Feeling Deadly, *Working Deadly*

NCETA
Australia's National Research Centre on AOD Workforce Development

W1. Worker Wellbeing: Working Deadly: A Guide for Workers

Theory Into Practice (TIP) sheet for Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander AOD workers

This TIP sheet is for Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander[1] alcohol and other drug (AOD) workers. It is part of a series of resources produced by the National Centre for Education and Training on Addiction at Flinders University. These TIP sheets aim to enhance Indigenous worker wellbeing and reduce work-related stress. The TIP sheets were developed in consultation with Indigenous AOD workers and other groups. Quotations from the consultations appear in italics in the TIP sheet.

Introduction

Indigenous AOD workers often have high levels of work-related demands and stressors which make them more likely to have problems with stress and burnout. This TIP sheet aims to help Indigenous AOD workers prevent stress and burnout and recognise when they are occurring.

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Why is worker wellbeing important?

From an Indigenous perspective, health and wellbeing is more than just about the physical wellbeing of the individual. It is also about the social, emotional and cultural wellbeing of the whole community (Office for Aboriginal and Torres Islander Health, 1989). For most Indigenous AOD workers, their main aim is to improve the health and wellbeing of their communities with whom they feel unified in heart and spirit. In doing this, it is important for workers, their supervisors and managers to understand what they (i.e. the worker) can do to improve their own wellbeing by reducing and preventing stress and burnout.

It is also important for workers to recognise how they personally respond to stress in their work role. This is different for each person. Understanding the factors and events that trigger stress and applying strategies to lower stress levels is essential for worker wellbeing.

In spite of the stress, pressure and demands placed on them and the conditions under which they are often required to work, many Indigenous AOD workers feel rewarded and satisfied from the work they do.

What is Stress and Burnout?

Stress occurs when people feel they can't cope with the demands placed upon them. Work stress refers to what happens when work demands get too much over a short-term period.

Burnout is different to stress (but it may include signs and symptoms of stress). Burnout is a longer-term process where workers don't function well at work and develop negative and cynical attitudes towards clients and work in general. Stressful working conditions and job demands can result in worker burnout over time.

When people are burnt out they:

- Feel emotionally exhausted (feeling overextended and emotionally and physically drained)
- Have a negative, detached or cynical view of their work
- Feel like they are not accomplishing much at work
- Feel they are stupid or that nothing they do has any effect

"Burnout, believe me, is shocking. I laid on the floor, and I was sleeping with my eyes open. I couldn't think, and I didn't want to go to work, you know. I didn't want to walk out that door. And your life becomes unmanageable." (Indigenous worker)

Stress and burnout can lead to:

- Reduced job satisfaction
- Lower job performance (quality and quantity of work)
- Increased absenteeism and turnover
- Reduced commitment to work and the organisation.

Strategies to address stress and burnout

The best strategy to prevent (or reduce) stress and burnout is to take a two-pronged approach that focuses on both:

- Organisational responses
- Individual strategies.

Organisational responses

Organisational responses can start by addressing the aspects of the work situation that cause stress for workers. This could be things like:

- Heavy workloads
- Not having enough time off work to deal with problems at home, or loss, grief and Sorry Business
- Work conflicts
- Work pressure from communities
- Not being sure about work roles
- Stressful work events
- Poor physical working environment
- Lack of supervision, support and opportunities to use skills
- Being on short-term contracts
- Poor pay or other rewards.

