



## Supporting our Migrant Workers

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

By:

• ACE Group

*With Inputs from Institute of  
Mental Health*

# 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.

