



Suicide in Construction Workers

In 2020, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported that the construction industry had one of the highest rates of suicide among their workers, along with mining, quarrying, and oil and gas extraction workers. This is seen not only in the United States, but in other countries and may be explained by a higher prevalence of certain risk factors in individuals working in the industry. In fact, as stated in an article published by the American Society of Safety Professionals, some have noted that construction workers potentially have a perfect storm of suicide risk factors:

- Economic insecurity as a result of job seasonality.
- Low job control and a fragmented community as a result of frequent changes in coworkers and tasks as jobs change.
- Emotional exhaustion stemming from irregular and long work hours.
- Work-family conflict that may manifest itself as strained relationships, marital breakdown, and difficulty maintaining relationships with children.
- Inefficient sleep patterns, including sleep deprivation, that may increase the risk of mental health problems.
- High psychological demands producing strain.
- Mental distress and mental disorders are common in construction workers. Furthermore, untreated psychiatric conditions are more common in this group of workers than others.

Physically demanding construction work not only increases the risk of musculoskeletal disorders—with higher rates than in other industries—but may lead to chronic pain and higher utilization of opioids, as well as the higher opioid overdose rate seen in these workers.

START A CONVERSATION

A major roadblock to addressing this issue in the construction industry and elsewhere is the stigma that has surrounded the issues of depression and suicide and the reluctance to talk about it. For many years, these have been taboo subjects, making it all the more difficult for those who may be contemplating suicide to get the help they need.

One of the most effective ways to do this is to simply talk to workers about what is going on in their lives so that they feel they have an outlet to discuss issues they are experiencing.

Along with the danger that workers may pose to themselves, these situations can present hazards in the workplace as well. The worse a person is doing personally, the more risk they present to themselves, their colleagues, and to the work.

When having a conversation with a colleague about personal difficulties, keep these three keys in mind to work toward a positive result.

Listen. Be a good listener for your colleagues. Often, all a co-worker may need is for someone to listen and understand what they are going through. In many cases, in the process of talking through the problems they are facing, they may be able to find a solution.

Ask direct questions. Difficult as it may be, it is important to be direct about the topic of suicide and to approach it in a way that is compassionate and empowering, to let the person know that someone is there for them to provide them partnership and support throughout their struggle.

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Direct them to qualified resources. Once you have started the conversation and brought underlying issues to the surface, the important next step is to put the person in touch with the appropriate resources. Organizations such as the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline, Construction Working Minds, and the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration provide tools and treatment resources for those in need of assistance.

Source: "Suicide in the Construction Industry." Travelers Insurance, www.travelers.com/resources/business-industries/construction/suicide-in-the-construction-industry. Accessed 27 Oct. 2022.

Source: Home. 988lifeline.org. Accessed 31 Oct. 2022.



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