root. Today, we'll explore how we can recognize it in ourselves and others, and what supportive leadership looks like in response.

Discussion (5–7 minutes)

As AASHTO leaders, we operate in high-stakes environments—multi-million dollar programs, contractor disputes, employee safety, public expectations. The pressure can weigh heavily.

Anxiety can be a reaction to that pressure—but it can also be a persistent condition that quietly undermines how someone thinks, feels, or performs.

Let's break it down:

Signs of anxiety might include:

- Excessive or persistent worry
- Difficulty sleeping or relaxing
- Racing thoughts, trouble focusing
- Physical symptoms like a rapid heartbeat, nausea, or shallow breathing
- Avoidance—of tasks, people, or even work settings

It's important to remember that these symptoms may not always be obvious. Someone might appear calm on the outside but be managing an inner storm.

What can we do as leaders?

- **Acknowledge that anxiety exists—and that it’s okay to talk about.**
- **Check in without judgment:** “How are you holding up lately?” can open more doors than “Everything good?”
- **Promote predictability where possible:** Even small schedule changes or clear timelines help reduce uncertainty.
- **Model calm under pressure:** Not perfection, but composure and care.
- **Encourage people to take breaks, ask for support, or use available resources.**

It’s not uncommon for individuals to experience anxiety without recognizing it for what it is. They may interpret their symptoms as personal failure—thinking they’re simply not good at their job—when in fact, they’re dealing with an underlying mental health challenge. Raising awareness helps prevent these harmful misinterpretations and encourages people to seek the support they need.

Engagement Questions

- “Have you ever experienced anxiety in a way that surprised you?”
 - “What has helped you navigate anxious moments as a leader?”
 - “What signs of anxiety have you seen on your teams—and how have you responded?”
-

Closing (1–2 minutes)

Anxiety is common, and it’s manageable—but only when we talk about it and respond with empathy.

As leaders, we have the power to create space for people to name what they’re feeling and to normalize asking for help. You don’t need to be a mental health expert—you just need to be human.

Resources like allonehealth.com, <https://womenshealth.gov>, and mantherapy.org offer helpful tools, like check-ins and self-assessments that your team members can use on their own, and I will pass out links and QR codes at the end.

Thanks for being willing to be apart of these conversations. They’re not always easy—but they matter.

Anxiety - Quick Guide to Helpful Resources

5 Actions to Alleviate Anxiety Quickly

AllOneHealth-AlleviateAnxiety.pdf —
<https://allonehealth.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/AllOneHealth-AlleviateAnxiety.pdf>



Anxiety Disorders - WomensHealth.gov

<https://womenshealth.gov/mental-health/mental-health-conditions/anxiety-disorders>



Anxiety: Helpful Tips for Men, by Men

Anxiety & Men's Mental Health | Helpful Resources by Man Therapy® —
<https://mantherapy.org/explore-topics/gentlemental-health/366/anxiety>



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<https://988lifeline.org>



Awareness and Recognition - Depression

Script for Discussion Leaders

Topic #3 in the Mental Health and Suicide Awareness Campaign

Opening (1–2 minutes)

Welcome everyone, and thank you for being here.

As part of our ongoing mental health awareness campaign, today we're focusing on something that touches more lives than we often realize—**depression**.

Depression doesn't always look like someone sitting in the corner or crying at their desk. It can show up as low energy, disengagement, irritability, or a lack of focus. For people who take pride in doing their job well—like many in our construction and engineering circles—depression can feel like personal failure, even though it's a common and treatable health condition.

Today's session is about recognizing the signs and learning how to support our peers and teams in ways that build trust and connection.

Presentation or Discussion (5–7 minutes)

Let's start with what depression might look like—because it doesn't always look like sadness.

Some common **signs and symptoms** include:

- Persistent fatigue or lack of energy
- Loss of interest in work or usual routines
- Difficulty concentrating, forgetfulness, or missed deadlines
- Withdrawing from coworkers or team activities
- Irritability, frustration, or unusually negative outlook
- Physical changes—like weight fluctuation or poor sleep
- Expressions of hopelessness or feeling like a burden

Imagine a technician who used to joke around during morning briefings suddenly becoming quiet and withdrawn—or a design engineer missing details they never used to miss. We

may assume they're distracted or underperforming—but in reality, they may be dealing with depression.

Here's how we can lead supportively:

- **Notice without judging.** Ask open, caring questions like, “You seem a bit off lately—how are you doing?”
- **Normalize getting help.** Make it clear that using resources like an EAP or seeing a doctor is a healthy, encouraged step.
- **Be patient.** Don't force anyone to talk, but let them know you're available if they want to.
- **Model openness.** Sharing a personal experience or simply saying, “I've had hard weeks too,” helps others feel less alone.

