COVID-19: Mental Health Guidance

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CANADIAN GAS ASSOCIATION
ASSOCIATION CANADIENNE DU GAZ

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As the COVID-19 crisis has continued, CGA members have identified a number of discussion points around both the physical and mental health of workers in our industry. This guidance document will specifically consider the mental health aspect.

While some personnel in the industry have found they very much prefer and are more productive working remotely, others have had struggles with the inability to interact face-to-face with their everyday colleagues, isolation from co-workers/other people/society, increased workloads during this time and other the responsibilities they must bear while working from their homes, such as child care needs while schools are closed, etc.

This document will not attempt to fully address all of the issues or potential solutions in isolation from other guidance or advice, but rather, will endeavor to capture the leading practices available from CGA membership, supplemented by professional guidance from other sources as available. Initial leading practices that have been collected include:

- **Overall Communications**
  Set clear transparent communications patterns that keep staff informed and socially connected. Consider having team or group "how-is-everyone-doing" calls in addition to normal business calls where people can discuss anything but the business.

- **Individual Conversations**
  Unfortunately, what can sometimes become clear during team calls is that in a group it is easy to default to a herd mentality of "we are ok." People don't want to share their fears in front of others. As such, bilateral calls can be key. Consider having individual calls on a regular basis with each staff member to assess how they and their families are really doing and how they are handling the situation. Include a conversation on current or potential challenges.

- **Honesty**
  Encourage open discussion, regardless of the format, of fears and anxieties to create a space for compassion and understanding. It will also break the stigma around mental health. Once we are able to name our fears, it's easier to find solutions. Ask employees what they are worried about, what scares them and share back our own fears. It is not critical to have immediate responses to these fears, but rather to acknowledge and show empathy and understanding.

- **Terminology**

  Language matters when it comes to mental health. Change phrases like "this is crazy" to "this is overwhelming, frustrating, etc.", and add more to positive phrases to emphasize the importance of the employee's wellbeing and life outside of work. For example, "keep up the good work" can be changed to "you are doing a terrific job and it's much appreciated, but your health is more important."

- **Exhaustion**

  Address the potential for burnout. Responding to the ever-changing context we're currently experiencing, could potentially burn out our highest achievers. It is real, but surrounded by lots of stigma. It is also not a weakness. The subject should be addressed in order to create a plan that anticipates challenges before people get to their boiling point. Tell employees, they should ensure they're not working too much overtime, or to take time off regularly, etc. Continuously communicate the message that life-work balance is important, noting that life goes before work.

- **Child Care**

  Be aware that because of the needs of children in the home, whether school work related or driven out of isolation from their friends and classmates or boredom, parents will have to carve out a certain amount of each day to give attention to their child/children.

- **Care Givers**

  Keep in mind care givers may also have ongoing responsibilities to others suffering from mental illness, the elderly, sick family members, or family members living abroad who are experiencing very different circumstances.

- **Set Clear, Simple Work Priorities**

  Work as a team to define what is a priority/most important from a work perspective. Cut out the nice-to-do's and hone in on the need-to-do's. This will help with the fears around delivery on work plans. The reality is we may not be able to do all that we wanted to do in 2020 for a number of reasons It is important to continue putting our response to this situation in the context of keeping health, safety and wellness *first* and then our work, *second.*

- **Balance the Day and the Work**

  Be clear that the normal hours worked in a day may not be continuous as people may have to take frequent breaks to address priorities in the home. Work with employees on flexible work arrangements and schedules when possible to help relieve stress imposed by working from home amongst other responsibilities and distractions.

Life/Work Balance

It may be all too easy to have the lines between when to work versus when to relax, blur. Encourage a regimen that is similar to the normal office routine and emphasize the need to step away and relax after hours and on weekends/holidays.

- **Physical Exercise**
  Physical activity is important for mental health. Encourage employees to allot time in the day to be active either before or after work periods, or by taking breaks throughout the day for physical activity. Physical activity supports: sharper memory and thinking, self-esteem, improved sleep, increased energy levels, and stronger resilience. A "step challenge" is a simple way of encouraging activity among employees.

Daily Guidance

9,000 steps

8 hours of sleep

7 glasses of water

6 minutes of meditation

5 servings of fruits & vegetables

4 rest breaks

3 meals and snacks

2 hours without a phone before sleep

1 physical activity

Source: http://www.dietitianrohini.com/9-steps-for-daily-healthy-habits-by-dietitian-rohini/

External Resources

Use of external, alternate resources, can also be considered:

Interactive Tool:
- http://aspirecampus.ca/boosters/the-big-4/

Tactics for Maintaining Mental Fitness During the COVID-19 Pandemic:
- https://maintainingmentalfitness.com/

Canadian Mental Health Association:
- https://cmha.ca/

Resources from CSA Group:
- CAN / CSA-Z1003-13 / BNQ 9700-803 / 2013, Psychological health and safety in the workplace - Prevention, promotion, and guidance to staged implementation

