

VAN Radar 2019

Roundtable session summary

Session: Mental Health – Managing the risks as a business owner

Presenter: Aaron Williams, Mindstar

*The cost to business of **NOT** treating mental health is **HUGE**.*

Q: How do I know if someone is struggling?

A: A good rule of thumb is to keep an eye out for any changes in usual behaviour. Trust your gut feelings. Look for these behaviours:

- Becoming distant from friends and family
- Not replying to texts or phone calls
- Being cranky, angry, irritable or aggressive
- Becoming increasingly stressed or worried
- Losing hope that things will ever change – this is a suicide red flag
- Changing sleep habits, appetite, drinking or drug use
- Stopping or changing usual activities

Early identification and early intervention are crucial.

Q: How do I approach someone who I think is struggling?

A: You can never make things worse by asking – it can be life-changing and life-saving.

Use these four steps:

1. **Ask:** Find a quiet spot for a coffee, in the park, on the weekend and ask, for instance: “I’ve noticed that...” “You don’t seem yourself...”
2. **Listen:** Instead of trying to solve their problem, just listen to them talk. They need to be heard. Australian men do want to talk, but they need a safe space to do it.
3. **Encourage action:** “Wow, that sounds really tough. Is there a time you’ve felt like this before, and what did you do?” Help them to look at little things, little decisions. Recommend a good GP and take them to the first session.
4. **Check in:** Put a note in your calendar, and check in a week later.

Q: How do we turn our office into a mentally healthy workplace?

A: Increase the conversation around mental health and make it easy for people to get advice. Solutions are not expensive or out of reach. Options include:

- Employee assistance programs: book in sessions with a professional.
- Online portals, e-wellbeing hubs available as phone apps, and digital posters
- Factsheets
- Employee welcome emails.

Q: How do we build resilience (in our children and in ourselves)?

A: With community structures breaking down, help children develop a relationship with one other person who is not a parent whom they can talk with. (Recommended read: *Raising boys*, Steve Biddulph).

- Provide security while being honest about the world we live in. Issues such as relationship breakdown are part of the fabric of society now.
- Find an activity that children can stick to and improve, like sport or dance.
- Develop a strategy, a plan of attack to reach goals instead of letting kids think they will just 'get' stuff like a great job, or a house, or a partner.
- Let kids fail and help them pick themselves up. They need to earn it. We're not all going to be winners.

Aaron Williams founded Mindstar to help workplaces develop healthy, positive corporate cultures and create positive social change.