We don't have to be therapists. But we can be the kind of leaders who make it safe for others to speak up.

Engagement Questions

- “Have you noticed changes in yourself or a coworker that might have been signs of depression?”
- “What did you—or others—do to offer support in that situation?”

Closing (1–2 minutes)

To wrap up, remember that depression isn't a character flaw or something people can ‘snap out of.’ It's a health condition—and one we can help with simply by being observant, nonjudgmental, and compassionate.

Support might look like checking in. It might look like reminding someone they're not alone. That small moment can make a big difference.

For those who want more information, visit [nimh.nih.gov](https://www.nimh.nih.gov), [womenshealth.gov](https://www.womenshealth.gov), or [mantherapy.org](https://www.mantherapy.org) are great places to start, and ask about your agency's support programs. I will pass out links and QR codes at the end with these resources and more.

Thank you all for your time and leadership today.

Depression - Quick Guide to Helpful Resources

Depression - National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) —
<https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/depression>



Staying Ahead of Seasonal Depression - AllOneHealth —
<https://allonehealth.com/staying-ahead-of-seasonal-depression/>



Depression in Women - 4 Things to Know - National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) —
<https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/depression-in-women>



Depression - WomensHealth.gov - Depression and Mental Health Conditions —
<https://womenshealth.gov/mental-health/mental-health-conditions/depression>



Depression - Helpful Tips for men by men - ManTherapy.org —
<https://mantherapy.org/explore-topics/gentlemental-health/368/depression>



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Coping and Resilience- Building Resilience

Script for Discussion Leaders

Topic #4 in the Mental Health and Suicide Awareness Campaign

Opening (1–2 minutes)

Good [morning/afternoon], and thank you all for being here.

Today's topic in our mental health awareness series is **resilience**—the ability to bounce back from challenges, setbacks, or high-pressure situations.

Resilience doesn't mean never feeling stress or struggle. It means we develop tools to keep going—even when things get hard. And in our work—where emergencies happen, deadlines shift, and public scrutiny is a given—resilience is not a luxury. It's a survival skill.

This discussion is about recognizing what resilience looks like, how we build it, and how we can support it in others.

Presentation or Discussion (5–7 minutes)

Resilience can look different depending on the role.

For example, a field inspector navigating aggressive contractor interactions, or a newer project coordinator getting feedback on a missed milestone—both are in high-pressure situations, and both can feel overwhelmed or discouraged. But resilience is what helps them recover and keep going without internalizing that stress as personal failure.

What builds resilience?

- **Supportive relationships:** A quick check-in from a supervisor can ground someone in a moment of stress.
- **Perspective:** Leaders can help reframe setbacks as learning moments instead of personal shortcomings.
- **Healthy coping tools:** Sleep, movement, even hobbies—when encouraged by leadership—help staff recover mentally.
- **Confidence:** Giving people room to grow and showing belief in their ability makes them more likely to bounce back.
- **Control where possible:** Even small choices—like being included in decisions—help build psychological resilience.

It's also important to remember: **resilience is not a solo sport**. We can all help each other build it. The way we respond to someone's struggle—whether with criticism or compassion—can shape how quickly they recover.

Some teams have adopted practices like ending weekly meetings with a simple question: 'What's one thing that tested your resilience this week—and one thing that helped?' This kind of approach can open the door for honest, supportive conversations and help normalize the reality that everyone faces challenging weeks.

Engagement Questions

- "Can you share a time when you had to bounce back from a difficult situation at work?"
 - "What helped you stay strong or move forward during that time?"
-

Closing (1–2 minutes)

In closing, resilience is not about being tough all the time—it's about building the capacity to recover, adapt, and keep going. That takes tools, support, and patience.

The more we normalize setbacks, offer encouragement, and lead with empathy, the stronger and more resilient our teams—and our industry—will become.

For those who want more information, visit <https://allonehealth.com>, www.agc.org, or mantherapy.org, and ask about your agency's support programs. I will pass out links and QR codes at the end with these resources and more.

As always, thank you for your leadership and your willingness to foster a culture where people feel supported, not judged.

