

# AS@W...FOR EMPLOYEES

## Why should employees be concerned with workplace mental health?

The average working adult spends as much, if not more of their waking hours at work than at home. Work is important for psychological health. It provides structure and routine, occasions to meet and interact with different people, opportunities to contribute to society and an income – all of which are important to good mental health and well-being. However, work can also be a place where people may experience stress and strain which may be precursors to low mood or depression. This does not mean that work causes depression; in fact, we know that a number of factors contribute to low mood and depression. Work may worsen low mood or depression; work can also provide a strong source of support. **AS@W is a tool that helps employees (and employers) take responsibility to become informed about the signs of low mood and depression and become aware of relevant options for assessment and intervention.**

## Who would find AS@W of value?

There are a number of employees who may benefit from the availability of AS@W:

- New employees who are entering the organization and/or workforce and want to know about available resources and supports.
- Current employees that may be at risk for depression or low mood due to personal risk factors (e.g. having a baby, mental health issues among a loved one) or workplace risk factors (e.g. taking on a challenging new position).
- Employees who are exhibiting workplace behaviours or performance concerns that may be due to low mood or depression.
- Employees who have clinical depression and would benefit from additional treatment resources.
- Employees who are returning to work after a depression-related absence.
- Individuals who are concerned about the mood and well-being of a colleague or loved one.
- Employees who have recovered from depression, but want to maintain good self-care in order to prevent or minimize relapse.



## **AS@W** Antidepressant Skills at Work Dealing with Mood Problems in the Workplace

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## How can employees use AS@W?

- ❑ Familiarize yourself with company programs and benefits that are relevant to maintaining and addressing mental health concerns. This is important whether you are exploring a new job, are newly hired or have been with a company for some time.
- ❑ AS@W provides information on effective coping skills that can be helpful for a number of workplace stressors, even if you do not have low mood or depression. Take a look at the AS@W to get an idea of the content. It can be helpful to just skim the table of contents and read any sections that seem interesting or relevant.
- ❑ If you are concerned about your own psychological well-being and think you may be suffering from depression, take action. Get information about depression from a credible source. If your organization provides access to an Employee and Family Assistance Program (EFAP) and/or your benefits program provides some coverage for the services of a mental health professional such as registered psychologist, pay them a visit. Go to your family physician and express your concerns. If you are diagnosed with depression, make sure you fully understand the diagnosis and treatment options.
- ❑ If you are receiving professional assistance, tell your treatment professional about the AS@W. The guide can be a useful adjunct to both medication and talk treatment. Be an active participant in your own care and be open and direct in discussing what is working and what isn't.
- ❑ If you are off work, AS@W can be used to assist with planning and implementing a successful work return. This might include working with your disability or occupational health provider or with your manager/supervisor to problem-solve how to deal with potential stress that may be encountered during the return, to determine appropriate accommodations, and to develop a plan to identify and manage possible relapse.
- ❑ Depression can be successfully treated by both medications and appropriate talk therapy. However, for some people depression comes back. It is important to be able to recognize the signs of a possible relapse and to have a plan of action should this happen. Return to AS@W from time to time to remind yourself of the skills you have learned, and use them to address changes in your mood.



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## Key considerations for employees

- ❑ Become familiar with the signs and symptoms of depression. This will help you to make the best decisions for yourself, your colleagues and your family if you suspect the presence of depression. Some useful websites for information include [www.carmha.ca](http://www.carmha.ca) (under Publications and Self-Care) and [www.heretohelp.bc.ca](http://www.heretohelp.bc.ca) (under Publications).
- ❑ Only a qualified professional – such as a family physician, psychologist or psychiatrist – can diagnose or treat depression. Attempting to diagnose or treat a clinical depression on your own would be unlikely to be helpful, and could be harmful. Similarly, attempting to diagnose or treat depression in someone else would be inappropriate, invasive and potentially destructive. Individual privacy and confidentiality must be respected.
- ❑ AS@W is not intended as a substitute for the provision of good quality, evidence-based mental health care. Nor should it be considered to be in lieu of other organizational programs and services that are relevant to employee mental health, such as Employee and Family Assistance or extended health plans.
- ❑ Carefully consider how you want to deal with depression and your work. You are under no obligation to tell anyone at work about your depression. However, if you are off work, you may be asked to provide documentation from your physician indicating that you have a diagnosed health condition that makes it necessary for you to be away from work, that you are engaged in treatment and how long you are likely to be off. For some depressed individuals, taking time off work may be necessary; for others it may not be helpful and can make things worse. Depending on your relationship with your manager/supervisor, union representative or human resources personnel, you may want to share your experience and tell them about AS@W. In such cases, it can be worthwhile to work together and use some of the skills in the guide to help you manage at work and address relevant workplace issues.
- ❑ All persons within an organization can benefit from education and training programs to raise awareness, reduce stigma and enhance skills in addressing workplace mental health. AS@W can be a core component of such training.
- ❑ Organizations benefit from creating and sustaining psychologically healthy workplaces that have a culture that supports everyone to work together, guided by values of respect, growth and integrity in order to promote both productivity and well-being. It is the responsibility of employees and employers to work together to accomplish this goal.



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## Further Reading

Bilsker, D. & Paterson, R. (2005). *Antidepressant Skills Workbook (2<sup>nd</sup> Edition)*. Available at : <http://www.comh.ca/antidepressant-skills/adult/>.

Bilsker, D., Gilbert, M., Worling, D., & Garland, J. (2005). *Dealing with Depression: Antidepressant Skills for Teens*. Available at: <http://www.comh.ca/antidepressant-skills/teens/>

Burns, D. (1999). *Feeling Good: The New Mood Therapy (2<sup>nd</sup> Edition Revised)*. Avon Books.

Davis, M. Eshelman, E & McKay, M. (2000). *The Relaxation and Stress Reduction Workbook (5<sup>th</sup> Edition)*. New Harbinger Publications.

Seligman, M. (1998). *Learned Optimism: How to Change Your Mind and Your Life*. Free Press.



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# ABOUT AS@W

## How was *Antidepressant Skills at Work* developed?

The guide was developed by British Columbia Mental Health and Addiction Services (BCMHAS), an agency of the Provincial Health Services Authority. The guide and accompanying materials have been authored by **Dr. Dan Bilsker**, **Dr. Merv Gilbert**, and **Dr. Joti Samra** – registered psychologists and scientist-practitioners with expertise in issues relating to workplace mental health. These psychologists are with the Centre for Applied Research in Mental Health and Addiction (CARMHA), Faculty of Health Sciences, Simon Fraser University. The guide was written on the basis of a review of the scientific literature; consultation with employers, unions, mental health providers and employee groups; and adaptation of existing self-care depression programs.

## How can the manual be accessed?

The manual is available for viewing and free download at [www.carmha.ca/antidepressant-skills/work/](http://www.carmha.ca/antidepressant-skills/work/) or from [www.bcmhas.ca/research](http://www.bcmhas.ca/research). Individuals or organizations are free to print and make multiple copies of the guide, with permission from CARMHA ([publications@carmha.ca](mailto:publications@carmha.ca)). Print copies and audio CDs are available at a low cost from our ordering page at [www.carmha.ca/ordering](http://www.carmha.ca/ordering).

For further information about AS@W and associated resources and materials, please visit [www.carmha.ca/selfcare](http://www.carmha.ca/selfcare). This information will be updated on a regular basis.



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