

## Mental Health and Wellbeing for Seafarers

The terms 'Mental Health' and 'Mental Illness' are often used as if they mean the same thing, but there is an important difference between these two similar terms.

Not everyone will experience a mental illness, but everyone will occasionally experience a challenge with their mental health, just as we do with our physical health.

Our mental health can be measured along a continuum. Depending on what challenges are thrown at us and how we are coping, the state of our mental health can move up and down this continuum.



'Mental health' means our well-being, our emotions, our thoughts and feelings, our ability to solve problems and overcome difficulties, our social connections and our understanding of the world.

On the other hand, 'mental illness' is diagnosable and can affect the way people think, feel, behave or interact with others.

Sometimes people can suffer mental illnesses as a consequence of long-periods of poor mental health or external factors, but it's also normal to suffer mental illness at any time and without an obvious outside cause.

An important sign of having good mental health is the ability to look at issues realistically and work to resolve them in a practical way.

That doesn't mean we will feel happy and confident all of the time or that there aren't challenges in our life that make things difficult for us. Having good mental health means that we are living and coping well despite the challenges that everyone will face from time to time.

**With the right support, everyone can live well and enjoy a meaningful and rewarding career.**

At Hunterlink, we can help you with any issues that arise and help move achieve good mental health by helping you work through the issues you are facing either at work or at home.

## Mental Health and Wellbeing for Seafarers

### **What is Anxiety?**

Anxiety is more than feeling stressed or worried.

While stress and worry are common responses to difficult situations, it usually eases once the immediate cause has passed.

Anxiety is when these feelings don't subside.

#### **Common emotional symptoms:**

- Excessive worry
- Feeling apprehensive and powerless
- Sense of panic
- Mind racing
- Difficulty concentrating and focusing on one thing at a time.

#### **Common physical symptoms:**

- Increased heart rate or shortness of breath
- Excessive sweating or trembling
- Muscle tension and headaches
- Difficulty sleeping and having nightmares
- Chest pain

### **What is Depression?**

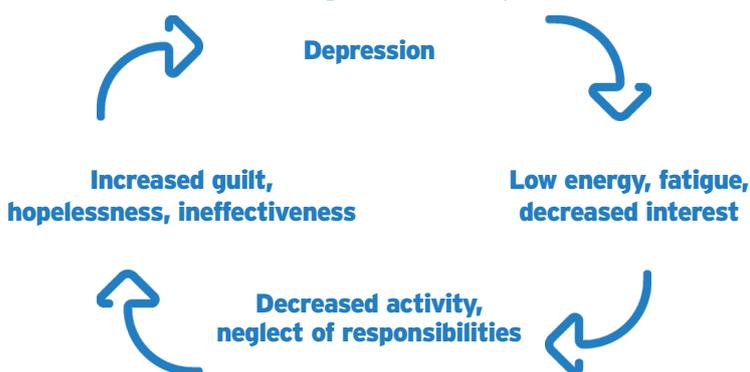
Depression is also a common experience.

We have all felt 'down' about certain situations, however depression can become an illness when the its impact on you is severe, lasts two weeks or more and interferes with your ability or willingness to engage with your work, friends or family.

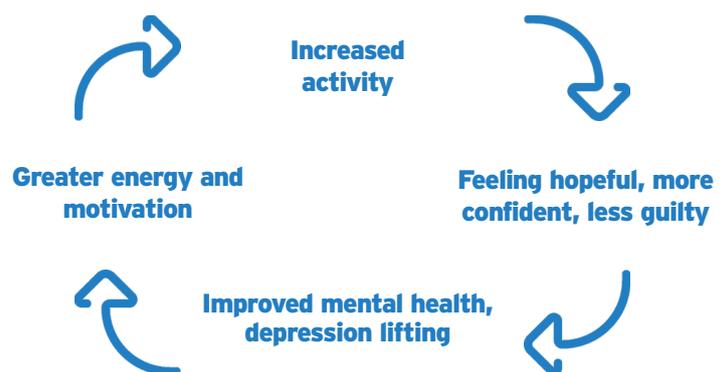
#### **Signs include:**

- Lowered self-esteem
- Change in sleep patterns and appetite
- Less ability to control emotions
- Reduced capacity to experience pleasure
- Reduced pain tolerance
- Changed sex drive
- Poor concentration and memory retention
- Reduced motivation and energy

### **The Vicious Cycle of Depression**



### **Reversing the Cycle of Depression**



One way to break the cycle of depression or to relieve anxiety is with medication prescribed to you by a Doctor. Antidepressants can help change your energy levels and improve your sleep patterns. Another way to relieve anxiety and depression is to increase your activity levels, especially in pleasurable activities or by tackling tasks and responsibilities that you can take pride in.