Building Resilience - Quick Guide to Helpful Resources

Resiliency - AllOneHealth- PDF (Feb 2025) —

<https://allonehealth.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/AllOneHealth-Resiliency.pdf>



Resilience - ManTherapy.org -

<https://mantherapy.org/explore-topics/gentle-mental-health/1192/resilience>



Coping and Resilience Toolbox Talk - AGC (PDF) —

<https://www.agc.org/sites/default/files/Files/Safety%20%26%20Health/Coping-and-Resilience-TBT-final-formatted-003.pdf>



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Coping and Resilience - Work-Life Balance

Script for Discussion Leaders

Topic #5 in the Mental Health and Suicide Awareness Campaign

Opening (1–2 minutes)

Welcome, and thanks for being here today.

This month, we're focusing on **work-life balance**—which, for many in the construction and engineering world, feels more like a moving target than a fixed goal.

Whether you're managing project timelines, coordinating inspections, or keeping up with contract documentation, the job doesn't always end when you leave the site or close your laptop. That makes finding balance difficult—and sometimes, it feels impossible.

But the truth is, long-term performance and well-being both rely on rest and boundaries. Today we'll talk about how to find balance, how to support it in others, and how to reframe it as part of doing the job well—not neglecting it.

Presentation or Discussion (5–7 minutes)

“Work-life balance isn't about clocking out at 5 p.m. every day—it's about making sure your work doesn't consume your identity, health, or relationships.

In our industry, imbalance can show up as:

- Answering emails late at night or during vacation
- Skipping meals or working through breaks regularly
- Feeling guilt or anxiety when taking time off
- Constant fatigue that doesn't go away with rest
- Missing out on family milestones, social time, or recovery days

And for supervisors, it's not just about managing our own time—it's about **modeling balance** so others feel safe doing the same.

What helps foster better balance?

- **Set expectations around communication:** If someone sends an email after hours, make it clear a response isn't expected until the next day.

- **Normalize taking leave:** Whether it's vacation, a mental health day, or time off after a tough stretch—respect time away.
- **Create breathing room:** Not every task is urgent. Helping your team prioritize reduces pressure and restores focus.
- **Know what fills your cup:** Whether it's family time, fishing, running, or just sleeping in—help people protect their off-time without guilt.
- **Try to leave work at work:** Focus on being present at home, and leave work at your door.

Some teams have built in small habits like planning one personal, non-work activity each week and checking in about it during Friday meetings. These moments can serve as a lighthearted way to reinforce the importance of balance and integrate well-being into team culture.

The key is remembering that nobody can give 100% at work when they're running on empty.

Engagement Questions

- “How have you balanced your work responsibilities with your personal life, especially during busy periods?”
- “What tips or habits have you developed that help you maintain that balance?”
- “When forced to choose between priorities, what helps you make the decision that's right for you?”

Closing (1–2 minutes)

In closing, supporting work-life balance doesn't mean lowering standards. It means **sustaining performance** over the long haul—without sacrificing well-being.

It starts with small changes: protecting time off, having clear expectations, and giving ourselves and others the permission to rest.

For those who want more information, visit mhanational.org, or mantherapy.org. I will pass out links and QR codes at the end with these resources and more.

Thanks for continuing to show up to these conversations. By making space for topics like this, we're building a healthier, more resilient workplace—and that's something to be proud of.

Work-Life Balance- Quick Guide to Helpful Resources

Work-Life Balance - Mental Health America —

<https://mhanational.org/resources/work-life-balance/>



Thriving - ManTherapy.org —

<https://mantherapy.org/explore-topics/gentlemental-health/1193/thriving>



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<https://988lifeline.org>



Coping and Resilience - Healthy Sleep Habits

Script for Discussion Leaders

Topic #6 in the Mental Health and Suicide Awareness Campaign

Opening (1–2 minutes)

Welcome everyone, and thank you for being here today.

This month's topic may not sound as urgent as some others we've discussed—but it's just as important: **healthy sleep habits**.

Sleep plays a vital role in both physical and mental health. Yet in our field, long hours, travel, unpredictable schedules, and late-night catch-up work often make sleep a lower priority.

The truth is, chronic sleep deprivation impacts more than alertness—it affects decision-making, emotional regulation, mood, and overall resilience. Today's conversation is about recognizing the signs of poor sleep, encouraging healthier patterns, and building a culture where rest is part of our performance strategy—not something we sacrifice for it.

Discussion (5–7 minutes)

Sleep is often the first thing we give up when demands increase—but it's one of the most important factors for our mental health and job performance.

When sleep is lacking, we may see:

- Short tempers and poor emotional control
- Increased mistakes and slower reaction times
- Trouble focusing or absorbing information
- Lower tolerance for stress or conflict
- Declines in physical health or immune function

For leaders, poor sleep can affect how we show up for our teams—making us less present, less patient, and less strategic.

