



Know The Signs

Your Guide To Understand When To Reach Out For Support. For Yourself, Or Someone You Work With

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Introduction

Working at sea can be physically and psychologically demanding. Long hours, disrupted sleep, isolation, limited privacy, close-quarters living, isolation from family and relationships, challenging crew dynamics and the pressure to perform can all affect mental and emotional states.

For some people, difficulties develop gradually. For others, a particular event, conflict, injury, loss, relationship breakdown or period of sustained pressure can become a turning point.

Mental health difficulties do not always look like sadness, anxiety or someone openly saying they are struggling.

At sea, they can show up through changes in behaviour, performance, relationships, sleep, mood or the way someone copes.

Knowing the signs can help you recognise when something may not be right: in yourself or in someone you work alongside.



If you're noticing these signs in yourself

You may want to consider reaching out for support if you have noticed a persistent or significant change in yourself.

Mood and emotions

You may be:

- Feeling persistently low, flat, empty or emotionally numb.
- Feeling unusually anxious, worried, tense or on edge.
- Becoming more irritable, angry or easily frustrated.
- Experiencing stronger emotional reactions than usual.

- Feeling overwhelmed by things that you would normally manage.
- Losing your sense of enjoyment, motivation or enthusiasm.
- Feeling hopeless, helpless, trapped or that things won't improve.
- Finding it increasingly difficult to regulate your emotions.

Thoughts and concentration

You may notice:

- Racing or repetitive thoughts that are difficult to switch off.
- Constantly thinking about work, mistakes, conflict or what might go wrong.
- Difficulty concentrating or making decisions.
- Forgetfulness or feeling mentally foggy.
- Becoming unusually self-critical or feeling that you are never doing enough.
- Persistent thoughts of failure, guilt, shame or worthlessness.

Sleep and physical wellbeing

You may be:

- Struggling to fall asleep or stay asleep.
- Waking feeling exhausted despite having had the opportunity to rest.
- Sleeping considerably more or less than usual.
- Experiencing headaches, tension, stomach problems or other physical symptoms without an obvious explanation.
- Feeling constantly fatigued or physically run down.
- Experiencing changes in appetite or eating patterns.
- Finding that your body feels permanently “switched on” or unable to relax.

Behaviour and coping

You may notice that you are:

- Working excessively or unable to allow yourself to rest.
- Becoming increasingly perfectionistic or controlling.
- Avoiding people or spending more time alone.
- Losing interest in activities or relationships you previously valued.
- Drinking more alcohol or using substances more frequently to cope, relax or sleep.
- Using partying, sex, gambling, food, exercise, work or other behaviours to escape difficult feelings.
- Taking more risks than usual.
- Finding it increasingly difficult to switch off when you're off duty.
- Feeling that you are simply going through the motions.

Relationships and life on board

You may be:

- Having more arguments or conflict with colleagues.
- Becoming unusually withdrawn from the crew.

- Feeling disconnected from your partner, family or friends.
- Avoiding calls home or finding contact with loved ones difficult.
- Feeling that nobody understands what life at sea is actually like.
- Dreading going back on board, or struggling significantly when returning home.
- Feeling like you have to maintain a particular version of yourself because everyone expects you to be capable, positive and professional.



If you're concerned about someone else

Crew members, heads of department and captains are often in a unique position to notice changes in someone's wellbeing. You may see something before the person themselves recognises it.

Look for **changes from their usual behaviour**, rather than expecting everyone to display the same symptoms.

Someone who is struggling may:

Behave differently

- Become unusually quiet, withdrawn or isolated.
- Become more irritable, argumentative or confrontational.
- Seem unusually restless, agitated or unable to relax.
- Lose their usual humour, enthusiasm or engagement.
- Appear emotionally flat or disconnected.
- Become unusually perfectionistic or controlling.
- Start avoiding communal areas or social interaction.
- Suddenly stop participating in activities they normally enjoy.

Perform differently at work

- Make more mistakes than usual.
- Have difficulty concentrating or following instructions.
- Appear distracted or mentally absent.
- Struggle with decisions or routine tasks.
- Become unusually slow or hesitant.
- Have difficulty maintaining their normal standards.
- Miss deadlines or responsibilities.
- Have a noticeable increase in accidents, near misses or unsafe behaviour.

A change in performance can have many causes, including fatigue, illness, medication, injury, stress or personal circumstances. It should be treated as a reason to **check in**, not as proof of a mental health condition.

Interact differently

They may:

- Stop communicating with people they normally engage with.
- Become unusually defensive when asked how they are.
- Have more frequent conflicts with colleagues.
- Become unusually sensitive to criticism.
- Withdraw from friends or family.
- Seem disconnected from the rest of the crew.
- Express feeling alone, trapped or unable to cope.

Say things that raise concern

Take comments seriously if someone says things such as:

- “I can't do this anymore.”
- “I just want to get off.”
- “I don't see the point.”
- “Everyone would be better off without me.”
- “I haven't slept properly in weeks.”
- “I can't switch off.”
- “I'm not myself anymore.”
- “I just want everything to stop.”
- “I can't cope.”

They may say these things casually, jokingly or indirectly. **Don't automatically dismiss them because they were said with a smile or as a joke.**



You don't have to wait for a crisis

Mental health support isn't only for people who are at breaking point. You can seek support because you're exhausted, overwhelmed, struggling with relationships, finding life at sea difficult, processing something that has happened, or simply because you don't feel like yourself.

You don't need a diagnosis. You don't need to justify it. And you don't need to wait until things get worse.

A confidential conversation can be the first step towards understanding what's happening and deciding what support might help.

Notice the signs. Start the conversation. Don't wait for a crisis.

If something in this guide felt familiar, consider it an invitation to pause and check in.

Ready to talk?

Whether you're struggling with life on board, relationships, stress, anxiety, burnout, a difficult experience, or simply don't feel like yourself, therapy can provide a confidential space to explore what's going on and find a way forward.

Take the first step and get in touch.



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