



Executive
COUNSELING



Mental Health First Aid Kit

**To bring in emotional well being and
balance back in your Work life**

www.executivecounseling.in



Preface

Welcome to Executive Counselling

Welcome:

The Indian corporate and organised sector have been passing from a stage of continuity to a stage of change ever since India got integrated to the globalised world. Along with the positive outcomes of this, one of the impact is changes in roles, skills and location affecting work life balance and increase in stress levels. Stress to a certain level is healthy but the impact of stress among Indian corporate executives are such that a study found that nearly 30 to 40 % of the executives are either stressed, anxious or depressed.

In a period of new normal after the COVID-19, the way businesses and people, society and economy function, will have a major change which in itself will result in a significant increase in issues related to mental health. On issues related to productivity, performance, recruitment and compensation there is expected to be many changes coming in. Technology is to take a prominent position on the basis of human interactions which has impact on interpersonal relationships, soft skills and even organisational strategies affecting mental health.

Falling into a Stress-Anxiety-depression cycle will have a direct impact on mental and physical health which affects not only work life balance but also the performance and productivity of executives. Excessive stress and anxiety leads into behavioural issues in organisation making the working system distressed, while depression makes the executive impaired. Hence executives in particular and management, in general, need to understand what are mental health issues at work and how to manage and cope with them.

This booklet is prepared for executives and organisations and include six important sections.

- Introduction to executive mental health
- Types of mental distresses faced by executives
- Factors affecting executive mental health
- Skill sets required to manage executive mental health
- Management strategy for Executive mental health:
- Corporate lifestyle practises

These information are developed for the common good of working executives after specific research and consultation with mental health professionals which we hope will find value

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What is Executive Mental Health?

Executive mental health issues are measured on the challenges faced by an executive in discharging his organisational roles. It can be disruptions in the individual's mental response system to managing people and processes and will exhibit the following psycho social symptoms

- Inability to organise themselves and control their behaviour
- Inability to manage time, remember key data/names
- Excessive absenteeism, day dreaming, irritability
- Mistrust, anger, crying spells
- Socially inappropriate behaviours.
- Hyper activity, fidgeting, impulsivity.

These symptoms will further manifest in a behavioural, Psychic and somatic (Physical) way. On the behavioural side we can find the executive indulging, in bullying, misbehaving, withdrawing from social interactions and team work and will be indecisive at work. On a psychic side the individual will be having chronic stress, acute anxiety, and low mood and will show a sign of burn out. There is also a physical manifestation to executive mental health which is much visible. Such executives will be having consistent back pain, gastro intestinal disorders, allergies and sleeplessness

While if these disorders only result in distress of the individual but he can come to office and work, then he/she can be called a distressed executive who needs training and counselling. However if the disturbances are acute then he/she is called as impaired executive where he should be having a psychiatric intervention.

Type of Mental distress faced by executives

1. Stress

It is the body's natural defence against predators and danger. It flushes the body with hormones to prepare systems to evade or confront danger. This is known as the "fight-or-flight" mechanism. When we are faced with a challenge, part of our response is physical. The body activates resources to protect us by preparing us either to stay and fight or to get away as fast as possible. The body produces larger quantities of the chemicals like cortisol, adrenaline, and noradrenaline. These chemicals trigger an increased heart rate, heightened muscle preparedness, sweating, and alertness. All these factors improve the ability to respond to a hazardous or challenging situation.

Factors of the environment that trigger this reaction are called stressors. The more stressors we experience, the more stressed we tend to feel. Stress slows normal bodily functions, such as the digestive and immune systems as all resources can then be concentrated on rapid breathing, blood flow, alertness, and muscle use. Stressors affect individuals in different ways. Some experiences that are generally considered positive can lead to stress like being promoted. This is because they often involve a major change, extra effort, new responsibilities, and a need for adaptation. They are also steps into the unknown. The person wonders if he can cope.

