

## Depression in the workplace



### ***How do you identify depression in the workplace and what adjustments can be made to assist employees struggling with depression?***

Depression in the workplace is a reality, as much as this is not intended as a medical or legal article, this article is important from an *HR or Labour Relations* perspective.

It is important that all employees perform at their optimal level to ensure productivity in the workplace. Many factors may contribute towards the productivity of employees, one being mental health. The mental health of employees may be overlooked due to a lack of knowledge about the subject, with people suffering from depression being stigmatised. According to the South African Depression and Anxiety Group, this stigma is a critical issue in South Africa. Depression falls under the category of mental health.

# What is Depression?

Depression can be defined as *“feelings of severe despondency and dejection”*.

## How do you identify Depression in the workplace?

Research has shown that early identification and treatment are important. An employer might be unaware that an employee is affected by depression, especially because employees do not talk openly about their condition, thus making it more difficult to identify. The following may be clues that an employee is struggling with depression:

- A lack of motivation/enthusiasm
- Withdrawal from groups/co-workers/functions
- Being late for work
- Lack of energy
- Lower productivity
- Taking sick leave more often than usual.

Since depression is not always readily identifiable, it is necessary to create an environment where employees can talk about their condition in order to make it easier to deal with from a management perspective. If an employer initiates open dialogue, employees may feel that they are supported, which could play a vital role in improving their mental health.

## What adjustments can be made in the workplace?

Considering the amount of time spent at the office, it goes without saying that the work environment can affect an employee's well-being. Adjustments can be made in the workplace to assist employees struggling with depression, namely:

- Educate all employees about depression
- Create an open environment
- Respect the confidentiality of employees
- Check up on employees to see how they are doing
- Adjusting work hours to be more flexible, thereby removing pressure to perform during certain times
- Changing workspaces – for example, does the employee have an office with small windows and can this be changed?
- Addressing the transition period when returning to work after sick leave
- Increased managerial support
- Providing space for relaxation and recreation
- Making resources available
- Introducing ecotherapy – plants, lighting, nature.

For further assistance, employees can contact the South African Depression and Anxiety Group or visit their website at [Sadag.org](http://Sadag.org) to obtain information on various support groups.

*About our author:* Audrey Cloete obtained her LLB degree from the North-West University Potchefstroom in 2003. She completed her articles with the main focus on Criminal Law and is also an admitted Conveyancer. Audrey joined SERR Synergy in 2015 where she currently works as a Legal Compliance Advisor.

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