



## Culture of CARE: Including Mental Health in Your COVID-19 Response

*April 6, 2020*

This is a challenging time for the workforce of our industry. As we strive to keep our jobsites safe and healthy as a response to the COVID-19 crisis, some of our employees are experiencing increased anxiety and fear which may lead to more severe mental health issues. Concern about new, changing conditions, and the health of family and loved ones has become top of mind for many, and social distancing measures have left them more isolated than ever, both at work, and at home.

Even without the new stresses of COVID-19, the construction industry experiences heightened need for mental health support as compared to other industries. We lose workers to suicide at six times the national average. In Washington state, we lost 6 workers to on the job injury, and 125 to suicide in 2018 alone. There are no quick fixes for these grim statistics, but our increased care and attention to mental health during the COVID-19 crisis will help tremendously and save lives.

The time is now to start conversations with your employees by using tools like the [Mental Health Concerns Related to COVID-19](#) toolbox talk by the Construction Industry Alliance for Suicide Prevention, and the many other helpful mental health resources on the PreventConstructionSuicide.com's [COVID-19 Resources](#) page.

Here are some of best practices you can implement now to help increase the support and sense of control for vulnerable workers dealing with COVID-19 stress:

**Provide resources for those in need of professional help:** Make sure the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline, and Crisis Text Line are well advertised and talked about in your workplace. For free, professional and confidential help 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, call 1-800-273-TALK (8255) or text HELLO to 741741. Employees should also be well aware of mental health resources through their employer and/or health plan and encouraged to use them.

**Increase communication:** Knowledge is power. Communicate your COVID-19 site specific workplan to your workers and maintain an open dialogue as to how the plan is working. Ensuring your workforce understands how COVID-19 is transmitted, and that CDC protocols are in-place on the job can go a long way toward calming fears.

**Empower practice of good hygiene habits:** Teach personal hygiene protocols to workers so they can keep themselves and others safe. By continually talking about and demonstrating the benefits of hygiene and social distancing, your workers will feel empowered to care for their safety and the safety of others.

**De-stigmatize mental-health struggles and encourage de-stressing activities:** Identify this time as a stress driver and acknowledge that it's ok to feel stress and anxiety under these circumstances. For those at risk for a mental health crisis, acknowledging one's own stress and anxiety is the first step toward acceptance of professional help. Encourage de-stressing activities such as taking a break from social media and news, eating properly, and staying in touch with friends and family. *(Continued...)*

**Notice individuals and respond to their needs:** Everyone reacts differently to stressful situations. Employees may respond more strongly to COVID-19 stress if they are in high risk categories, are caregivers of children or high-risk individuals, or have mental health conditions including current or historic problems with substance abuse. Get to know which employees may be at higher risk of mental health issues so you can provide support and resources to those in need.

**Arm employees with tools to care for their loved ones:** Helping others in a time of need helps deliver a sense of control in times of uncertainty. Talking about and distributing information like [Managing Reactions to the Coronavirus – PDF](#), individuals can help lead at work and in their families.

Creating a Culture of CARE on our jobsites is about making employees feel safe to come to work and share their full self. This empathetic culture is more critical than ever to maintain cohesive teams and navigate these tough times with success. As we all know, COVID-19 is forcing us to manage new and different scenarios in rapid succession, however maintaining a healthy connection to our team is one way we all will get through these challenges and get better because of it.