In acute stress you feel

- Inability to concentrate
- Constant worrying or racing thoughts
- Irritability and anger
- Feeling overwhelmed

2. Anxiety

It is a general term for several disorders that cause nervousness, fear, apprehension, and worrying. These disorders affect how we feel and behave and can cause physical symptoms. Mild anxiety is vague and unsettling, while severe anxiety can seriously affect day-to-day working. Anxiety is a natural human reaction to stressful situations, but becomes a condition when it frequently occurs without a trigger.

During acute anxiety you have,

- Disrupted sleeping patterns or nightmares
- Avoiding people or social situations
- Constantly worried about the past, present or future
- Headaches, tension, nausea or chest pain, increased heart rate, fatigue
- shortness of breath
- Fears of bad things happening
- Difficulties concentrating or remembering things, mind racing

" YOU ARE ANXIOUS BECAUSE YOU ARE HUMAN"

3. Depression

Sadness, feeling down, having a loss of interest or pleasure in daily activities – these are symptoms familiar to all of us. But, if they persist and affect our life substantially, it may be depression. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), depression is the most common illness worldwide. Depressive disorder is the second leading contributor to the global burden of diseases and affects all persons irrespective of gender or age. It is intense, long lasting and affects your everyday life

The causes can be related to

- Genetic or Hereditary factors
- Dietary or Deficiency of vitamins
- Social – Cultural – Environmental Issues affecting our thoughts
- Negative Perception of Life
- Low tolerance to stress
- negative self-image

Symptoms of depression can include

- depressed mood,
- reduced interest or pleasure in activities previously enjoyed
- restlessness
- slowed movement and speech
- fatigue or loss of energy
- feelings of worthlessness or guilt,
- impaired ability to think, concentrate, or make decisions,
- Recurrent thoughts of death or suicide.

Factors affecting executive mental health

Personality and organisational culture

Our personalities play a significant role in our adjustment to work environment and is characteristic of our thinking feeling and behaviour. There are many personality types but your general adjustment and acceptance of a work environment depends on how your personality type adjust to the organisational culture people and processes.

Management policy:

The policies of an organisation on factors related to health and hygiene has an impact on employee mental health and productivity. Policies related to mental and physical health, policy on equal opportunities and gender balance and policies on issues affecting an employee's personal life like leave, compensation, and entrenchment affects mental health of the employee.

Work design and skill matrix:

In accordance to a person's talent and experience if work flow, responsibilities and authorities are not designed then it results in a trigger to generate mental health issues. Similarly if a person's skills capabilities and achievements are not recognised there evolves a stress trigger.

Interpersonal relationships:

The relationships between peers and also between seniors and juniors are significant factor which affect employee mental health. Bullying, organisational politics and other factors resulting in toxic relationships causes mental agony.

Work- Life balance:

In effective work life balance in terms of unavailability of time for family and personal work can cause mental distress. Employees who pass through strained personal relationships at home, as like divorce, separation etc. can contribute to exasperation of mental health issues.

Self-actualisation needs:

At the middle and senior management levels work should get integrated to a larger purpose in life giving a meaning and satisfaction to what one is doing. If there is a dissonance in a person's mind in terms of his aspiration, need and passion while working then this will trigger issues related mental health.

Skill sets required for handling mental health issues

Work Lag identification skills:

Supervisors and managers need to look at their work team productivity not in a mechanical way of time management but by considering them as emotional beings whose moods and motivation are intrinsically connected. Hence performance of a team member should be evaluated over a period of time and if there is a lag, then that need to be discussed with the member in an open conversation and the reason for lag identified. This will help in taking a decision to address the lag.

Empathetic communication skills

Empathy is a broad concept that refers to the cognitive and emotional reactions of an individual to the observed experiences of another. Having empathy increases the likelihood of helping others and showing compassion. This is a higher order communication skill required where team members are not felt bullied or pushed to a corner or excessively criticized affecting their morale. Their weaknesses should be addressed in an empathetic way with an approach of a problem solver and solution provider.

