

TOOLBOX TALK: MENTAL HEALTH

Job or site _____

Date _____

Led by _____

Open with this

Nobody has to say anything in this one. Just listen, and if one number lands wrong with you, stay behind for a minute afterwards and we will talk about it then, not now, and not in front of everybody.

The talk

CDC published suicide rates by occupation for 2021. For working men across every occupation in the country the rate was 32.0 per hundred thousand. For men in construction and extraction it was 65.6. That is not a bit higher. It is double.

It is not only the men. Construction laborers was one of the five highest rates of any detailed occupation for women, at 38.6, against 8.0 for working women overall.

Nobody knows exactly why and the honest list is long: the work is seasonal and the money is not steady, the injuries turn into painkillers, the drink after the shift is part of the job, you move from site to site and never keep a crew, and this is a trade where saying you are struggling is heard as saying you cannot do the work.

That last one is the part we can actually change today. Nothing here is going to fix anybody's money or anybody's back. What this crew can do is stop treating it as the one thing that cannot be said out loud.

The warning signs are not dramatic. Somebody who was always here starts being late. Somebody who never drank at lunch does. Somebody stops taking the mickey. Somebody gives away a tool they have had for twenty years. Somebody who talks about being a burden, even as a joke.

And what you say is smaller than you think. Not a speech. You look off. Are you all right, properly? And then the hard bit, which is to stay quiet and let it be uncomfortable for ten seconds instead of filling it. Most people have never been asked twice in their life.

If it is worse than that, asking somebody directly whether they are thinking about killing themselves does not put the idea in their head. That is the thing everybody is afraid of and it is not true. Asking straight is what gives them permission to say yes.

The number is 988, from any phone in the US. You can call it, text it, or chat online, any hour of any day, free and confidential, and it is not only for the worst moment. You can call it about somebody else. You can call it on the way home about a conversation you had on this site and did not know what to do with.

Point at these before anybody starts

- The number 988, said out loud by everybody here so it is in the room.
- Anybody on this crew nobody has seen properly in a fortnight.
- Whether this company has an employee assistance program, and whether anybody knows the number.
- The person on this crew who always asks how everybody is, and who asks them.
- What time this crew actually finishes, and whether anybody here is doing seven days.
- Where somebody could have a conversation on this site without eight people hearing it.

The rules that apply

- 988 is the Suicide and Crisis Lifeline. Call, text or chat, 24 hours a day, every day, free and confidential, and available in Spanish.
- 988 is not only for a crisis. It takes calls from people worried about somebody else.
- Asking somebody directly whether they are thinking about suicide does not increase the risk. It lowers the barrier to them saying yes.
- Never agree to keep it secret. Anybody who tells you they are in danger needs one more person to know, and you can tell them that before they answer.
- If somebody is in immediate danger they do not get left alone, and that is a 911 call, not a lift home.
- There is no OSHA standard behind any of this. It is a company rule and it holds on this site because this company says so.

Ask the crew

- What is the number, and has everybody here got it in their phone now?
- Who would you ring at ten at night, and would you actually do it?
- Name one person on this crew you have not spoken to properly in a month.

Close with this

Twice the rate of every other trade and nobody talks about it. That is the bit we can change by the end of this shift.

Attendance

Everybody who was present signs, including subcontractors and anybody visiting the site.

	Print name and signature
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This talk is general safety information for a crew briefing, not legal advice and not a substitute for the training your employees are required to have. Standards are quoted for orientation only. Check the current text of the standard and your own state plan, which may be stricter than the federal rule.