

TOOLBOX TALK #3

Divorce and Strained Relationships



The construction industry is one of the most demanding sectors in the U.S., with workers facing stress both on and off the job site. Long hours, physical labor, travel, and job insecurity contribute to mental health challenges. Outside of work, relationships can become strained, leading to divorce or separation. These events can have severe impacts on mental health, affecting job performance and overall well-being. We will discuss how these issues manifest, signs to look out for, and how to provide support to those struggling.

What Are Divorce and Strained Relationships

- **Divorce** is the legal end of a marriage by a court. It's often a stressful, emotional, and financially challenging process.
- **Strained relationships** involve tension, conflict, and lack of communication, leading to emotional distance and isolation.

How Construction Work Can Lead to Divorce and Strained Relationships

- **Long hours:** Many construction workers spend long hours on the job site, often working weekends or overtime, which leaves less time for family.
- **Physical demands:** The physical toll construction takes on the body can lead to exhaustion, irritability, and a lack of energy for home life.
- **Travel requirements:** Some workers are required to travel for jobs, leading to long periods away from home, which can strain family dynamics.
- **Job security concerns:** Periods of unemployment or job insecurity can lead to financial stress, creating tension between partners or family members.
- **Emotional toll:** The combination of these factors can result in frustration, anxiety, and depression, which may spill over into relationships, increasing the likelihood of conflict.

Recognizing the Signs

Knowing the signs of when someone is struggling can allow for early support. Look for signs such as:

- **Mood changes:** Irritability, anger, or emotional outbursts.
- **Withdrawal:** Avoiding social activities or isolating themselves.
- **Fatigue:** Physical and mental exhaustion due to lack of sleep or constant stress.
- **Decline in work performances:** Reduced productivity, missing work, or careless mistakes.
- **Alcohol or substance use:** Turning to substances as a way to cope with stress.

GROUP DISCUSSION

1. In what ways do you think stress from home carries over to the job site?
2. How can we support each other when personal challenges like divorce or relationship stress come up?

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Impact on Mental Health

- **Depression and anxiety:** Relationship problems can intensify feelings of hopelessness or anxiety.
- **Feelings of loneliness:** Emotional detachment from loved ones can worsen feelings of isolation.
- **Suicidal thoughts:** Divorce and relationship problems can lead to feelings of hopelessness, and construction workers are already at higher risk for suicide.
- **Impaired judgement:** Mental health challenges can affect judgement and decision-making, increasing safety risks on the job.

Supporting a Coworker Going Through Divorce or Relationship Struggles

If you notice a coworker struggling, here's how you can help:

- **Listen without judgement:** Sometimes, just being there to listen can mean a lot to someone.
- **Check in regularly:** A simple "How are you doing?" can help them feel seen and cared for.
- **Offer resources:** Encourage them to seek help from professionals, like a counselor or employee assistance programs (EAPs).
- **Be patient:** Understand that healing from relationship issues takes time.

Managing Stress and Mental Health Outside of Work

Handling stress outside of work is crucial to navigating challenging times. Here are some strategies:

- **Counseling:** Professional counseling offers a neutral space to process emotions and develop coping skills.
- **Support groups:** Connecting with others in similar situations can help reduce feelings of isolation.
- **Exercise:** Regular physical activity can boost mood and reduce stress, even short walks.
- **Healthy habits:** Reducing alcohol and substance use helps maintain clarity and better manage emotional stress.
- **Communication:** Open communication to your trusted support system can help prevent further strain.

Divorce and strained relationships are deeply personal, but they don't have to be faced alone.

Being aware of the signs and offering support can make a significant difference. Remember, it's ok to ask for help - whether from a professional, support group, or a trusted friend.

988 Lifeline

TEAM 1-800-634-7710

Additional resources can be found at www.northcountrycarpenter.org/mental-health