Listening skills:

Majority of the mental health issues can be minimised by patient listening. By being able to listen to issues that confronts a person, a solution can be worked out rather than imposing one's own thoughts. The ability to be non-judgemental and showing maturity in addressing issues require good listening skills.

Socio- Emotional skills:

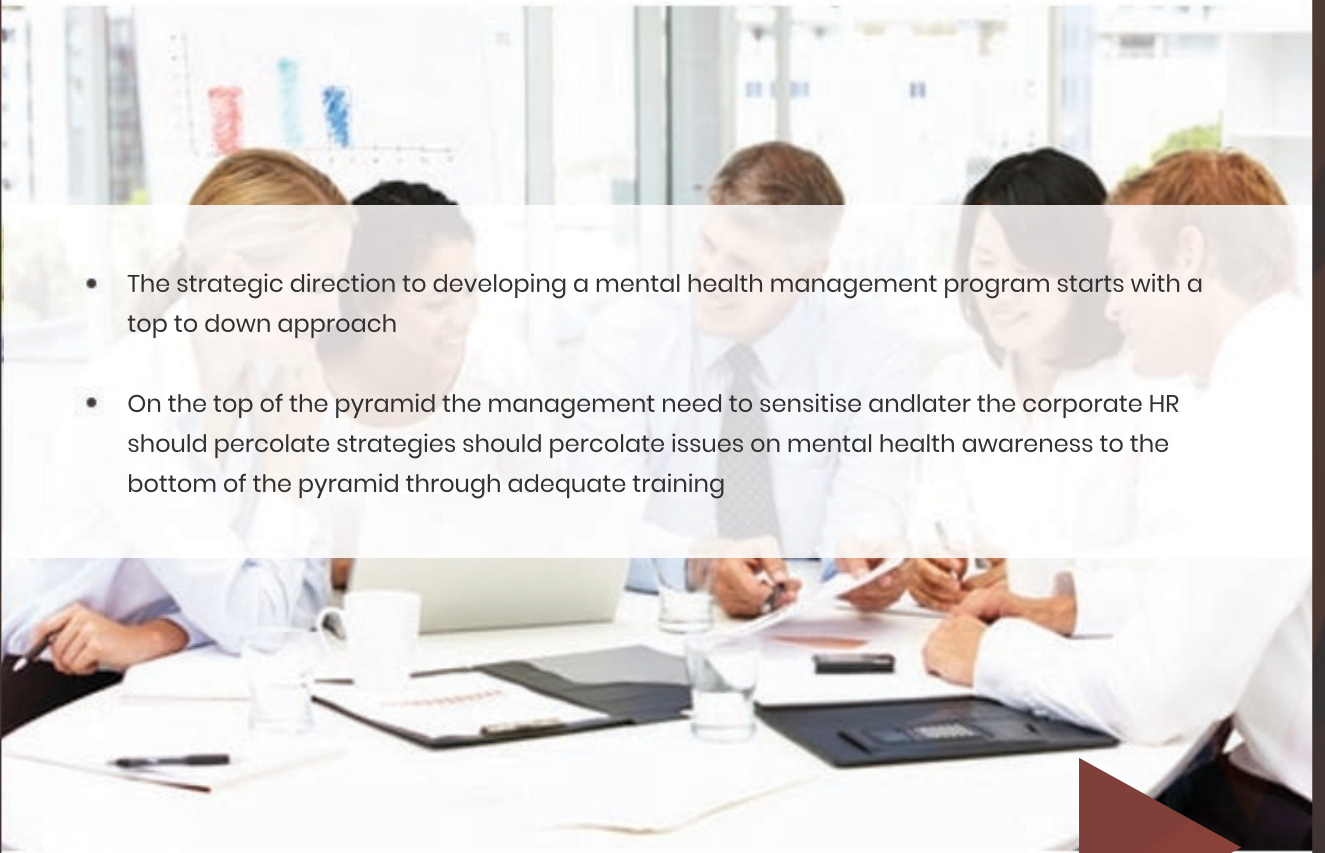
Ability to develop a positive relationship of trust, resolve challenging situation and the ability to control and manage the emotional responses of the individual and team. It involves ability to develop an open conversation and give a feeling of comfort to a distressed individual.

