

# Mental Wellbeing for Tree Workers



**2016 Edition**



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## The purpose of this document

This document is designed to promote health and wellbeing through raising awareness of any underlying stressors that may be affecting your mental health. Some simple practical exercises are provided to assist you in this process.

If the practical exercises in this manual bring up any feelings which you find uncomfortable please consult with a trusted health professional or call one of the references in the final section which includes Lifeline on 13 11 14.

## Overview: Mental Wellbeing for Tree workers

The Tree Worker faces many challenges in terms of physical hazards, including the potentially catastrophic hazard of falling from a significant height.

The high level of potential consequence of this particular hazard has two potential ripple effects. One is that for the Tree worker there may understandably be a high level background stress associated with being engaged in such high risk work. The second is that the focus on this most immediate risk can potentially blind us of the other more holistic risks associated with work. These may or may not include financial pressure, depression, isolation and more.

This document aims to provide some practical tools and resources to assist in promoting mental wellbeing for Tree Workers.

This includes:

Step 1 – checking in with yourself

Step 2 – talking with someone about your concerns

Step 3 – being proactive about your mental wellbeing



## Step 1 – checking in with yourself

In the busy schedules of work and private life we can easily forget to stop, take a breath and check in with ourselves to track how we are going.

Ask yourself regularly:

Am I sleeping well at night? If not, what is the barrier here?

Do I have stressful thoughts about work and/or life that keep recurring?

Have I noticed any mood changes that are concerning?

Am I taking the time I need to rest and self-nurture?

Am I keeping up connection with friends, family and groups that help improve my wellbeing?

If the answer to any of these questions above raises concerns for you then the next step is to talk to someone about this...



## Step 2 – Talking with someone about your concerns

There are a number of potential barriers that may act to prevent you taking this important next step and talking to someone about any stressful feelings you may have. This may include:

- Not wanting to dent your pride or look weak
- Not wanting to burden someone with your problems
- Feeling embarrassed or shamed

The reality is that life is not smooth all the time. We can be guaranteed to have some rough spots and when that happens some assistance and support can make a big difference. Don't let the barriers prevent you from sharing your concerns with someone who can listen to you and potentially help you.

For many of us, the first step will be family and friends. You will want to choose someone you can trust. However, if the barriers for approaching your family and friends are strong then there are other places you can turn. Below is a list of some of the options:

### Life line

Web: <https://www.lifeline.org.au/>

Call 13 11 14

If you have strong negative feelings or find yourself in a crisis situation this is the recommended option for you. The Lifeline team are well trained to take your call anonymously and help point you in the right direction for assistance.

### Beyond Blue

Web: <https://www.beyondblue.org.au/>

Call: 1300 22 46 26

If your feelings relate to anxiety and/or depression Beyond Blue are a valuable resource for you. The website is a rich sources of resources, personal stories and information. They are also skilled at providing support and advice via telephone.

## **Men's shed**

Web: <http://mensshed.org/>

Call: 1300 550 009

If your check in revealed to you that isolation was a key problem for you then consider joining a mens shed. There are hundreds of these all over Victoria and throughout Australia. Men's shed work on the philosophy that many men prefer to talk shoulder to shoulder rather than face to face.

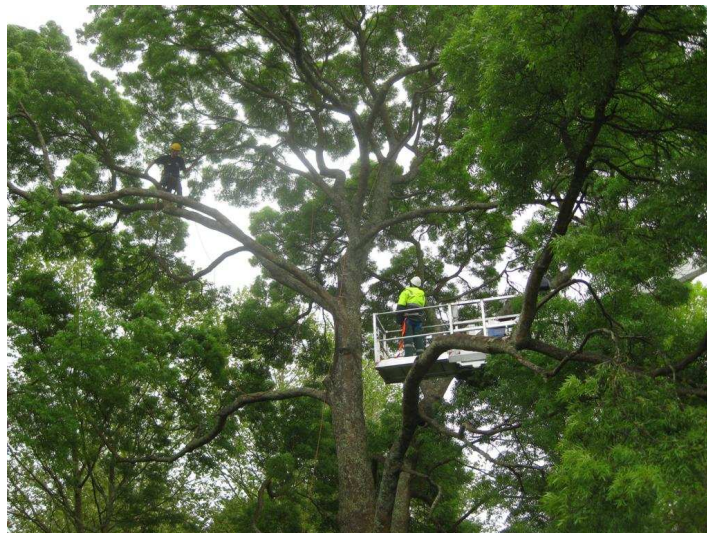
## **Mens Line Australia**

Web: <https://www.mensline.org.au/>

Call: 1300 78 99 78

Mens line Australia is a resource for on line counselling and video counselling. It provides a good resource for all men in need of support and has a particular focus on victims of child abuse.

Other helpful links and resources noted in reference section.



## Step 3 – Being proactive about your mental wellbeing

In some cases after steps one and two have been attended to, it can be helpful to engage in some activities that help reduce your stress levels and keep you grounded. The workplace can be a hot source of potential stress triggers. For Tree Workers these can be related to work load, the pressure to win enough work to support a family, the challenge of working at heights, etc.

