

Toolbox Talk Series

Without mental health, there is no health. Good mental health underpins our ability to work, have healthy relationships, achieve financial goals, and even enjoy good physical health.

Mental health and wellbeing can be achieved by having strategies and tools to manage our mind, emotions, physical health, relationships and vocation (finance, career and education).

Toolbox talks engage staff in convenient bite-sized topics that can be delivered over time and in any location that can support their wellbeing.

Talks include:

- Mental Health Awareness
- Stress Management
- Financial Well Being
- Self-Maintenance - Staying well

- Health body - Healthy Mind
- Relationship Well Being
- Managing Your Mind
- Managing Your Mood

1. Mental Health Awareness

Understanding mental illness is vital. One in five people in any 12 month period experience one of these common medical conditions, but only half will take action to seek support. Nine people die in Australia each day due to suicide. The cost to business is approximately \$11bn per annum in workers compensation claims, absenteeism and presenteeism.

Key Messages:

- Mental Illness is a common medical condition
- Learn the signs and symptoms
- Recovery from mental illness
- The importance of taking action and stigma (help-seeking)
- Reaching out to others (help-giving)
- Self-Maintenance - Staying well

Resources: What works for treating depression and What works for treating anxiety (beyondblue)

2. Stress Management

Stress is normal and can even be healthy. Discuss something stressful that happened to you this week. How did you know it was stressful? How did you respond? How are you now?

In general, humans function well with an optimum level of stress. Even high levels of stress can be tolerated for short periods (starting a new job, moving house, having a new baby). However, long periods of high stress can be extremely damaging over time. Lower immune system, cardiovascular disease, insomnia, mental illness, Musculo-skeletal problems, relationship issues, burnout all originate in stress. Learning to reduce and manage stress is critical.

This toolbox will teach you about:

- The stress response
- How you experience stress and its effects
- Identifying the stressors in your life
- Identifying the stress relievers in your life
- The stress bucket
- Strategies for managing stress
- Applying the brakes

3. Financial Fitness

Finances are stressful. It's one of the biggest causes of conflict in relationships. It can be confusing as well.

What are some of the financial rules/guidelines that have worked for you during your career?

What mistakes have you learned from?

What are your top tips for your workmates today?

Some of the rules I've lived by:

- Budget 50/30/20 (Needs/Wants/Saving+Investing). Use different accounts/buckets.
- Save (automate it). Reduce waste/impulse buying. Watch subscriptions
- Invest/Compounding.
- Never borrow to buy a depreciating asset. Only borrow to buy appreciating assets
- Don't buy new cars
- Average your standard of living over your lifetime. Live within your means.
- Don't use credit cards

Read Barefoot Investor and Making Money Made Simple

Come up with at least one financial goal for the next 12 months and a strategy to make it happen.

4. Self-Maintenance

Without mental health, there is no health. Burnout and mental illness affect one in five.

What skills do you use to manage stress? How do you know when you're experiencing stress? What are your top tips for staying on top of things mentally?

Some of the skills I use:

- Hobbies (distraction, mindfulness, creativity, connection with others)
- Problem solving
- Talking to others
- Getting professional input when I need it (EAP, GP)
- Green space/ Blue space (Nature)
- Process Emotions (name it to tame it)
- Meaningful activities (volunteering,

Some practical things we can all do to take control of our lives, and manage our health, and reduce our chances of developing a mental illness.

- Keep an eye on yourself. In a quiet moment, ask yourself how you're going – and answer yourself honestly
- Talk to someone about how you're feeling
- Increase physical activity
- Make sure you are eating well – get some advice from a health professional or dietician
- Make sure you get enough sleep
- Reduce your alcohol intake
- Give up or, at least, reduce smoking
- Avoid illicit drugs
- Ensure any prescription or non-prescription drugs are appropriate. If you are in doubt, get some advice from your health professional
- Learn to relax – get a massage, learn to meditate
- Arrange to have some time away from work
- Learn to say no to work and other "obligations"!
- Maintain positive relationship with the people closest to you
- Seek help if your relationship is under pressure
- Look at ways you and your family can achieve a better work/life balance – and don't be frightened to make the changes!
- Keep in touch with friends
- Get involved in social events to avoid feeling isolated and alone
- Learn to accept the things you cannot change
- See your GP and have regular check-ups to make sure you stay physically healthy
- Plan for the future
- If your stresses are financial or legal, seek professional advice and support
- Know what support is available both on-line and in your community.

