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| SUBJECT | DRIVER'S MENTAL HEALTH |
| | Discussion, PowerPoint presentation, NRSPP Toolbox Talks fact sheet handout, self-assessment sheet. |

DRIVER'S MENTAL HEALTH

Facilitator:

Stressful events, thoughts and emotions can impact on your safe driving.

Have you ever reached a destination after driving a long distance and realised you do not remember how you got there, have been driving on 'autopilot' the whole time, not paying attention to what is happening on the road or noticed anything.

Driving is an activity that requires all our attention. Unexpected events can happen at any time and our lives and others could depend on how we respond. Driving in an emotional state that can increase the risk of being involved in a road incident.

Start discussion with some of the following questions:

(Remember your trainees do not have to know the correct answers, you just need to get them thinking and find out what their opinions, ideas and what they know or understand about the topic.)

How does your headspace affect your driving performance?

Answers could include: Our headspace directly impacts our driving performance. What is going on in our heads will be reflected on our driving. Stressful events, rumination and our emotions can make us drive on 'autopilot' without paying attention to the road or our driving attitudes.

How does mental health relate to driving?

Answers could include: Driving is an activity that requires all our attention. A strong mental health allows us to focus on the road and keep distracting thoughts from overwhelming us. While some ill mental health symptoms, such as lack of sleep or certain medications, can affect driving performance.

What is the 'busy brain syndrome'?

Answers could include: The 'busy brain syndrome' or cognitive overload that occurs when our brains have too many tasks to focus on, impacts our ability to focus on the road.

How does driving in an emotional state impact the road crash risk?

Answers could include: Driving in an emotional state has been reported to increase the risk of being involved in a road incident by nearly 10 times.



What are some helpful activities to get to the right headspace before starting a journey?

Answers could include: Creative writing, journaling, going for a short walk, breathing exercises. Checking the route and preparing to the journey by setting the mobile phone on 'do not disturb' mode, taking a deep breath and assessing our feelings and headspace.

PowerPoint presentation: When driving where is your mind at.

Key Points

- Driving is an activity that requires all our attention. Our senses should be focused on the road. Unexpected events can happen at any time and our lives could depend on how ready we are to respond.
- Our headspace directly impacts our driving performance. Stressful events, rumination and our emotions can make us drive on 'autopilot' without paying attention to the road or our driving attitudes.
- Studies have shown that when angry we can overestimate the control we have in specific situations and make quick, stereotypical judgements. Our behaviour transfers into subsequent driving situations.
- In Australia, distracted driving causes 16% of serious casualty road crashes that result in hospital attendance.

Be prepared by:

- Before starting your journey prepare your route and set your mobile phone on 'do not disturb' mode.
- Before starting to drive, try an activity that helps you deal with your thoughts and prepares you to focus on the road, such as creative writing or a short walk.
- When you get in the car, take a couple of minutes to focus. Take a deep breath and assess how you are feeling.
- When you notice you keep getting distracted by the same thoughts or your emotions are making you react, find a safe place to park and take a break. Be aware of how you are feeling and try to focus on your breathing.
- If you are not feeling in the right headspace to drive, consider alternatives like taking public transport or asking a family or friend to drive. Remember safety is the priority.

Handout Fact Sheet plus the Self-Assessment sheet.

MENTAL HEALTH TOOLBOX TALK



| Items Raised/Corrective Action | Action By | Action completed | |
|--------------------------------|-----------|------------------|------|
| | | Sign off | Date |
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DATE:.....

FACILITATOR SIGNATURE.....

SELF ASSESSMENT

When driving where is your mind at?

The following information forms the basis of a **step 5** a self-assessment for Toolbox Talk participants. Please complete this short Self-Assessment by circling your

Question 1. How often do you catch yourself daydreaming or ruminating about stressful issues, while driving?

| | |
|---|---------------------------------------|
| 0 | Never |
| 1 | A few times a month |
| 2 | Once a week |
| 3 | A few times a week |
| 4 | Every day or almost every day I drive |

Question 2. How often do you use your mobile phone while driving?

| | |
|---|---------------------------------------|
| 0 | Never |
| 1 | A few times a month |
| 2 | Once a week |
| 3 | A few times a week |
| 4 | Every day or almost every day I drive |

Question 3. How often do you get upset or feel anger while driving?

| | |
|---|---------------------------------------|
| 0 | Never |
| 1 | A few times a month |
| 2 | Once a week |
| 3 | A few times a week |
| 4 | Every day or almost every day I drive |