It's not just about sleep quantity—but also **quality**. Even if someone gets eight hours, stress or late-night screen time might prevent the deep rest their brain and body need.

Encouraging better sleep habits might include:

- Talking openly about the importance of rest—especially during intense project phases
- Avoiding a culture of emailing or messaging late at night unless truly urgent
- Supporting predictable schedules where possible, especially for staff who travel or cover emergencies
- Encouraging breaks and time off that allow for full recovery—not just catching up on chores

Modeling healthy habits—such as prioritizing sleep—can have a meaningful impact on leadership effectiveness. Protecting rest and recovery time supports clearer thinking, better emotional regulation, and improved interactions with teams. Over time, these small shifts can help reinforce a culture that values sustainable performance over constant urgency.

Engagement Questions

- “Can you share a time when lack of sleep affected your mental health or ability to work?”
 - “Have you found any strategies or changes that helped you improve your sleep quality?”
-

Closing (1–2 minutes)

To close, let’s remember: sleep isn’t optional. It’s not a luxury. It’s a foundation for good thinking, safe working, and healthy living.

As leaders, we can help normalize the need for rest—not as weakness, but as wisdom. One of the most powerful messages we can send to our teams is this: *You don’t have to run yourself into the ground to be valued.*

For those who want more information, visit nami.org, womenshealth.gov or mantherapy.org, and ask about your agency’s Employee Assistance Programs. Each are a positive starting place. I will pass out links and QR codes at the end with these resources and more.

Thanks for showing up today—and for continuing to support a healthier, more sustainable culture in our workplaces.

Healthy Sleep Habits - Quick Guide to Helpful Resources

Sleep Disorders - NAMI

Understanding sleep disorders and their connection to mental illness —

<https://www.nami.org/About-Mental-Illness/Common-with-Mental-Illness/Sleep-Disorders/>



Sleep and Your Health - WomensHealth.gov -

The connection between sleep and mental well-being —

<https://womenshealth.gov/mental-health/good-mental-health/sleep-and-your-health>



Sleep - ManTherapy.org -

The importance of sleep for men's mental health —

<https://mantherapy.org/explore-topics/gentlemental-health/369/sleep>



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Behavioral Health – Substance Abuse and Mental Health

Script for Discussion Leaders

Topic #7 in the Mental Health and Suicide Awareness Campaign

Opening (1–2 minutes)

Thanks for being here again today.

This month's topic is one that's both sensitive and deeply important—**substance abuse and mental health**.

Whether we talk about it or not, substance use—especially alcohol—is part of the culture in many parts of our industry. It's often used as a coping mechanism after long, stressful days, time away from family, or unresolved mental health issues.

Our goal isn't to shame or diagnose. It's to raise awareness of how substance use and mental health are connected, and how we as leaders can create a culture where support—not judgment—is the norm.

Presentation or Discussion (5–7 minutes)

We know that people in construction and engineering roles face intense pressures: unpredictable schedules, high accountability, and sometimes a strong expectation to 'tough it out.' In that kind of environment, it's not uncommon for people to turn to substances like alcohol or even prescription medication to decompress or cope.

But over time, what starts as a drink to unwind can become a dependence that affects mood, focus, physical health, and relationships. Mental health struggles—like depression, anxiety, or trauma—often drive that reliance, even if the person doesn't talk about it.

Some warning signs of concern include:

- Regular use of alcohol or other substances to “relax” or “get through the day”
- Increased absenteeism or presenteeism (being at work, but disengaged)
- Mood swings, irritability, or withdrawal
- Decline in reliability or work quality
- Legal, financial, or relationship problems

It's important to know: people don't use substances because they're weak. They do it because they're hurting, overwhelmed, or isolated—and they don't see another option.

What can we do?

- **Break the silence:** It's okay to say, "I've noticed you don't seem like yourself lately. I care—can we talk?"
- **Avoid enabling:** Don't ignore signs just because someone is performing well.
- **Connect them to support:** Employee Assistance Programs, crisis lines, or sober peer groups can make a big difference.
- **Be honest about culture:** If after-hours drinking is expected or celebrated, think about what message that sends.
- **Share stories if you can:** Sometimes hearing that someone else sought help and got better is the most powerful motivator.

This is also a place where personal experience can be hard to talk about—but incredibly impactful. If anyone's open to it, shared stories can help destigmatize the issue.

Engagement Questions

- "Have you or someone you know faced challenges with substance use and mental health? How did that affect them in the workplace?"
- "What kinds of support or resources were helpful—or could have been helpful—in that situation?"

