

Mental health and wellness—Dispatcher/supervisor

Mental health is the capacity to feel, think, and act in ways that enhance our ability to enjoy life and deal with the challenges we face.* It includes how we feel about ourself, about our life, and about other people.

Mental health is part of our overall health. Poor mental health—such as low self-esteem, feelings of stress or loneliness, and relationship problems—can eventually lead to mental and physical illness.

Explain dangers

Truck drivers can be at increased risk of experiencing mental and physical health issues. Due to the solitary nature of the job, they are predisposed to feelings of isolation, loneliness, and depression.

Other risk factors include long shifts in a sedentary position, irregular sleeping and eating patterns, and pressure to meet strict schedules. These factors can contribute to problems such as stress, sleep apnea, obesity, diabetes, and drug and alcohol use.

Early detection and intervention can prevent mental and physical issues from becoming long-term problems, which could lead to increased crash potential and absenteeism.

Identify controls

As dispatchers and supervisors, you can play an important role in identifying early signs and symptoms of mental health issues such as:

- Reduced ability to pay attention and concentrate
- Decreased motivation
- Impaired decision-making ability
- Increased incidents of overreaction and road rage
- Feelings of sadness or depression
- Excessive fears or worries
- Disproportionate feelings of guilt
- Extreme mood changes (highs and lows)
- Withdrawal from friends and activities

Once identified, there are several things that you can do to help prevent mental health issues:

- **Initiate meaningful conversations:** Ask drivers revealing questions, such as: You do not seem yourself lately. Are you okay?
- **Balance dispatch assignments:** Ensure that drivers are given fair and reasonable work assignments.
- **Set realistic expectations:** Unrealistic expectations of on-time delivery can put additional pressure or stress on drivers.
- **Promote social interaction:** Encourage drivers to use technology, such as phones and tablets, to stay in touch with family and friends while away from home.
- **Consider allowing companionship:** Where company policy permits, allow drivers to bring a friend, family member, or pet with them to combat loneliness and isolation.
- **Promote healthy eating:** Encourage drivers to plan healthy meals in advance and provide them with healthy alternatives at the terminal.
- **Promote a healthy lifestyle:** Encourage drivers to get regular exercise and at least seven hours of sleep. Educate them on the dangers of sleep disorders and their affect on mental health. Explain that excessive alcohol consumption can lead to sleep disruptions and dependency issues.
- **Be supportive:** If approached by a driver for help, do not try to fix them. Instead, listen without judgment, offer reassurance, and encourage them to seek help.
- **Promote mental health services:** Put up posters and send emails and newsletters. Plan mental health safety meetings to encourage discussion and distribute resources. Remind employees that you have a safe, supportive environment. Review the services offered by your Employee Assistance Program (EAP).

Demonstrate

Review the company's mental health policy (or make a commitment to develop one).

Talk with dispatchers and supervisors about taking a Mental Health First Aid course.

* According to the Public Health Agency of Canada.