

## Should I tell people at work about my depression?

IF A QUALIFIED healthcare provider has diagnosed you as having depression, the decision to discuss your health condition with your employer (manager/supervisor, coworker, union representative or human resources department) is an individual one. It depends on your particular situation, job and workplace, as well as your personal comfort level. If you are able to go to work and fulfill your job duties, you may choose to not disclose your depression to your employer or colleagues. Regrettably, there continues to be stigma and possible discrimination against persons experiencing mental health conditions.

There are, however, some situations where you may need to disclose a diagnosed mental health condition to your employer:

- *If your employer has an absenteeism policy or benefits plan that requires documentation.*
- *If you are requesting accommodation at work (or so you can return to work).*
- *If your depression has caused impairments that may unacceptably increase risk to you, your coworkers or the public, especially for safety sensitive positions.*

Speaking to your employer may be helpful. Changes in your work behaviour or productivity may otherwise be viewed as performance concerns and dealt with accordingly, which would be unfair and may impact your mood further. Keeping difficulties secret may become an additional stress, and may prevent you making arrangements at work (for example, modifying workplace demands) that can support your self-care efforts.

If you choose to speak to your employer, you should decide how much information to provide. You might:

- *Consult with your union steward or health and safety representative about benefits or programs that may be available to you.*
- *Describe how depression is impacting your work behaviour.*
- *Identify current or upcoming workplace factors that may contribute to depression (e.g., upcoming deadlines that you may not be able to meet).*
- *State the steps you are taking to deal with the problem (e.g., seeing a mental health specialist).*
- *Discuss privacy issues (e.g., indicate that you do not feel it is appropriate to provide details on your specific difficulties).*
- *Speak in general terms about “personal health concerns.”*
- *Decide on a strategy for follow-up support and further communication (e.g., suggest you meet with your direct supervisor on a weekly basis to review deadlines).*

You are under no obligation to discuss your situation with your coworkers, although you might choose to say something to trusted colleagues. This is more common when there have been obvious changes in behaviour or extended periods of absence. In these circumstances, consider whether to simply mention “personal difficulties” or provide more specific information. Although stigma remains, many people have faced mental health problems themselves, or among their family or their friends – they are likely to be understanding and willing to help.