Closing (1–2 minutes)

In closing, let's remember that substance abuse is often the visible symptom of something deeper—stress, pain, trauma, or isolation.

As leaders, our job isn't to fix it all. But we can create space where people don't have to hide, and where seeking help is treated with the same seriousness and support as any other health issue.

For those who want more information, visit [womenshealth.gov](https://www.womenshealth.gov), [allonehealth.com](https://www.allonehealth.com) or [mantherapy.org](https://www.mantherapy.org), and ask about your agency's support programs. All are great places to start. I will pass out links and QR codes at the end with these resources and more.

Thank you for being willing to hold space for this conversation. It could be life-changing—or even life-saving—for someone on your team.

Substance Abuse and Mental Health- Quick Guide to Helpful Resources

Alcohol & Substance Use Disorders and Addiction- WomensHealth.gov —

<https://womenshealth.gov/mental-health/mental-health-conditions/alcohol-use-disorder-substance-use-disorder-and-addiction>



Substance Abuse - ManTherapy.org —

<https://mantherapy.org/explore-topics/gentlemental-health/367/substance-abuse>



Opioid Addiction - AllOneHealth - PDF (March 2024) — <https://allonehealth.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/AllOneHealth-OpioidAddiction.pdf>



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Behavior Health - Suicide Awareness

Script for Discussion Leaders

Topic #8 in the Mental Health and Suicide Awareness Campaign

Opening (1–2 minutes)

Welcome, and thank you all for continuing to engage in these conversations. Last month, we focused on **bullying and harassment**—and one of the reasons that topic matters so deeply is because of its strong connection to this month’s topic: **suicide awareness**.

Bullying—whether verbal, social, or systemic—can lead to isolation, anxiety, hopelessness, and a loss of self-worth. When someone is already struggling mentally or emotionally, it can push them further into crisis. This is why psychological safety in the workplace isn’t optional—it’s protective.

Today’s discussion may be emotional or uncomfortable. We’ll approach it with care. Our goal is to understand the signs, know how to respond, and reinforce that we don’t need to be mental health experts to help save a life.

Presentation or Discussion (5–7 minutes)

Suicide is one of the most serious mental health issues facing our industry. In construction, suicide rates are **among the highest of any profession**. According to recent data, more workers in our field die by suicide than from jobsite accidents.

People may not talk about it—but that doesn’t mean they’re not thinking about it.

Common warning signs include:

- Withdrawal from coworkers or social circles
- Talking about being a burden or feeling hopeless
- Sudden mood changes—especially from despair to calm
- Giving away personal belongings
- Decline in work performance, absenteeism, or tardiness
- Increased substance use or reckless behavior
- Expressing things like, *“I can’t do this anymore,”* or *“They’d be better off without me”*

Sometimes, the signs are subtle. Other times, they’re easy to miss because the person keeps showing up. That’s why ongoing connection is key.

If you’re concerned about someone:

- **Ask directly but compassionately:** “Are you okay? Are you thinking about hurting yourself?” You won’t plant the idea—you’ll show that it’s safe to talk.
- **Listen without judgment:** Just being heard can be incredibly powerful.
- **Encourage help:** Whether it’s reaching out to a doctor, EAP, or crisis line—remind them they don’t have to figure this out alone.
- **Stay present:** If someone’s in immediate crisis, don’t leave them alone. Call for help—988 is the national suicide and crisis line.

Some supervisors keep a printed version of the ‘warning signs’ checklist in their notebooks—not for daily reference, but as a steady reminder that mental health deserves the same level of attention as jobsite safety.

Engagement Questions

- “Have you ever encountered a situation where someone was in emotional crisis? What did you do—or wish you had done?”
 - “What would help you feel more confident recognizing or responding to warning signs?”
-

Closing (1–2 minutes)

To close, let’s remember this: **you don’t need to have the perfect words. You just need to be present, to care, and to connect.**

Suicide prevention isn’t just about reacting—it’s about building the kind of culture where no one has to suffer in silence. Where we look out for each other, speak up when something feels off, and make it okay to ask for help.

Please remind your teams—and yourselves—that the **988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline** is free, confidential, and available 24/7. There is also a host of other great resources I will provide links and QR codes to, and also do not forget you can ask for your agency’s Employee Support Programs.

Thank you for your attention to this conversation. It’s not easy—but it’s essential.

