



CANADIAN  
MANUFACTURERS  
& EXPORTERS



**MADE SAFE™**

# COVID-19: PSYCHOLOGICAL HEALTH AND SAFETY

## TIPS AND INSIGHTS FOR MANUFACTURERS

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# SURVIVING THE SURVIVAL PHASE OF THE CRISIS

Social distancing. Self-isolation. Pandemic. Quarantine. Just a few weeks ago these words meant very different things to most Canadians than they do today. In a short period, COVID-19 has changed the way we work, learn and socialize. A focus on workplace mental health and psychological safety is critical to surviving the survival stage.

As employers, we have an important role to play in the mental health and well-being of our people, just as we do their physical health. Some anxiety is healthy and normal: it motivates us to wash our hands after being in public, cough into our elbows and take other reasonable steps to protect ourselves and others. At the other end of the spectrum, unhealthy anxiety at extreme levels can be debilitating.

There are three critical factors to how much anxiety a major crisis can be expected to cause. In the case of COVID-19, these conditions have created a perfect storm for mental health crises in the workplace.

1. How predictable was the event, and the course the event will follow?
2. How much control over the event does the individual have?
3. How important are the impacts of the event to them personally?

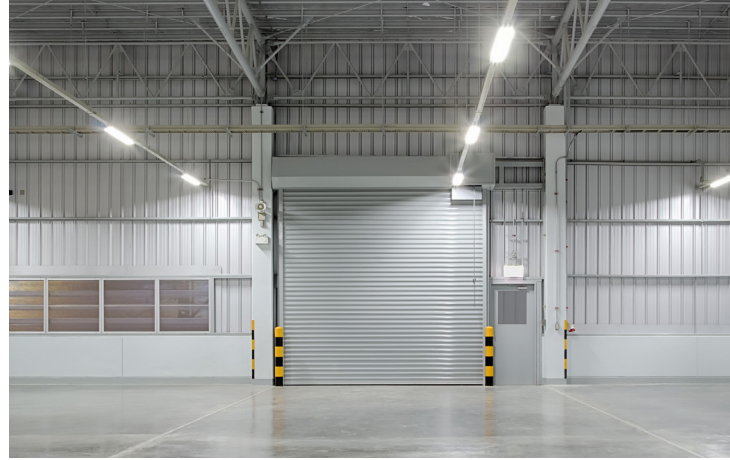
Compounding the situation is the degree of uncertainty around recovery. Many workers now know what steps are needed to mitigate the impacts of a pandemic, but not how quickly those steps will return us to normal, nor even what normal will be when this is over.

As employers and leaders, we are uniquely positioned to contribute positively and help our workers through this phase of the pandemic. As provinces begin to turn their eyes to gradually re-opening the economy and workplaces consider bringing employees back in force, here are the considerations manufacturers need to be aware of when navigating this phase of the pandemic.

## MANAGING ANXIETY

Anxiety needs to hear truth. Anxiety is the brain saying, “Yes, but what if...” louder and louder until the person can’t hear anything else. Below are the messages that your people need to hear (preferably from the direct leaders) often and with transparency. Credibility will be key to delivering effective messages:

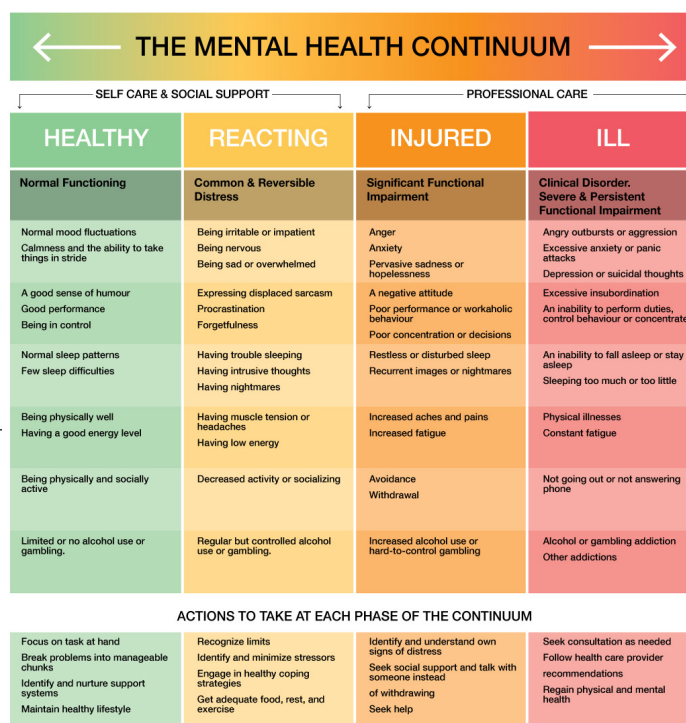
- Have a plan. Let your employees know that you are looking ahead, that your organization is staying well-informed and that you can answer their questions. It is normal for employees to want to know what if I get sick? How do I take time off work? What if my family member contracts the virus? You may want to compile frequently asked questions and direct employees to them often. Mental Health First Aid for Leaders, like the program offered by [St. John's Ambulance](#), can be invaluable during these conversations to help recognize mental health struggles.
- Communicate and share openly. Worry and fear thrive in the absence of up-to-date information. Let your employees know that they can expect regular updates from you. Communicate even if the situation remains unchanged. Communicate even when the situation is not entirely positive to help your employees to see how your plan adjusts.
- Empathize. Show that you understand that it’s stressful. Recognize that it’s okay to be anxious. Remind your employees of resources, such as an EAP if your company has one, that are available for those who are experiencing stress. Author and speaker [Dr. Brene Brown’s video on empathy](#) is a tool that each person reaching out to someone else to provide support can review to understand the difference between empathy and sympathy and help equip leaders for difficult conversations.



- Reassure—as best you can, while still acknowledging the difficulty of the situation. You can refer to reports indicating that most people who become infected with the virus will recover, and can highlight the current statistics on [“flattening the curve” in your jurisdiction](#).
- Understand. Recognize when stress has become unmanageable for individual employees. Stress can lead to anxiety and even panic. Some employees may need mental health days and medical intervention in order to cope. We are all experiencing one of the most traumatic upheavals of our lives and we all deserve compassion as we find our way through it. The resources put together by the [Canadian Mental Health Association](#) and the [Mental Health Commission of Canada](#) can support your frontline leaders as they have these conversations.
- Recognize this is not quite ‘business as usual.’ Know that your business will likely be impacted. Work will slow down, necessary travel may be canceled and other changes will be necessary in the short-term. Reassure staff that expectations will shift accordingly, and that’s ok. We will get through this!

## MANAGING ISOLATION AND DEPRESSION

Even introverts need interaction with other people on a regular basis. Humans are social creatures. This [Mental Health Commission of Canada Workbook](#) is an excellent resource to provide to your people to help them monitor and plan to safeguard their mental health during isolation. The [Mental Health Continuum Model](#) contains helpful signs and indicators as well as actions to take at each phase of the continuum. Make your Leaders aware of the model and help them be alert for the signs of worsening mental health in their reports:



Source: <https://mentalhealth.ae/mental-health-continuum/>

Help leaders to focus on identifying the signs and indicators and encourage their people to take the appropriate actions for that phase of the continuum.

## COMMUNICATION

- Communication is connection. Ensure that you are provide at minimum weekly updates on the state of the business.
- Create opportunities for your internal teams to connect on a more regular basis:
  - Create a Slack group (or use another team collaboration tool of your choice) and publicize it. Any team member with a smartphone or computer can access your group and you can create different “channels” within that group for specific topics.



- Email regularly and provide updates on the business, summarize accurate information on the current situation, and provide industry information. Stay connected!
- Personal contact: a schedule for phone calls and text messages can be a way to ensure that your leaders and employees stay connected and provide an opportunity for an assessment of current mental health condition and provide a safe forum for the workers to ask about how to get more support.

## MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORTS ACROSS CANADA



[Virtual mental health support for BC provided via CMHA](#)



[Alberta health services COVID-19](#)  
[Alberta wide COVID-19 support services](#)



[Government of Saskatchewan mental health supports for COVID-19](#)



[Manitoba mental health virtual therapy](#)  
[Support and Information for Manitobans for COVID-19](#)  
[Community help and support network](#)



[Province of Ontario comprehensive community support resources.](#)  
[Also contains links to mental health resources.](#)



[Strategies for dealing with stress, anxiety, and depression related to COVID-19](#)



[Mental health & wellness support for COVID-19](#)



[Public health mental health resource](#)



[PEI mental health / COVID-19 resource](#)



[Nova Scotia health authority mental health services & resources](#)



[Mental health & wellness support](#)



[Mental health & social distancing](#)



[Managing anxiety and stress](#)

## CHECKLIST

This basic checklist can help ensure mental well-being among workers impacted by COVID-19. This checklist is not exhaustive but provides a base level of support for individuals who manage staff through the pandemic. As an employer, you may choose to supplement this list with tools and recommendations specific to the supports available at your own workplace:

| ACTION ITEM                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | YES | NO | ACTIONS TO IMPROVE |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|----|--------------------|
| <p><b>Have we taken steps to manage employee anxiety related to operations?</b></p> <p>Have we identified and prepared for possible scenarios that could shut down or impact production? Have we been transparent as we examine worst-case scenarios and have we communicated contingencies to the employees?</p> <p>Information sharing can stop gossip and innuendo and increase trust and performance during a crisis.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |     |    |                    |
| <p><b>Have we taken steps to manage employee anxiety related to COVID-19 in the workplace?</b></p> <p>Have we taken every appropriate step to reduce the likelihood of COVID-19 transmission within our workplace, and steps to mitigate its impact if it were present? Have we communicated these steps to employees?</p> <p>Appropriate risk mitigation strategies are not only critical to keeping workers healthy and safe, but can reduce absenteeism and refusal of work.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |     |    |                    |
| <p><b>Are we communicating effectively and transparently with employees?</b></p> <p>Are we keeping up regular communication intervals with staff, even if there is no change in the news? Are we communicating all the information, both positive and negative where appropriate? Are we using a credible source for the information we are providing to staff?</p> <p>Reducing ambiguity can reduce stress levels. Communication and information sharing can decrease perceptions of helplessness and improve outcomes.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |     |    |                    |
| <p><b>Am I demonstrating an understanding of my employee's mental state?</b></p> <p>We are currently living through arguably one of the most traumatic upheavals of our lives due to COVID-19. Has each leader reviewed resources from the Canadian Mental Health Association &amp; the Mental Health Commission of Canada? Are leaders comfortable with their own mental state? Have we created an environment where staff realize that it is OK to be anxious, it is human nature given our circumstances?</p> <p>Frontline leaders and managers may require training on psychological wellness and mental health in the workplace. Moreover, these leaders and managers may also be struggling during this difficult time. It is critical that the organization equip leaders with both the knowledge and support to lead.</p> |     |    |                    |
| <p><b>Am I providing reassurances and empathy to my employees?</b></p> <p>Does our organization offer resources such as an Employee Assistance Program or other supplemental wellness resources for staff? Should an employee need to self-isolate, have we made them aware of the social &amp; mental supports available?</p> <p>Organizations that work to dispel myths and misconceptions and create a culture of support see productivity gains. Given COVID-19's high transmission rate, it is especially critical that employees feel supported to be away from the workplace if necessary.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |     |    |                    |

## References

Association, A. P. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www.apa.org/practice/programs/dmhi/research-information/social-distancing>

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*SHRM*. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www.shrm.org/hr-today/news/hr-news/pages/company-talk-show-virtual-clubs-keep-employees-connected-during-covid19-pandemic.aspx>

## ACCESS TO EXPERTS

# CME AND MADE SAFE ARE HERE TO HELP

Our team is dedicated to helping manufacturers through the COVID-19 pandemic; with resources that run the gamut from national advocacy to local shop floor solutions.

Contact our team of health and safety experts for manufacturing-specific insights and supports:

[INFO@MADESAFE.CA](mailto:INFO@MADESAFE.CA) | [CME-MEC.CA](http://CME-MEC.CA)



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