"We should pat ourselves on the back for even a little job." (Indigenous worker)

Individual strategies

Individual workers can do a lot to reduce their stress and risk of burnout including:

- Having close family bonds, telling and hearing cultural stories, having close connections and spirituality
- Laughter can also be used within the workplace as a way to manage distressing events and not letting minor irritations get out of hand
- Having realistic expectations about what they can and can't do, and being aware that it is not possible to help everyone
- Prioritising work to manage the demands and expectations from communities, co-workers and managers
- Focussing on successes, no matter how small
- Doing traditional things
  » Taking time out to participate in traditional activities
  » Going home to their communities
  » Practicing their spiritual understanding of the world
- Doing recreational things
  » Taking time out to participate in an enjoyable activity like listening to music
  » Meditation, yoga, breathing exercises
  » Going for a walk with a friend/dog
  » Having a regular massage
- Doing social things
  » Sharing knowledge
  » Learning new things
  » Having a close personal support network
  » Spending time with family
  » Visiting friends
  » Eating well, going out for dinner
- Doing domestic/personal things
  » Taking a nap
  » Turning off the phone, lights, TV; spending time alone
  » Not answering the door
  » Enjoying a movie or favourite TV show
  » Going for a long drive
  » Gardening
  » Having regular medical checks
  » Practicing healthy living (i.e., do not smoke, drink, use illicit drugs)
- Doing work-related things
  » Having a coffee and debriefing informally with work mates
  » Having a routine
  » Taking one day at a time
  » Considering things from another perspective
  » Accepting their limitations
  » Looking forward to the end of the working day and not taking work home.

"Aboriginal people joke all the time. It could be about a death, but we try and make something funny about it, just to cheer everyone up. It's good to have a cry, but you have to laugh too." (Indigenous worker)

"Have to learn your limitations and learn to enforce them. Cannot help everyone. Have to remember that work is a priority and that you are helping people there as well. Have to take time for yourself as you cannot help others unless you are well." (Indigenous worker)

Feeling Deadly/Working Deadly TIP Sheets

This is the first in a series of TIP sheets for Indigenous AOD workers. A series of TIP sheets have also been developed for supervisors and managers. The complete list is as follows:

Worker TIP sheets

W1. Worker Wellbeing: Working Deadly –
A Guide for Workers

W2. Mentoring –
A Guide for Workers

W3. Clinical Supervision –
A Guide for Workers

W4. Goal Setting –
A Guide for Workers

Supervisor TIP sheets

S1. The complex personal lives of Indigenous AOD workers

S2. Indigenous ways of working

S3. Rewarding workers

S4. Mentoring

S5. Recruiting and retaining workers

S6. Clinical supervision

S7. Developing teams

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W2. Yarning About Work (Mentoring): A Guide For Workers

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A TIP sheet on mentoring has also been developed for managers/supervisors (Managers/supervisors TIP Sheet No.S4) and forms part of this resource Kit.

Introduction

Indigenous AOD workers may face stress from:

- Heavy workloads and clients with complex health and social problems
- People having negative attitudes towards AOD work and from racism towards them and their client group

- Problems using mainstream AOD treatments to meet the needs of Indigenous clients
- A lack of cultural understanding and support from non-Indigenous health workers
- Problems of isolation when working in remote areas.

Mentoring is a good way to get the support you need for the work you do and to prevent stress and burnout.

What is mentoring?

- Mentoring is like yarning. It is when a more experienced worker (the mentor) helps support and advise a less experienced worker (the protégé)
- It can provide a safe and supportive place where the protégé can learn to manage stressful and difficult situations and develop problem solving skills to address issues related to working in the AOD field
- Mentoring can happen between a mentor and a protégé or a small group of protégés or it may involve co-workers who act as mentors for each other
- Mentoring can make sure that workers know how to do their jobs well and make sure that knowledge is passed down to present and future Indigenous AOD workers.

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Why is mentoring important?

Mentoring can be very helpful because it:

- Allows experienced workers, as the mentors, to build their protégé's skills, as well as their own

- Provides support for workers by:
  - » allowing workers to discuss stressful work events
  - » helping workers develop good work strategies
  - » helping workers to be clear about their job roles and responsibilities
- Can help stop experienced workers from leaving organisations.

What mentoring is not

- Mentoring is not about helping workers with their personal issues. This is the job of qualified counsellors working for culturally appropriate Employee Assistance Programs (EAP).

- Mentoring is also different to supervision and performance reviews. These are separate processes and should not be confused with mentoring.