5. Health body - Healthy Mind

We think we're bulletproof but in reality, we're not. Being physically fit and healthy allows us to work and play. I lost a kidney through an accident in the bush, was chopper lifted to LGH and spent a month on the surgical ward. I've worked hard to recover so I can still hunt, bushwalk, fish and mountain bike ride.

How do you stay in shape? How do you maintain motivation? What are your top tips/hacks?

- Healthy Diet (macros) vs junk/fast food
- Sleep (what's normal, sleep hacks – e.g. white noise, routine, caffeine use)
- Exercise (sport, strength training, cardio)
- Reduce smoking/vaping/drinking
- Sort out physical problems early – be proactive

What's one thing that you would like to improve for your physical health in the next 12 months and how will you go about it?

Dr Michael Mosely

6. Relationship Fitness

Relationships underpin health/happiness/wellbeing. See Harvard Study of Adult Development. 80 year study. The biggest factor to someone living a long, healthy and happy life, was relationship fitness – warm relationships. Partner relationships are the toughest. Breakups and toxic relationships are deadly. If you had to bury a body, who would be there for you?

How would you rate the quality of your relationships? How do you maintain close relationships with mates or partners? What wrecks relationships?

Some relationship lessons and skills I've learned are:

- Prioritise relationships and work at them. Tips/skills
- Be a good listener (empathy and curiosity)
- Manage your threat detection system (flight or fight) and your partners
- Watch out for the "Four Horsemen" of relationship apocalypse
 - Criticism, Contempt, Defensiveness, Stonewalling
- Be vulnerable

Read Wired for Love/Dating Stan Tatkin. Anything by John Gottman.

What is a relationship you'd like to improve over the next 12 months, and how are you going to go about it?

7. Manage your Mind

Our minds are powerful and the way we use it can be constructive or destructive and everything in between. Think of the last time you felt stressed, nervous, worried or anxious. What was your mind thinking? Thoughts are intricately linked to conditions such as depression and anxiety, so much so, that CBT (cognitive behavioural therapy) is the front-line treatment -dealing with thoughts.

Unhelpful thinking patterns include:

- Tunnel vision – looking at things with “blinkers” on – seeing the world through one prism
- Obsessive thinking
- Thinking based on “ought to”, “should” and “must”
- Paranoia
- ‘Catastrophising’ – expecting and perceiving everything to be catastrophic
- Personalising everything – “it’s all because of me and my inadequacies”
- Assuming you know what others are thinking (“mind reading”) and that whatever they’re thinking is bad
- Perfectionism.

Strategies to manage your mind include identifying unhelpful thoughts, unhooking (ACT), learning problem solving skills, re-focusing, journalling, reframing, therapy (CBT).

Read The Happiness Trap. Russ Harris.

8. Manage your Mood

Emotions are powerful. Think about the last time you were angry or disappointed. How did that affect you? Most men however are only taught two ways of managing tough emotions – ignore them or push them down – until they explode. The majority of males find it difficult to even identify their emotions much less process them.

Your mood plays a huge role in your relationships, performance at work, and your mental health.

We all want to feel happier, so how do we process tough emotions and increase the happy ones?

In this toolbox you will learn:

- What emotions are
- How to identify emotions
- How to manage your mood

Regulation strategies include

- a. Exercise
- b. Mindfulness / breathwork / grounding
- c. Hobbies
- d. Connecting with others
- e. Name it to tame it (self awareness)
- f. Laughter