

TOOLBOX TALK #06

Recognizing PTSD & Anxiety



PTSD and anxiety are common, real mental health conditions that can affect anyone no matter how tough, experienced, or seasoned they are in their craft. These conditions are your brain and body trying to cope with overwhelming stress or a traumatic event. This Toolbox Talk is about understanding, support, and practical tools.

What Are PTSD and Anxiety

PTSD often develops after experiencing or witnessing something frightening, stressful, or life-threatening. In the skilled trades, this could include seeing or being involved in a serious jobsite accident, a close call, repeated high-risk work, or trauma from personal life experiences such as military service or violence.

Anxiety disorders involve persistent worry, tension, or fear that does not go away once the stressful moment passes. Skilled tradespeople face unpredictable conditions, heavy workloads, and constant pressure to perform often making anxiety very common in our industry.

In this industry, we regularly face unique stressors: unpredictable jobsite conditions, physical risk, weather impacts, production pressure, and long hours. Over time, these stressors can take a toll on mental and emotional health. **When PTSD or anxiety symptoms go unrecognized, it can affect:**

- Focus and concentration
- Decision-making and awareness
- Safety performance
- Relationships at home
- Energy, sleep, and overall well-being

Taking mental health seriously protects both the individual and everyone on the jobsite.

Common Signs

- Feeling constantly on edge
- Replaying stressful events in your mind
- Sudden waves of fear, worry, or panic
- Feeling detached, numb, or “checked out”
- Trouble concentrating or remembering tasks
- Frequent headaches or stomach tension
- Trouble sleeping, nightmares, or waking up exhausted
- Feeling worn out even after resting
- Increased irritability or frustration
- Avoiding certain tasks or areas on the jobsite
- Withdrawing from coworkers or family
- Using alcohol or substances to cope

GROUP DISCUSSION:

Think about a leader who made you feel supported on the job. What specific action or behavior made the difference, and how could you model that for your crew?

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When to Step In If Someone Shows Signs of PTSD or Anxiety

In construction and industrial work, we are used to looking out for physical safety hazards. We also need to recognize when someone may be struggling mentally or emotionally, and know when it's time to step in.

You don't need to diagnose anything. You step in when:

- Behavior is affecting their safety or the safety of others
- You notice a clear change from their normal work habits
- The person seems overwhelmed, distressed, or not in control of their reactions
- There is repeated risk-taking, distraction, or inability to focus on tasks

How to Respond

How you approach it matters just as much as noticing it.

- Start private, not public. Do not call someone out in front of the crew.
- Keep it simple and direct. "Hey, I noticed you don't seem like yourself lately. Are you doing alright?"
- Listen more than you talk. You are not there to fix it, just to check in.
- Encourage support. This could be a supervisor, HR, EAP resources, or a trusted lead.
- If there is immediate safety risk, act right away. Get a supervisor involved or remove them from a hazardous task if needed.

What Not to Do

Do NOT label or diagnose, dismiss it as "just stress, assume it will pass on its own, or spread it around the job site. Bottom line, we look out for each other on every level: tools, tasks, and people. If something feels off, trust that instinct. A quick check-in can make a real difference, and getting the right support early helps keep everyone safe and working.

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 & Alliance (EAP Service):** 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.
- **Additional national and state-by-state resources** can be found by scanning the QR code or visiting www.nmcarpenters.com/programs/mental-health