- Mentoring is not just having a friendly chat from time to time. Mentoring involves setting goals and objectives and is about developing the skills of the protégé.

What's needed to have a successful mentoring relationship and program?

A successful mentoring relationship needs mutual respect, trust and confidentiality between the mentor and protégé. Both need to:

- Be aware of their own strengths and weaknesses and be willing to learn from the other person

- Listen to positive and negative feedback, welcome ideas to improve work practice and learn from mistakes

- Allocate time to attend regular meetings

- Keep discussions confidential.

Who should be involved in mentoring programs?

Each new or junior Indigenous AOD worker should be offered the option of participating in a mentoring program. The protégé always has the final say in who they would like to accept as a mentor. In most instances, an Indigenous worker will best be mentored by a more experienced Indigenous worker either from their own organisation or a similar one. Often male:male and female:female matches are preferred.

A range of employees, including managers, can also benefit from involvement in a mentoring program so participation should not be limited to new and junior employees.

How to set mentoring goals and objectives

To get the most out of a mentoring relationship, it is helpful for the person being mentored to identify what they would like to get from the relationship and the time and effort it involves. Also have specific goals and objectives.

- *Goals*: are the long term outcomes that the protégé wants to achieve

- *Objectives*: are the more specific shorter term actions, behaviours and work practices that will be needed to reach the goal.

W3. Clinical Supervision: A Guide for Workers

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A TIP sheet on clinical supervision has also been developed for managers/supervisors (Managers/supervisors TIP Sheet No.S6) and forms part of this resource Kit.

Introduction

Clinical supervision aims to develop Indigenous AOD workers' work skills with support and guidance from a more experienced worker. This supervision needs to be undertaken in an Indigenous-specific and culturally safe way.

Most Indigenous AOD workers are relatively young and inexperienced and their clients can have complex needs. They may need a lot of support to help them do a difficult job. Clinical supervision is important to ensure that these clients receive the best possible care and that AOD workers are well supported and up-skilled.

What is clinical supervision?

Clinical supervision usually involves working together regularly to examine a supervisee's work with clients or patients in detail. Clinical supervision can also involve two practitioners of equal seniority and experience.

Clinical supervision aims to:

- Support and encourage supervisee/s[2]
- Develop workers' high level skills so that they can provide the best possible care for their clients
- Help supervisees meet professional standards
- Meet the standards required by the employing agency

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2   This TIP sheet uses the terms:
- Supervisor – the more experienced worker
- Supervisee – the less experienced worker

- Increase worker job satisfaction and self confidence
- Improve communication amongst workers
- Reduce the likelihood that good staff will leave.

"I think one of the critical elements in all of this, no matter where you train, or who you train with, or whatever, it's about clinical supervision. Good clinical supervision is a must, no matter what level of training you're at." (Indigenous worker)

Clinical supervision varies according to the needs and experience of the supervisee and the style of the supervisor. It may also change over time and in different clinical situations.

Clinical supervision may involve:

- Counselling, teaching and consultation
- Personal and professional support and development
- Skills building
- Developing supervisees' professional qualifications.

Clinical supervisors can come from within or outside the organisation and from a wide range of backgrounds. Having Indigenous clinical supervisors for Indigenous AOD workers can be helpful because they are more likely to have a better understanding of the issues experienced by clients and supervisees.

If it is not possible to have Indigenous supervisors for Indigenous AOD workers, at the very least the clinical supervision should be culturally appropriate.

"Need more clinical supervision available for workers, by Indigenous supervisors who know the Indigenous languages and culture." (Indigenous worker)

Indigenous workers may also need cultural supervision to support them in their efforts to ensure that their clinical practice is culturally appropriate. This may also help workers to recognise the differences between Indigenous and non-Indigenous ways of working. Cultural supervision may also involve cultural mentorship through the involvement of Elders.

What clinical supervision is not

- Clinical supervision is different to administrative or managerial supervision, which focuses on the worker's day-to-day administrative issues. It is best if a worker's clinical supervisor is not also their manager or line supervisor.

