



Supporting our Migrant Workers

Employers and Dormitories' guide to provide mental health support for workers

By:

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*With Inputs from Institute of
Mental Health*

Updated as of: April 2020

Managing situations on the ground

Fears of being infected by COVID-19, adhering to safe management measures, worries about family back home, and financial distress etc. may have taken a toll on the well-being of our migrant workers. It is important that you are aware of this, and that you take steps to support their mental health.

In this short guide, we provide:

1. Guidance on setting up a **buddy system for migrant workers**, and
2. Guidance on supporting **migrant workers in distress**

What is Mental Health?



Mental health is about how we **think, feel and act** when we face ups and downs in our lives. **Good mental health is more than just the absence of mental illnesses.** It is a **state of well-being** in which an individual realises his own abilities, can cope with the stresses of life, and can work productively.

What are some **triggers** of distress and worry amongst migrant workers (MWs)?



Employment

- ☐ Fear of not being able to work and losing job if quarantined
- ☐ Fear of being deported back home
- ☐ Financial scams where MW loses savings
- ☐ Employers do not pay salaries on time, are unreachable



Social

- ☐ Fear of change of environment if moved to a new dorm or put in quarantine
- ☐ Fear of being socially isolated and rejected from community because of association with Covid-19 or mental illness
- ☐ Issues in romantic relationships



Health

- ☐ Fear of falling ill and dying from disease e.g. Covid-19
- ☐ Fear of poorer health if they cannot get medicines from home
- ☐ Stigma to seek help for mental illness
- ☐ Fear of financial burden from medical treatments e.g. for Covid-19, mental illness



Family

- ☐ Fear of not being able to pay off loans to support family back home
- ☐ Feeling grief, helplessness and fear of losing family back home if they fall ill or face natural disasters

Guidance on setting up a **buddy system** **for migrant workers**

What is a buddy system?



In a buddy system, preferably two workers who **speak the same language, and belong to the same culture** are paired up as 'buddies'. Buddies **look out for each other, support each through difficult times, and are able to look for help** if their fellow buddy is in distress. Being from the same culture, speaking the same language also helps them to connect better.

Why is having a buddy system beneficial?



1

BETTER WELL BEING

Building interpersonal relationships supports stronger collaboration, positive working and communal living.

2

STRENGTHEN COMMUNITY SUPPORT

Awareness of how to help one another in difficult situations fosters community support

3

BETTER WORK PRODUCTIVITY

Stronger communal relationships means greater productivity of workers, lesser disputes between them, and better adherence to work and dorm rules

How can you setup the buddy system?

Step 1

For existing workers, pair up workers who speak the language, live in the same dorm. Even better if you can pair those from the same city/hometown!

For new workers, try to match them with an experienced worker from the same cultural background.

Step 2

Keep a simple **checklist of what your experienced worker has to show** the new worker e.g. rules at work, directions to get to work, where to buy things, how to use MOM's essential apps.

Step 3

Set up **regular check-ins and feedback** sessions with your workers.

Gather feedback on how they are coping and if the buddy system is working well.

In particular, **check in on the new workers more frequently**, and after their first week with you.

Buddy System: Frequently Asked Questions

1. What is the manpower needed for setting up a buddy system?

You could consider using existing processes in your workplaces or dormitories to support the formation of a buddy system. Follow the 3 simple steps on Page 8 to start.

2. How do I gather feedback?

You can set aside some time each month or so, to speak to your workers. This should be a protected time and space where they feel safe and share their feedback or concerns.

Guidance on supporting **migrant workers in distress**

Supporting migrant workers in distress

One should follow the **3Ls – Look, Listen and Link**, when responding to a situation where a migrant worker (MW) could be in acute distress.

1. LOOK

- ☐ Scan for the issue
- ☐ Assess the situation
- ☐ Conduct check on yours' and MW's safety



3. LINK

- ☐ Connect MW to appropriate resource
- ☐ Follow up on MW's well-being
- ☐ Support MW in his recovery

2. LISTEN

- ☐ Stay calm
- ☐ Enquire for details
- ☐ Reassure the MW

How to tell if a migrant worker is in **distress**?



You may see or hear of this...

1

Early/mild symptoms

- i. Difficulty in sleeping
- ii. **Change in behavior or mood swings**, especially - after phone call from home (e.g. argumentative, irritable, feeling sad, tearfulness, excessive alcohol intake)

2

Late/serious symptoms

- i. **Signs of self-harm** on body
- ii. Turning violent
- iii. Actively **planning and/or talking about** suicide
- iv. Appearing delusional, saying unusual things
- v. Complaining of fear, difficulty breathing

Other signs to watch out for during your shifts are if a MW is:

- i. Refusing to eat
- ii. Not sleeping at all and roaming around dorm late at night
- iii. Did not report to work/took rest days suddenly, and did not seek medical attention

What to do if a migrant worker is showing **early/mild symptoms** of distress?



1

Early/mild symptoms

1

Reach out to the MW or get their block/room mates/buddy to find out if he is okay, and whether he is facing problems.

If you know that the MW is facing some problems and may benefit from talking to a counsellor/fellow ambassador, you can do the following:

Note: *Seek MW consent on the below options before proceeding.*

a) Help MW to call the **helplines** run by NGOs

- ☐ HealthServe at **3157 4460** - *has medical and counselling teams, but helpline is a callback service*
- ☐ Migrant Workers Centre at **6536 2692** - *has 24/7 helpline, but no medical/counselling expertise*
- ☐ Hear4U at **6978 2722 (Tamil) 6978 2723 (Bengali) 6978 2724 (Mandarin) 6978 2725 (English)** - *offers WhatsApp text-based helplines on weekdays*

OR

b) Bring the MW (or allow the MW's fellow dorm friend if accessible to accompany him) to the **nearby medical centre**. Alternatively, help the MW use the telemedicine service on the FWMOMCare app.

What to do if a MW is showing **late/serious symptoms** of distress?



1

Call **995/999 AND** inform MW's **employer**

If you suspect the MW has an **intent of self-harm or violence...**

2

Ensure that the distressed MW is **conveyed to a medical centre or to IMH**, if possible.

3

Check-in/look out for MW
Ask MW's block/ roommates/ buddy to help after he is discharged and returns to dorm.

If you think the MW has **no intent of self-harm or violence**, **there is no need to call 995/999**. Instead, ensure that the distressed MW has been seen by a medical centre or by IMH.

How can you help prevent suicide incidents?



2

Late/serious symptoms

- Most suicides are **impulsive acts**. MW did not plan for it.
- Some suicide incidents are triggered by a **distressing call** e.g. news from family, partner back home, **financial distress, relationship issues***

Hazardous Material

Ensure these are **removed, locked up or under restricted access** (i.e. ropes, electrical cables, insecticides/pesticides, ladders, rooftop access etc.)

Be Vigilant

Keep an eye out for:

- a) MWs showing **signs of distress**
- b) MWs who are **reserved, new to a dorm/employer** – they may have weaker social networks/protection. Pair them up with a buddy so they have someone to talk to.

(You may notice these or dorm-mates/friends/security may alert you)

Escalations

Ensure other staff or security team **alert** you if they notice anything unusual (e.g. find hazardous material) when they go around the dorm or worksites



Caring for yourself and others

We thank you for your continuous partnership in looking out for our migrant workers.

Do also take time to de-stress and recharge. If you or colleagues need to reach out, please call the National Care Hotline at:
1800-202-6868

In collaboration with Project DAWN Taskforce, comprising of members from healthcare and non-governmental organisations serving the migrant community.