Get to know your physical and emotional responses to anxiety and improve your work/life balance by devoting appropriate time to work, recreation and family. Know your physical and emotional limits, and pay attention to the warning signs that your mental health needs attention.

## Mental Health and Wellbeing for Seafarers

### ***Suicide awareness***

If you are thinking about suicide, it is important to understand that you are not alone. Feeling like you want to end your life is distressing and it's important to keep yourself safe. Remember that thoughts about suicide are just thoughts.

**You don't have to act on them, no matter how overwhelming they feel.**

These thoughts won't stay with you forever, and it's possible to get through with coping strategies. Please tell someone what you're going through as soon as possible.

**Speak to someone onboard that you feel comfortable with, talk with a family member or friend, or contact Hunterlink 24/7 Helpline.**

Writing down your thoughts and feelings is also a great way of processing them privately, and can help you think about alternative solutions to the problems or challenges that you're facing.

#### **Identifying the signs or risks of suicide in other people:**

- Talks about suicide
- Feels and expresses hopelessness
- Appears depressed most of the time
- Has trouble eating/sleeping
- Withdraws from social situations
- Loses interest in work, hobbies, education
- Takes risks that put themselves in physical danger
- Neglects their personal appearance
- Increases their use of alcohol or drugs

When someone is experiencing a mental health crisis or experiencing suicidal thoughts, they will often approach someone who they feel comfortable with to talk about their distress.

The person they approach may not have professional expertise in dealing with mental health crises. Often, the decision to reach out to someone about suicidal feelings is based on the shared relationship between two people or a prior connection.

#### **It may be you that someone experiencing a mental health crisis decides to reach out to!**

The MOST important thing is to do SOMETHING when suicidal behaviour is exhibited or when you suspect a person is thinking about suicide.

The words you use don't need to be perfect. What's important is that you express concern for the person's wellbeing. If you reach out in a genuinely caring manner, you may very well make the difference between life and death.

**Help the person make contact with a health professional. Contacting Hunterlink or a Doctor is of vital importance.**

Remember to look after yourself. Take time afterwards to talk to Hunterlink about your experience and the emotions you've felt while helping your friend or colleague. You have just helped save a life.

## Mental Health and Wellbeing for Seafarers

### **Relationships**

**Some of the pressures of life at sea on your relationships include:**

- Separation from family and friends causing damage to important relationships.
- Being unavailable for important occasions like birthdays, holidays or anniversaries.
- Restricted opportunity to travel home in case of emergency.
- Demanding physical work and fatigue.
- Adjustments leaving work and returning home for intermittent time-frames.
- Reduced communication.
- One parent taking the role of single parent while the other is away at sea.
- Adjustment difficulties during times when both parents are home together again.
- Children being impacted emotionally by a parent leaving for long periods.
- Both partners needing down time, time with each other, and time with their children.

### **Keeping your Relationship Alive**

- Have Specific Joint Goals.
- Discuss how to keep your connection going while away. Try to communicate daily and let your partner know your roster so they know when you are available to talk.
- Agree on jobs to be done so you have the same expectations and talk about any problems early.
- Make reunions enjoyable. Carve out time for yourself and don't book too many activities in during time at home so family can be priority.
- Talk to the kids about their feelings and spend quality time with them. Having you away can take a toll on them emotionally and they look forward to your return

### **Bullying and Harassment at Sea**

Workplace bullying is verbal, physical, social, or psychological abuse by your employer (or manager), another person or group of people at work.

If you are being bullied at work, you might:

- be less active, confident, or successful in your work;
- feel scared, stressed, anxious or depressed;
- have your life outside of work affected or want to stay away from work;
- feel like you can't trust your employer or the people who you work with; or
- have physical signs of stress like headaches, backaches, sleep problems.

An employer that allows bullying to occur in the workplace is not meeting their responsibilities.

**You should talk to a supervisor or manager, a workplace health and safety representative, the HR Department or your union. Some other steps you should take are:**

- Keep a diary. Document everything that happens, including what you've done to try to stop it.
- Check your workplace for their bullying policy and complaints procedure.
- Contact Hunterlink. Counselling can help you deal with stress especially if the bullying is already affecting your physical and mental health.
- Stay Healthy - you need to look after yourself and maintain a healthy and balanced lifestyle to help you cope. Exercise, sleep and eat healthy.



