Mental Health and Wellbeing Toolbox Talk

Key points, do's and don'ts, and questions with answers. The attendance sign-off sheet is on the last page.

Asked to show your toolbox talk records? The Site Book keeps each talk and its signatures with the job, on Pro: **thesitebook.co.uk/features/toolbox-talks**

Key points to cover

- Mental health is a workplace safety issue, not a personal failing — employers have a legal duty to assess and manage risks to psychological health
- Construction workers are at higher risk due to job insecurity, long hours, time away from home, physical demands, and a culture that discourages talking about feelings
- Learn to spot the warning signs: changes in behaviour, withdrawal from colleagues, increased absence, loss of interest, irritability, changes in appearance
- If you are concerned about a colleague, ask them directly — a simple 'are you OK?' can make a real difference
- Know where to get help: site mental health first aiders, Mates in Mind, Samaritans (116 123), Construction Industry Helpline (0345 605 1956)
- Managers must create an environment where workers feel safe to talk — lead by example, check in regularly, and take concerns seriously

Do's and don'ts

Do

- Ask a colleague directly if you are concerned about them — 'are you OK?' is a powerful question
- Know who the mental health first aiders are on site and how to contact support services
- Take your breaks and rest days — overwork and fatigue are major contributors to poor mental health
- Create a culture where talking about mental health is normal and encouraged
- Attend mental health awareness training if offered — understanding the signs can help you help others

Don't

- Never dismiss or ridicule someone who talks about their mental health — take every conversation seriously
- Never assume someone is 'fine' because they haven't said anything — many people hide their struggles
- Never pressure someone to talk if they are not ready — let them know you are available when they are
- Never ignore a colleague who seems to be struggling — inaction can have devastating consequences
- Never use phrases like 'man up' or 'get over it' — these attitudes contribute to the stigma that prevents people seeking help

Questions to check understanding

Ask each question and let the crew answer before you read out the answer.

Q1. Why is the construction industry at higher risk for mental health problems and suicide?

Answer: Construction workers face a combination of risk factors: job insecurity and short-term contracts, long hours and physical exhaustion, time away from home and family, financial pressures, a macho culture that discourages talking about feelings, and high levels of alcohol and substance use as coping mechanisms. ONS data for England (2011–2015) shows men in low-skilled construction jobs had a suicide risk 3.7 times the national average, and men in skilled construction and building trades 1.6 times.

Q2. What are the warning signs that a colleague may be struggling with their mental health?

Answer: Warning signs include: changes in behaviour or mood (becoming withdrawn, quiet, or irritable), increased absence or lateness, loss of interest in work or socialising, decline in appearance or personal hygiene, increased alcohol or substance use, talking about feeling hopeless or being a burden, giving away possessions, and sudden calmness after a period of depression (which can indicate a decision to act on suicidal thoughts).

Q3. What should you do if you think a workmate is struggling?

Answer: Find a quiet, private moment and ask them directly — 'Are you OK?' or 'I've noticed you seem a bit different lately, is everything alright?' Listen without judging, do not try to fix the problem or minimise their feelings. Let them know support is available — mental health first aiders on site, Samaritans (116 123), Construction Industry Helpline (0345 605 1956), or Mates in Mind. If you believe someone is in immediate danger, do not leave them alone and call 999.

Attendance sign-off sheet: Mental Health and Wellbeing Toolbox Talk

Everyone who attended prints their name and signs to confirm they received this talk.

Date _____ **Time** _____

Site or location _____ **Presented by** _____

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This is general guidance for UK construction sites. Check it against your own risk assessment, method statement and the site before you deliver it. Toolbox talk from The Site Book, reviewed 26 October 2026. Read it online at thesitebook.co.uk/toolbox-talks/mental-health.