Suicide Awareness - Quick Guide to Helpful Resources

988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline

Call or text - 988 —

<https://988lifeline.org>



Crisis Text Line

Text-based support for people in crisis —
Text HOME or HOLA to 741741

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



Suicide Prevention Workplace Pledge

Take the Pledge to Make Suicide Prevention a Health and Safety Priority at Work —

<https://workplacesuicideprevention.com/>



Suicidal Thoughts – ManTherapy.org

—

<https://mantherapy.org/explore-topics/gentlemental-health/1194/suicidal-thoughts>



Suicide Prevention – WomensHealth.gov

—

<https://womenshealth.gov/mental-health/get-help-now/suicide-prevention>



Veterans Crisis Line

Confidential support for veterans and their families —

<https://www.veteranscrisisline.net/>



International Crisis Resources

IASP - Global crisis center directory —

<https://www.iasp.info/resources/CrisisCentres/>



Psychological First Aid and Recovery

NCTSN - Free training for disaster and trauma response —

<https://learn.nctsn.org/course/index.php?categoryid=11>



Communication and Workplace Culture - Effective Communication

Script for Discussion Leaders

Topic #9 in the Mental Health and Suicide Awareness Campaign

Opening (1–2 minutes)

Welcome back, everyone.

This month, we're focusing on something that seems simple—but is often the root of unnecessary stress in our work environments: **communication**.

In fast-paced, high-pressure environments like construction and engineering, clear and open communication can be the difference between confusion and clarity, conflict and collaboration, stress and support.

Today's discussion is about how communication affects mental health—and how we as leaders can model habits that reduce tension, build trust, and make space for honest conversation.

Discussion (5–7 minutes)

Let's be honest—how we communicate shapes our team culture more than any policy ever will.

Think about what happens when:

- Expectations change but aren't communicated
- Feedback is delivered abruptly or without context
- People are unsure who to go to when something goes wrong
- Workloads build up quietly because no one feels safe asking for help

These gaps create anxiety, burnout, and frustration. But when we **lead with clarity, transparency, and empathy**, the entire team feels safer and more connected.

What does effective communication look like?

- **Being clear and direct:** Say what you mean, and make expectations visible—not implied.

- **Active listening:** Let people finish. Reflect back what you heard. Check for understanding.
- **Frequent check-ins:** A five-minute conversation can reveal issues that would never come out in a formal meeting.
- **Tone awareness:** What we say matters—but how we say it may matter more.
- **Courageous honesty:** Don't avoid tough conversations—approach them with care, not defensiveness.
- **Modeling openness:** If we can admit when we're unsure, overwhelmed, or wrong, our teams will too.

Some teams have incorporated questions like, 'What's one thing you need from leadership this week to do your job better?' into their regular meetings. While the answers may not always be easy to hear, this practice can build trust, surface unmet needs, and reduce long-term frustration.

Engagement Questions

- "Can you recall a time when open communication helped reduce stress or resolve a workplace issue?"
- "What did you learn from that experience about how we can communicate better?"

Closing (1–2 minutes)

In closing, communication isn't just a leadership skill—it's a mental health tool. When we communicate well, we reduce anxiety, improve teamwork, and help people feel seen and heard.

It doesn't require perfect language—just intentionality, presence, and care.

For those who want more information, visit helpguide.org, mentalhealthhotline.org or www.utdouthwestren.edu, and ask about your agency's support programs. All are great places to start. I will pass out links and QR codes at the end with these resources and more.

Thanks again for participating in this effort. Every time we lead with clear, open communication, we're improving not just our projects—but our people.

Effective Communication- Quick Guide to Helpful Resources

Effective Communication In Relationships - HelpGuide.org —

<https://www.helpguide.org/relationships/communication/effective-communication>



Effective Communication Skills for Better Mental Health - Mental Health Hotline.org

<https://mentalhealthhotline.org/effective-communication/>



Emotional Intelligence PDF - UT Southwestern —

<https://www.utsouthwestern.edu/about-us/administrative-offices/access/assets/emotionalintelligence.pdf>



988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline

Call or text - 988suicidepreventionlifeline.org — <https://988lifeline.org>



Communication and Workplace Culture - Bullying and Harassment

Script for Discussion Leaders

Topic #10 in the Mental Health and Suicide Awareness Campaign

Opening (1–2 minutes)

“Thanks again for joining today.

This month, we’re talking about a topic that may be uncomfortable—but is essential to address if we’re serious about mental health and safety in our workplaces: **bullying and harassment**.

While often unspoken, workplace bullying is more common than we like to admit—and it can take many forms: subtle exclusion, hostile language, inappropriate jokes, or targeting a colleague repeatedly.

It’s not just about being ‘tough’ or part of the culture. It creates lasting harm to individuals and teams—and as leaders, we have a responsibility to stop it.”

