

MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS & REASONABLE SUSPICION TRAINING



For Building Trades Union Members
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1. INTRODUCTION

The construction and building trades are industries where safety, reliability, and teamwork are essential. Mental health awareness and reasonable suspicion procedures play a vital role in maintaining not only individual well-being but also the safety and productivity of the entire crew. By increasing awareness, reducing stigma, and providing clear procedures, unions can ensure their members receive the help they need while safeguarding the work environment.

2. MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS



Understanding Mental Health

Mental health includes emotional, psychological, and social well-being. In the trades, long hours, physical demands, and stress can increase risks of anxiety, depression, and substance use. Recognizing mental health as equally important as physical safety is critical.



Signs & Symptoms

- Behavioral: irritability, withdrawal from coworkers, reduced motivation
- Physical: fatigue, changes in appearance, neglect of safety gear
- Emotional: mood swings, hopelessness, difficulty concentrating



Stigma Reduction

Stigma often prevents members from seeking support. By normalizing mental health discussions in union meetings, apprenticeship programs, and on job sites, leaders can encourage openness and reduce fear of judgment.



Supportive Strategies

- Members are encouraged to:
- Use Employee Assistance Programs (EAP) for confidential support
 - Check in on peers showing signs of struggle
 - Promote a culture where asking for help is seen as strength, not weakness

3. REASONABLE SUSPICION

Definition

Reasonable suspicion is the process by which a supervisor, steward, or union leader observes and documents behavioral, physical, or performance-based indicators suggesting impairment at work. It is not an accusation; it is a protective measure for both the member and others on the job site.

Indicators

- Appearance: bloodshot eyes, odor of alcohol or drugs, poor hygiene
- Behavior: slurred speech, unsteady movement, aggression, confusion
- Performance: repeated mistakes, near-miss accidents, unexplained absences

Procedures

When reasonable suspicion arises:

1. Observe and document specific behaviors (avoid assumptions).
2. Remove the individual from safety-sensitive tasks.
3. Follow union and company protocols, which may include drug/alcohol testing.
4. Connect the member to support services, such as the EAP, rather than focusing solely on discipline.

Legal/Contractual Considerations

All actions should respect collective bargaining agreements and protect member rights. The focus must be on safety and support, balancing accountability with compassion.

4. RESOURCES FOR MEMBERS

- Modern Assistance Programs: 24/7 confidential clinician line (617)774-0331
- Union Peer Supports
- National Suicide & Crisis Lifeline: Dial 988
- Local treatment and counseling providers available through referral

5. CONCLUSION

Mental health awareness and reasonable suspicion procedures protect lives, reduce accidents, and strengthen the bond among union members. By fostering a culture of care and accountability, building trades unions demonstrate their commitment to both safety and solidarity. Members are encouraged to look out for one another and to use the resources available when challenges arise.

APPENDIX

Sample Observation Checklist

- Date, time, and location of observation
- Specific behaviors observed
- Physical indicators (odor, appearance, coordination)
- Performance issues noted
- Actions taken (removal from task, referral, testing, etc.)

Quick Reference Signs & Symptoms

- Mood changes (irritability, sadness)
- Declining job performance
- Safety risks and near-misses
- Isolation from coworkers
- Physical indicators (odor, slurred speech, fatigue)