- SPE Z1003 IMPLEMENTATION HB, Assembling the Pieces: An Implementation Guide to the National Standard for Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace

MEA Energy Association:
- Complimentary Courses for the Energy Industry – topics include mental health awareness, working remotely, working from home, ergonomics. Courses are available until mid-June, 2020. https://www.meaenergy.org/covid19/?utm_source=informz&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=MEA-informz&_zs=ebQka&_zl=2UE42

Mental Health Commission of Canada:
- The National Standard of Canada for Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace is a voluntary set of guidelines, tools, and resources that offer a blueprint for promoting mental health and preventing psychological harm at work.
- The Working Mind is a training program for employees and managers designed to address and promote mental health and reduce the stigma of mental illness in a workplace setting.
- Online training in psychological health and safety for employees to learn what impacts their mental health and what we can all do to support ourselves and others in the workplace.
- Being a Mindful Employee: An Orientation to Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace is a free online course recommended for anyone interested in learning more about how you can contribute to positive mental health at work.

World Health Organization:
- Parenting in the time of COVID-19:
  To help parents interact constructively with their children during this time of confinement, these six one-page tips for parents cover planning one-on-one time, staying positive, creating a daily routine, avoiding bad behaviour, managing stress, and talking about COVID-19. Use them to you and your kids' advantage, and have fun in doing so.

Educational Resources:

A series of resources on education:
- https://www.pearson.com/ca/en/about/learning-online-during-pandemic.html
- https://www.d2l.com/covid-19/
- Collection of materials available here covering:
    - Ideas for Montessori activities at home
    - Audible stories
    - Virtual museums/parks/art gallery
    - Online library
- U.S. Department of Education collection of home activities here covering:
    - STEM activities
    - Virtual field trips
    - Presentations for children on history
    - Series of Smithsonian materials

Ergonomics:
- Entrac materials for ergonomics:
    - Practical guide for Ergonomics while temporarily working form home: https://entrac.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Practical-Guide-ergonomics-and-temporary-work-from-home-by-Entrac.pdf
- WorksafeNB: https://www.worksafenb.ca/safety-topics/covid-19/working-safely-from-home/
- Worksafe Saskatchewan: http://www.worksafesask.ca/covid-19/ergonomic-safety-at-home/?doing_wp_cron=1587996443.8338980674743652343750

Exercise:
- Social distancing workout jam series: https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLVCSNX8DDJhdQt7aM5xaR9WrHchdEjGN6

- WHO – Be active during COVID-19: https://www.who.int/news-room/q-a-detail/be-active-during-covid-19

- Toronto Star at home workout: https://www.thestar.com/life/health_wellness/2020/03/21/missing-the-gym-amid-covid-19-heres-a-special-at-home-cardio-workout-for-star-readers.html

- Basic workout consists in: squats, push-ups, cardio.
For example: https://www.acefitness.org/education-and-resources/lifestyle/blog/6593/top-25-at-home-exercises/

Being a Mindful Employee: An Orientation to Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace:

This free online training is offered through the Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety. This course demonstrates what can impact employee mental health and what we can all do to support ourselves and others in the workplace. https://www.mentalhealthcommission.ca/English/online-training-psychological-health-and-safety

National Standard for Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace:

https://www.mentalhealthcommission.ca/English/what-we-do/workplace/national-standard

13 Factors: Addressing Mental Health in the Workplace:

This video series aims to raise awareness around the 13 factors that can impact the mental health of employees in the workplace and encourage conversations on methods for promoting psychologically safe places to work. This series was developed by MHCC in partnership with Ottawa Public Health.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ojpK2UWd6zU&list=PL2NuAPXp8ohZmoVaECl6sRiV9l+Q25XkId

13 Psychosocial Workplace Factors:

Download and print these posters to promote the factors in your workplace.

https://www.mentalhealthcommission.ca/sites/default/files/2019-02/13_factors_posters_eng.pdf

MindsMatter Online Assessment:

This tool is designed to help you assess where your workplace stands on mental health. The tool is free, confidential, easy to use and takes under three minutes to complete.

http://mindsmatter.openingminds.ca/

1. Here to Help
https://www.heretohelp.bc.ca/
2. Mood Disorders Society of Canada
https://mdsc.ca/
3. Mental Health Commission of Canada
https://www.mentalhealthcommission.ca/English
4. Mindful
https://mindful.org
5. Beyondblue
https://beyondblue.org
6. Mymentalhealth.ca
https://mymentalhealth.ca
7. Thrive Mental Health
https://thrivementalhealth.ca
8. Guarding Minds at Work
https://guardingmindsatwork.ca
9. Coping Strategies for Better Mental Health, 2017
https://www.medicentres.com/2018/11/coping-strategies-mental-health/
10. Government of Western Australia Mental Health Commission – Mindful Colouring
https://www.actbelongcommit.org.au/assets/resources/targeted/mental-health-recovery/2.-mindful-colouring-in.pdf