

TOOLBOX TALK #01

Mental Health 101



In the trades, toughness is not just an expectation, it is part of our identity. Long hours, physically demanding tasks, unpredictable weather, tight deadlines...you learn to push through almost anything. Most of us were raised on messages like "Keep your problems off the site," "If you can't handle it, you don't belong here," or "Suck it up and deal with it." And for a long time, that mindset felt necessary. It is what got the job done and earned respect. But being tough has never meant going through life silently. It has never meant carrying stress alone or pretending everything is fine when it is not.

The reality is, people in our industry deal with real-life pressures; financial stress, family struggles, loss, long commutes, unpredictable schedules, injuries, and everything else life throws at us. When we do not talk about these things, we do not make them disappear, we just carry them until they get heavier.

What many tradespeople are starting to realize is that the old stigma does not help anyone; not the person struggling, not the partner at home trying to understand what is wrong, and not the crew that is counting on each other to stay sharp and safe. This Toolbox Talk helps break down what mental health is so you can recognize when to take steps to keep your well-being balanced.

What Is Mental Health

Mental health is not just about diagnosis or serious conditions; it is part of your everyday health, just like sleep, diet, or physical fitness. It affects how you think, how you handle stress, how you communicate, and how you show up at work and at home.

Mental health is:

- Your emotional and mental energy
- Your ability to handle stress and pressure
- The way you react to challenges or change
- Your patience, focus, and decision-making
- How connected you feel to others; family, friends, coworkers

Signs You Might Be Struggling

Everyone experiences stress differently, but there are common signs that your mental health might need attention.

- Feeling tired or worn down, even after a full night's sleep
- Noticing your patience is thinner and you get irritated more easily
- Pulling away from friends, family, or people you normally connect with
- Feeling burned out, overwhelmed, or emotionally drained
- Losing interest in hobbies or activities you usually enjoy
- Feeling "on edge" or tense for no clear reason
- Catching yourself worrying more than usual or having racing thoughts

Changes in appetite, sleep, motivation, or mood are often your mind's way of saying, "Hey, something needs attention." These signs simply mean your stress has been building, and it is time to take care of yourself.

GROUP DISCUSSION:

1. What do you do to mentally recharge when you feel your well-being starting to burn out?
2. What resources (on or off the job) do you think people forget they have access to?

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Tools to Support Your Mental Health

Taking care of your mental health does not have to be complicated. Small, realistic habits can help you feel more grounded and steady in your day-to-day life. Try incorporating these small everyday actions into your routine:

- **Make sleep and rest a priority** to help you show up with a clear head, better focus on the job, and more patience
- **Eat regular nutritious meals** to keep your energy and mood stable.
- **Take advantage of your breaks** during the day to reset your mind and prevent burnout.
- **Limit social media or screen time** when you feel overwhelmed
- **Talk with someone you trust** like a coworker, friend, partner, or family member
- **Move your body** through walking, stretching, or light exercise
- **Practice calming techniques** like intentional breathing, stretching, stepping away from the noise, or even just sitting quietly for a couple of minutes
- **Set small boundaries** like taking 10 minutes at the end of the day to practice intentional breathing; slow, deep breaths to clear your head and reset your mind after a long day

When You Should Reach Out for Help

It is important to talk with a professional or support resource if you are experiencing any of the following:

- Stress or worry that lasts more than a couple of weeks
- Mood changes that are affecting sleep, relationships, or job performance
- Feeling overwhelmed, hopeless, or unable to cope
- Trouble concentrating or staying safe on the job
- Feeling disconnected from yourself or the people around you

No one is asking anyone to spill their deepest secrets on the jobsite. What we are doing is recognizing that we all have real lives, real stress, and real emotions. There is strength in acknowledging that.

Because when someone reaches a breaking point, it does not just affect them. It affects their family, their focus, their safety, and the crew around them. A healthier mindset does not just make the industry better, it makes your life better. It makes your home life calmer, your sleep better, your relationships stronger, and your days easier to get through. And when one person speaks up, it gives others permission to do the same.

This is how things change; not by ignoring problems, but by being real about them. That is how you shift a jobsite, support a coworker, and build an industry where people come home healthier than when they left.

AVAILABLE RESOURCES

- **988 Lifeline:** Available 24/7 for anyone feeling overwhelmed, in crisis, or needing someone to talk to. You do not have to be in a major crisis to call.
- **TEAM & Ulliance (EAP Services):** Offers free, confidential support for financial counseling, stress management, mental health, debt concerns, and more. They can help you create a plan and connect you with trained professionals.
- **Your Union Representative:** A trusted point of contact who can help guide you through available resources, benefits, or next steps if finances are affecting your ability to work or your emotional well-being.