## **Mental Health and Wellbeing for Seafarers**

### ***Looking out for yourself and looking out for other people***

#### **Signs of Struggle**

- Appears to withdraw, isolate or seems quieter;
- Agitated, irritable, distressed, argumentative;
- Difficulty managing workload, struggling with tasks;
- Confused, forgetful, difficulty concentrating;
- Behaving out of character;
- Unexplained absences or arriving late;
- Looking teary or emotional; or
- Expressing pessimistic thoughts or putting themselves down.

#### **What to do?**

- Spend time with the person, asking how they are and listening without judgement;
- Offer your assistance, listening ear and acknowledge their feelings;
- Don't take their emotions personally;
- Don't downplay their problems, instead, be sensitive and encouraging;
- Talk about other topics too - don't let a mental health issue become the centre of your relationship;
- Encourage them to get enough sleep, eat healthy and exercise regularly;
- Discourage them from self-medicating with alcohol or drugs;
- Remain confidential;
- Ask what you can do to help; and
- Encourage the person to get professional help through Hunterlink.

### ***What does Self-Help Mean?***

Self-help is any number of various strategies or actions a person can take to relieve the pressure they're feeling or build their resilience in the face of life's challenges. It could take the form of:

- Meditation, breathing and visualisation exercises, and/or spiritual and religious practices.
- Listening to music or pursuing a hobby.
- Question your own ideas or anxieties (is what you told yourself really true?).
- Practice gratitude and pause to reflect on the many good things about your life and your job.
- Cutting down your 'to do' list and removing stress from your life.
- Calling a friend or loved-one and catching up.
- Think about setting realistic goals and then putting them into action.
- Setting reasonable boundaries - learn to say no and only take on what you can manage.
- Not trying to control the uncontrollable.
- Keep your sense of humour.
- Focusing on good nutrition, getting enough sleep and making time for daily exercise.
- Calling Hunterlink to talk through the difficulties you're facing.



## Mental Health and Wellbeing for Seafarers

### Frequently Asked Questions

**1. What is Hunterlink EAP?**

Hunterlink is a confidential counselling service that can help you deal with work-life stress, relationship and family issues, grief and loss, financial concerns, drug and alcohol problems, legal concerns and much more. You don't have to be in crisis to contact Hunterlink. If you have a question about any of our services or are unsure about how we can help, don't hesitate to get in touch with us.

**2. Who can Access Hunterlink?**

You and your immediate family can access a qualified counsellor 24/7. Our specialist counsellors are available around the clock to help you manage the pressures of life at home and at work.

If you are worried about someone else, please don't hesitate to reach out to us on their behalf to find out what you can do and how you can help them. If they are open to it, we are also able to make contact with them, taking the responsibility off your shoulders.

**3. Why reach out to Hunterlink?**

People reach out to a counselling service when they feel depressed, anxious, bullied, under stress or at a crossroads in their lives. Hunterlink gives them the chance to talk things through, relieving the emotional pressure they're under and helping them to focus on what to do next.

Hunterlink can provide you with a sense of direction in working through your problems.

It can feel daunting to reach out for help when you are already in distress. Many people feel they should resolve things themselves, are concerned about 'wasting' a counsellors time or depriving a 'more deserving' person from getting help. Hunterlink are here for you and no issue is too big or small. Be assured that your emotions and feelings are always valid and that many people feel relieved and helped after just one session.

**4. When can I contact Hunterlink?**

Hunterlink understand people can need to talk at any time. That's why we offer support on our helpline, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Our counsellors are qualified, friendly, professional, and ready to provide immediate assistance. Whether you require one-off support or ongoing assistance, we can connect you with the right person and provide immediate access to live counselling.

**5. Will Hunterlink respect my confidentiality?**

Nobody is ever notified of your involvement with Hunterlink without your permission. Everything you speak about remains private and confidential. We believe in supporting you and Hunterlink maintains strict confidentiality. We will never tell your employer about what you've discussed with us.

**6. Do you have Translation Services available?**

Hunterlink provides a high-quality translation service including over 130 languages and dialects, including indigenous, emerging and rare languages. Please let us know and we can arrange this service in order to conduct our counselling session in the most effective and helpful way possible.