Presentation or Discussion (5–7 minutes)

“Workplace bullying isn’t always obvious. It can be as overt as yelling or threats—or as subtle as constant undermining, exclusion from key conversations, or using sarcasm to shame someone.

Some signs that bullying may be occurring include:

- A team member who suddenly withdraws, avoids meetings, or stops speaking up
- A pattern of someone being the target of blame or jokes
- Passive-aggressive behavior, gossip, or sabotage
- Mood changes, absenteeism, or sudden drops in performance from the person being targeted

Bullying doesn’t have to come from a supervisor. It can happen peer-to-peer, across departments, or even from contractors.

Why does it matter? Because it damages psychological safety. It creates fear, stress, and sometimes lasting trauma. And when someone is being bullied, they’re often too afraid to report it—especially in a culture that prizes toughness or conformity.

As leaders, we can take these steps:

- **Set clear expectations:** Make it known that disrespectful behavior won't be tolerated—regardless of title or experience.
- **Intervene early:** If you witness or hear about a concerning interaction, don't ignore it. Ask questions. Address it.
- **Support the person affected:** Let them know they're not overreacting and that their well-being matters.
- **Use your influence:** Speak up when others can't. Challenge dismissive language or damaging norms, even informally.
- **Create safe reporting options:** Make sure people know how to speak up—without fear of retaliation or shame.

When teams move away from 'locker-room talk' and outdated hazing practices, and instead emphasize respect, mentorship, and professionalism, the impact can be significant. Morale improves—and often, so do recruitment and retention outcomes.

Engagement Questions

- “Have you witnessed or experienced bullying or harassment at work? How did it affect you or others?”
 - “What actions or changes made the situation better—or what do you wish had been done differently?”
-

Closing (1–2 minutes)

In closing, workplace bullying isn't a rite of passage. It's a barrier to health, trust, and performance.

Creating a safe and respectful work environment takes more than policies—it takes daily action. And it starts with us—calling it out, setting the tone, and making it clear that this is a workplace where people are valued.

For those who want more information, visit workplacementalhealth.org, or workplacebullying.org, or ask about your agencies guidance. All are great places to start. I will pass out links and QR codes at the end with these resources and more.

Thank you for your courage and commitment in having this conversation. Every time we speak up, we build something better.

Bullying and Harassment - Quick Guide to Helpful Resources

Workplace Bullying - Center for Workplace Mental Health —

<https://workplacementalhealth.org/Mental-Health-Topics/Bullying>



Workplace Bullying Institute -

WBI Tutorials on understanding and addressing bullying in the workplace —

<https://workplacebullying.org/tutorials/#TUT>



988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline

Call or text - 988suicidepreventionlifeline.org — <https://988lifeline.org>



Communication and Workplace Culture - Mindfulness and Meditation

Script for Discussion Leaders

Topic #11 in the Mental Health and Suicide Awareness Campaign

Opening (1–2 minutes)

Welcome, and thank you for continuing to be part of these discussions. Today's topic is **mindfulness and meditation**—two simple but powerful tools that can improve focus, reduce stress, and support mental well-being in the workplace.

You don't need to sit cross-legged in a silent room for an hour to benefit from mindfulness. It's really about **being present**—learning to slow your thoughts, notice how you're feeling, and respond rather than react. These practices are especially valuable in the high-stress, fast-moving world of construction and engineering.

Today, we'll explore how these tools work, how they help, and how we might bring them into our daily work—without needing to be experts or spiritual gurus.

Presentation or Discussion (5–7 minutes)

Mindfulness is simply the practice of paying attention to the present moment—without judgment. Meditation is one way to develop that skill, but it's not the only way.

In our line of work, we're often pulled in multiple directions—emails, site visits, conflict resolution, back-to-back meetings. The result? We operate in survival mode, and our minds rarely get a chance to settle.

Research shows mindfulness can:

- Reduce stress and anxiety
- Improve focus and decision-making
- Help manage emotional reactions
- Lower blood pressure and improve sleep
- Enhance resilience in challenging environments

Simple ways to practice mindfulness at work include:

- Taking one minute before a meeting to pause and breathe
- Doing a “mental scan” during breaks: *How am I feeling? Where’s my energy?*
- Walking without your phone—just noticing your steps and surroundings
- Using short guided meditations (many are available for free via apps like Insight Timer, Headspace, or Calm)

Incorporating short practices like a one-minute pause for quiet breathing before meetings has become a simple way some teams create space for focus and reflection. While it may feel unfamiliar at first, brief mindfulness moments can help people feel more centered and ready to engage. The goal isn’t to eliminate stress entirely, but to build the habit of noticing it early and responding with intention.