Question 4. How often do you start your journey without having planned the trip, setting your mobile phone on 'do not disturb' mode and assessing how you are feeling?

| | |
|---|---------------------------------------|
| 0 | Never |
| 1 | A few times a month |
| 2 | Once a week |
| 3 | A few times a week |
| 4 | Every day or almost every day I drive |

ARE YOU AN AT RISK DRIVER

| | |
|----------------------|--|
| LOW- MODERATE | An individual score of 0-2 on any question |
| HIGH | An individual score of 3 on any question |
| SERIOUS | An individual score of 4 on any question |

There are always potential risks and consequences associated with driving. However, these risks can be heightened during heavy rain events.

If you scored 3 on any individual question in this section it means that your recent driving behaviours may have been dangerous to yourself and others. The best predictor of unsafe driving behaviour in the future is how you have recently been driving and the outcomes of this driving behaviour.

If you scored 4 on any question your driving habits require attention and you need to act now to adopt some of the strategies outlined to prevent serious road injuries and fatalities. Many people do successfully change their driving behaviour and drive much safer than they did in the past and we would encourage you to adopt some safer driving strategies.

Mental Health

NRSPP TOOLBOX TALKS | FACT SHEET

Our headspace directly impacts our driving performance. Stressful events, rumination and our emotions can make us drive on 'autopilot' without paying attention to the road or our driving attitudes. What is going on in our heads will be reflected on our driving.

- Driving in an emotional state has been reported to increase the risk of being involved in a road incident by nearly 10 times ^[1].
- Studies have shown that distraction by secondary tasks that demand the driver's visual attention for more than two seconds increase crash risk three-fold ^{[2][3]}.



the issue

Driving is an activity that requires all our attention. Our senses should be focused on the road. Unexpected events can happen at any time and our lives could depend on how ready we are to respond.

When we enter our vehicle, our thoughts enter with us. It is inevitable. Yet our problems, stresses, and even fantasies shouldn't make us lose our focus on the road. Our headspace and the emotions we are feeling while driving have an impact on how we drive and assess situations.

For instance:



Studies have shown that when angry we can overestimate the control we have in specific situations and make quick, stereotypical judgements. Our behaviour transfers into subsequent driving situations ^[1].



Also, the 'busy brain syndrome' or cognitive overload that occurs when our brains have too many tasks to focus on, impacts our ability to focus on the road ^[4].

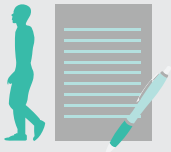


Studies have shown in Australia, distracted driving causes **16%** of serious casualty road crashes that result in hospital attendance ^[5].



Ill mental health symptoms, such as lack of sleep or certain medications, can affect driving performance ^[6]. A conversation with your GP is recommended.

recommendations



Focus your thoughts

Before starting to drive, try an activity that helps you deal with your thoughts and prepares you to focus on the road, such as creative writing or a short walk ^[8].



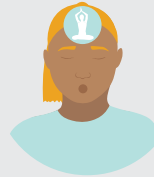
Be aware of others

On the roads, everyone is sharing the same space. Just like we sometimes we may find others on the road irritating, they may feel the same way towards us.



Take a moment

When you get in the car, take a couple of minutes to focus. Take a deep breath and assess how you are feeling. Breathing is part of our nervous system and can help us balance our body and mind while reducing our stress ^[9].



Mindfulness

Mindfulness, the act of being present and engaged in what we are doing at the moment, helps us achieve focused attention, a key element to stay safe on the road



Set your phone to 'do not disturb'

Before starting your journey prepare your route and set your mobile phone on 'do not disturb' mode. You can also activated the 'do not disturb while driving' mode by following these simple steps: go to Settings, choose 'do not disturb', find the 'do not disturb while driving' option, finally tap to activate and set as automatic ^[10].



Consider alternative transport

If you are not feeling in the right headspace to drive, consider alternatives like taking public transport or asking a family or friend to drive.



Take a break

When you notice you keep getting distracted by the same thoughts or your emotions are making you react, find a safe place to park and take a break. Be aware of how you are feeling and try to focus on your breathing. Remember safety is the priority.

To seek help, please contact:

| | |
|---------------------------|--------------|
| Lifeline | 13 11 14 |
| Beyond Blue | 1300 224 636 |
| Suicide Call Back Service | 1300 659 467 |
| Mensline Australia | 1300 789 978 |