  This is because clinical supervision issues can get mixed up with administrative or managerial issues thereby complicating the supervision process.

- Clinical supervision is also not about providing counselling for workers on personal issues. If personal counselling is required, this should come from a qualified counselling service such as Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs).

- Clinical supervision is also not just having a friendly chat from time to time; rather, it is focussed on enhancing the clinical skills of the supervisee.

Supervision sessions should be centred on the needs of the supervisee. The supervisee should be able to "own" the process, rather than feeling that the process is being imposed on them.

W4. Setting Work Goals: A Guide For Workers

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A TIP sheet on clinical supervision has also been developed for managers/supervisors (Managers/supervisors TIP Sheet No.S6) and forms part of this resource Kit.

Introduction

This TIP sheet looks at goal setting as a way to help Indigenous AOD workers perform more effectively. Goal setting is familiar to many AOD workers as a counselling technique. What is sometimes overlooked, however, is the value of goal setting as a tool to help workers stay motivated and on track.

Goals and objectives

Goals are targets. Longer-term goals and objectives are useful. Goals are the overall desired long-term outcomes, or what the individual worker and/or team are aiming to achieve or change. Objectives are more specific shorter-term actions, behaviours and work practices that are needed in order to reach the goal.

How does goal setting work?

Setting specific and challenging goals/objectives helps workers to do their jobs by:

- Helping them to focus on doing the things that are needed to achieve goals

- Encouraging workers to be persistent when times get tough

- Helping to work out whether workers, teams and organisations are achieving what they are setting out to achieve.

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Effective goal setting

In order for goal setting to be effective, five strategies are needed:

1. *Set specific and challenging goals and objectives*
    Setting vague goals (such as "provide high quality service to clients") is unlikely to be useful.

Specific goals and objectives:

*   Refer to observable behaviours or work practices (e.g., exactly how will we work with clients)

*   Clearly indicate the standards or outcomes that are required (e.g. how will we know when we have achieved our goals/objectives)?

Goals and objectives need to be both realistic and sufficiently challenging.

2. *Building and supporting your commitment to achieving the goal and objectives*
    For goal setting to be effective, it is important that workers accept the goals and are committed to achieving them. This can be achieved by:

*   Ensuring that workers are involved in the development and setting of goals and objectives

*   Making sure that workers understand the benefits for clients, workers, the team and/or the wider organisation of achieving the goals and objectives

*   Ensuring that supervisors/managers enhance the confidence of workers about achieving their goals and objectives.

3. *Feedback, rewards and recognition on the achievement of shorter-term objectives, as well as the final goals*
    Goal setting and feedback go hand in hand. Without feedback, goal setting will not be effective. To maintain motivation and

commitment to a goal, it is important to give and receive feedback on short-term objectives which are steps towards achieving a longer-term goal, as well as the final goal itself. Feedback should be given on how the work (i.e., how were the goals and objectives achieved), as well as the final outcomes were achieved.

Just like feedback, recognising and rewarding achievement should focus on both shorter term objectives as well as achieving final goals. Rewards do not have to be financial.

Effective non-financial rewards include:

*   Public recognition and praise

*   Team celebrations

*   Preferred work assignments, roles or responsibilities

*   Opportunities to act in higher duties

*   Attendance at workshops/conferences.

4. *Ensure that resources and support are available*
    Resources and support are essential to achieve work-related goals and objectives. This could include things such as regular supervision (particularly important in the AOD sector), flexible working arrangements and having a good environment to work in. The goal setting process should include discussion with workers about ways to maximise supports and minimise problems in the work environment.

5. *Ensure that workers have the appropriate knowledge, skills and abilities required to achieve the goal and objectives*
    It is worthwhile to take the time to assess whether workers have the skills and knowledge required to do the work needed to achieve the goals and objectives. Workers should seek assistance from their supervisor/manager to enhance knowledge or skills.

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