Engagement Questions

- “Have you ever tried mindfulness or meditation? What was that experience like for you?”
 - “Is there a specific mindfulness practice that has worked well for you or someone you know?”
-

Closing (1–2 minutes)

To close, mindfulness isn’t about perfection—it’s about presence. It gives us a way to check in with ourselves before burnout or frustration take over.

And it’s a tool we can model and share. When we lead calmly and intentionally, our teams benefit too.

If you’re curious to try it yourself or offer it to your teams, resources like [headspace](#), and [nami.org](#), and [mayoclinic.org](#) offer free and accessible starting points. I will pass out links and QR codes at the end with these resources and more.

Thanks again for being part of this. Sometimes, just taking a breath is the most powerful step forward.

Mindfulness and Meditation - Quick Guide to Helpful Resources

Meditation for Work – Headspace

<https://www.headspace.com/meditation/work-meditation>



Mindfulness Exercises – Mayo Clinic

Simple mindfulness practices for daily life

<https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/consumer-health/in-depth/mindfulness-exercises/art-20046356>

Self-Care Resources – NAMI

Downloadable guide for self-care and support group wellness —

<https://my.nami.org/NAMI/media/Extra-net-Education/Support-Groups/Self-Care-Resources.pdf>



Breathing Exercise – ManTherapy.org –

Rich Tip #52 on breathing and calming strategies —

<https://mantherapy.org/explore-topics/tips-and-testimonials/rich-tip/52/breathing>

National Library of Medicine – Mindfulness Evidence Map

<https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC6598008/>



988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline

Call or text -

988suicidepreventionlifeline.org —

<https://988lifeline.org>



Communication and Workplace Culture - Celebrating Successes

Script for Discussion Leaders

Topic #12 in the Mental Health and Suicide Awareness Campaign

Opening (1–2 minutes)

Welcome everyone—and thank you.

This is the final session in our 12-month mental health awareness series, and today we're taking a step back to focus on something we often overlook in our high-pressure environment: **celebrating successes**.

Over the past year, we've had important conversations—about stress, anxiety, depression, resilience, suicide, communication, and more. These weren't always easy, but they were necessary—and each one was a step toward a healthier, more supportive culture.

Today is about acknowledging that progress—big or small—and recognizing the courage it takes to show up to these conversations, reflect, and lead differently.

Discussion (5–7 minutes)

When it comes to mental health and workplace culture, success doesn't always look dramatic. Sometimes, it's:

- A supervisor checking in more regularly with their team
- A staff member reaching out for support for the first time
- A tough conversation handled with patience instead of pressure
- A team making space for someone to take time off without guilt
- Just showing up to these monthly discussions and listening

These wins matter. They create ripples—and they add up.

Celebrating progress helps reinforce that this work isn't just about fixing problems. It's about building something better. And when people feel seen, appreciated, and part of something meaningful, their engagement and well-being improve.

Ideas to continue building on this year’s work:

- Share a success story from your team related to these conversations
- Invite feedback—what resonated most? What changed as a result?
- Recognize champions—who stepped up to support mental health in your workplace?
- Make space for future sessions, peer support, or continued dialogue

Organizations can reinforce a culture of well-being by incorporating small, consistent practices—such as ending monthly meetings with a brief ‘Wellness Win’ to highlight positive changes or team efforts related to mental health. Even simple gestures like this can help sustain visibility around wellness and keep the conversation active in a low-pressure, supportive way.

Initial Questions

- “Can you think of a moment when you or your team made progress in improving mental health awareness?”
 - “Would anyone like to share a success story that highlights growth or positive change in mental health practices?”
-

Closing (1–2 minutes)

In closing, thank you—for your time, your attention, and your willingness to lead differently.

Mental health awareness isn’t a box we check once a year. It’s a mindset. It’s something we model, reinforce, and keep growing. This campaign helped us start that process—and now it’s up to us to keep the momentum going.

Let’s continue to create workplaces where people feel valued, supported, and safe—not just physically, but emotionally too.

If you have feedback or ideas for what’s next, please share them. And take a moment today to recognize not just what still needs doing—but what’s already been done.

You’ve made a difference.

If you want to know more feel free to visit www.indeed.com - success at work. I will pass out the link and QR code at the end.

Celebrating Successes - Quick Guide to Helpful Resources

Celebrating Successes at Work - Indeed

Indeed.com - Strategies for recognizing and celebrating workplace achievements —
<https://www.indeed.com/career-advice/career-development/successes-at-work>