Persuasion skills:

Persuasion skills mean the ability to make intentional and successful efforts at influencing someone's mental state through written or verbal communication without hurting the person. Here you should have the ability to understand the cognitive responses and body language of the person in order to respond to him in an effective way.

All the above skills require strong emotional intelligence and knowledge on mental health issues and behavioural responses.

Management strategy for executive mental health

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- The strategic direction to developing a mental health management program starts with a top to down approach
 - On the top of the pyramid the management need to sensitise and later the corporate HR should percolate strategies should percolate issues on mental health awareness to the bottom of the pyramid through adequate training

- Conduct Mental health sensitisation workshops
- Develop a culture against stigma on mental health issue
- Conduct mental health audit
- Develop a robust mental health policy
- Encourage employee counselling
- Training programs for senior leadership on mentoring techniques
- Conduct training for employees in developing mental health management skills

Your Emotional first aid kit or corporate life style practices

Develop the art of positive goal setting:

Develop a road map of your career and your objectives within the organisation and delink it with people and activities within the organisation such that you concentrate your energy and attention to your goal but not on the time you spend on the goal. Understand that times will change and people and circumstances will change, and nothing is permanent.

Focus on Family:

Why do you work? Is it to be recognised by your organisation? Is your life family and happiness more important? Should it be allowed to be compromised? Keep asking these questions to your mind and progressively feed your mind in understanding what is more important.

Be Assertive and uphold your self-esteem:

Assertiveness is a skill that can reduce your feelings of stress and anxiety and improve your self-esteem and confidence. Develop open communication channels with self, family and work ecosystem and reassert that 'I am what I am and not what is judged by others'

Identify your Enjoyable Activities:

When the office situation is overwhelmingly stress full take a break and do activities that gives you pleasure and find a positive outlet to release your negative feelings. Research shows that the more pleasurable activities that people engage in, the higher their wellbeing and mental health recovery.

Get away from obsessive and repetitive thoughts;

When you are in mental distress you will develop a pattern of thinking. This is called the thinking trap. Mental filtering of thoughts is a technique used by many. Keep a mental dustbin of thought in your mind. Consider the thoughts as pieces of paper and whenever these

Avoid catastrophizing;

Catastrophizing means that you conclude a bad outcome from a trivial stress trigger. "My boss criticized me in public means he intent to fire me" is an example. Your boss criticized you to satisfy his ego and he does not have the power to fire you will be the truth. However your mind will try to create a monster out of your boss.

Emotional reasoning:

Try to analyse a problem objectively taking you as a person away. The anxious mind creates new conclusions out of the thinking increasing the cycle of anxiety when you attach yourself to the problem. This is because when you are stressed anxious or depressed a tiny part of your brain called amygdala is highly reactive and is sending thoughts for deciding a fight or flight situation. Time tested method is to practice mindfulness and being in the moment by accepting your every moment by detaching yourself from it remain mindfully present.

Seeking Social and Professional support

- Fight stigma and accept your distress. Proudly express your feeling. When one person expresses others follow as you are not alone. Having a mental distress is as simple as having a physical distress. Anxiety and Depression is like mental cough and cold. It comes and goes and is treatable.
- If you are feeling extremely distressed and find your impaired to work seek social support. Talk to your family first. Discuss your problem with a mental health counsellor and develop a strategy to fight the mental infection.
- Develop a supportive social network. Meet friends and increase your social interaction.
- If your counselor advises you to seek professional help, after your mental examination and preliminary report, it means you need medical intervention where you need to seek the help of a clinical psychiatrist.

1. In case of a mental distress way beyond your control please be free to write to me in rajeshmenon@executivecounseling.in. I will be maintaining confidentiality as per the privacy policy mentioned in our website.

2. If your organisation needs an employee mental health audit, or to conduct a mental health workshop or prepare a mental health policy, then please visit our website and write to rajeshmenon@executivecounseling.in