### How we respond to stress

We all respond in different ways to stress, depending on the situation, individual differences and what patterns of behaviour we have developed from past experience. Consider this list of responses:

Physical	Emotional	Cognitive
<input type="checkbox"/> Pounding heart	<input type="checkbox"/> Irritability	<input type="checkbox"/> Rumination
<input type="checkbox"/> Rapid breathing	<input type="checkbox"/> Nervous, edgy	<input type="checkbox"/> Poor concentration
<input type="checkbox"/> Sweaty palms	<input type="checkbox"/> Lack of patience	<input type="checkbox"/> Memory lapse
<input type="checkbox"/> Hot or cold flushes	<input type="checkbox"/> Crying	<input type="checkbox"/> Increase in careless errors
<input type="checkbox"/> Lack of energy	<input type="checkbox"/> Losing temper	<input type="checkbox"/> Negative or critical attitude
<input type="checkbox"/> Headaches	<input type="checkbox"/> Worrying	<input type="checkbox"/> Indecisiveness
<input type="checkbox"/> Muscle tension	<input type="checkbox"/> Emotional sensitivity	<input type="checkbox"/> Procrastination
<input type="checkbox"/> Sleep difficulties	<input type="checkbox"/> Guilt	
<input type="checkbox"/> Stomach disturbances		

Filling in this list on the previous page is a helpful way of noting how we personally tend to respond to stress. Knowing which of the three factors your dominant reaction is can then guide how we best respond to the stress.

**Physical symptoms:**

May be best responded to with a physical exercise such as slow deep breathing or walking mindfully (focusing on our contact with the floor).

**Emotional symptoms:**

Often best responded to by being open with someone about your feelings.

**Cognitive symptoms:**

May require you to take a break. Continuing to work with these sorts of symptoms can leave you at risk of making errors.

**General ideas for managing stress triggers**

- Recognise common sources of stress in your life (Stress triggers)
- Becoming aware of your body response to stressful environments (Stress responses)
- The “head on” approach – march up to the source of the issue and assert your needs
- The honest approach – be honest to yourself, partner, colleagues about your sources of stress
- Using time management skills
- Be prepared and willing to say “no”
- Regular exercise away from work in the outdoors





## Time management skills

For many of us, a common source of stress relates to feeling time poor. For those who like simple rules, try this... When a request comes in, immediately respond with one of the following...

<b>Do</b>	Do immediately
<b>Diarize</b>	Place on a "To do" list with a SMART goal in mind
<b>Delegate</b>	Ensure the referral is helpful and appropriate
<b>Decline</b>	Be assertive and unapologetic

## Effective "To do" lists

- Priority is noted
- Alarms are set ensuring important deadlines aren't missed
- Time frames are placed
- Enough info is listed to be clear later what the task is
- It's realistic
- A quick glance informs you whether you can accept more work or not
- Includes social life potentially so this is prioritised too



## **Mindfulness at work**

Being “mindful” essentially means being in the present moment, rather than letting your mind race ahead and behind you all the time. When practiced, being mindful can help you feel healthier, calmer, more energetic and clear headed.

A good way to practice this sense of being mindful is to practice the practical exercises below:

### **1. Focus on the breath**

Focus your attention on the rhythmic nature of your breath. When other thoughts enter your mind just let them drift past you and continue the focus on your breathing. Feel all the sensations involved with breathing – the flow of air, the use of muscles, the temperature of the air as you inhale and exhale, the depth of your breathing, which parts of your chest move, etc. There are no right or wrong things to notice. Just enjoy paying attention to this process that you normally do subconsciously.

### **2. Visual imagery**

Visualise calming images such as water, colours and natural scenes of beauty. Focus on these scenes and take in all there is to see. As other thoughts come into your mind let them drift past and continue to focus on your images. Move along in these scenes and see what you find. Let your imagination run free. This exercise is basically “daydreaming”, with a focus on positive things. If you are having trouble getting these images try thinking of your favourite place, the best day you can remember etc.

### **3. Hold/relax muscle relaxation**

Sit or lie down comfortably. Take a minute or two to settle into your position and let your mind slow down. Tense the muscles around your feet on both sides of your body, then relax them. Notice the different feeling between tense and relaxed muscles. Repeat this twice, then repeat the process for the muscles around your knees, then your hips, your tummy, shoulders... work all the way up to your face and jaw muscles.

Once you have covered all the main muscles of the body try holding all your muscles tense while holding your breath for 3 seconds, then let them all relax as you exhale. Repeat this twice. At the end, let your body be still and enjoy the sensation of being relaxed before you continue your day.

Consider the above mindfulness exercises as a brief mind break in your day. A chance to reset the mind and body and check in with yourself to see how you are feeling. From this you may realise you are overtired, over stressed, thirsty? When our mind gets too busy we can miss these things.

## References and further reading:

### Life line

Web: <https://www.lifeline.org.au/>

Call 13 11 14

### Beyond Blue

Web: <https://www.beyondblue.org.au/>

Call: 1300 22 46 26

### Men's shed

Web: <http://mensshed.org/>

Call: 1300 550 009

### Mens Line Australia

Web: <https://www.mensline.org.au/>

Call: 1300 78 99 78

### Other helpful resources:

<http://www.healthdirect.gov.au/mens-health#!>

<http://psychology.org.au/public/mental-health-websites/#s2>

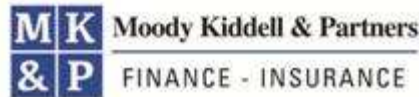
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