

# Warning Signs List

Before we dive into the problem-solving worksheets, let's talk about some warning signs that might indicate a more serious issue than you or the first responder realized. This can also serve as a training handout for discussions on when to seek mental health help.

Think about warning signs as a check engine light. Everyone throws different codes, but there is definitely something wrong. Just like a car, if you ignore it, you may be able to limp it along for years, or you might have a breakdown tomorrow. None the less, when it breaks, you are going to really wish you took the light more seriously, because what was a small fix then, is now a much bigger one.

*Here are some warning signs that maybe you need to check in with someone:*

## *Low Energy or Mood for Extended Periods:*

- You find yourself coming home and just wanting to sleep or sleeping too much, even though you know you have things to do.
- You don't feel like doing the things you usually enjoy.
- Getting tasks done feels like it requires three times the effort.
- You engage in risky or thrill-seeking behaviors just to feel something.

## *A Constant "Hum" of Anxiety:*

- You find yourself worrying about something going wrong all the time
  - This MAY be appropriate at work, but it shows up everywhere
- You can't sleep at night because your mind is racing, despite being exhausted.
- You feel tension in your body—like TMJ, GI distress, shoulder pain, or chronic headaches—without any medical explanation.
- You feel wired or on edge even when you're not at work.
- You might overwork yourself to keep your mind busy.

## *Substance Use or Abuse:*

- You're drinking more than you'd admit to your boss or doctor.
- You drink to help yourself fall asleep.
- You're using illegal substances, putting your job at risk.
- You feel like you need substances to feel "normal."

## *Feeling Detached from Loved Ones:*

- You avoid spending time with family, even though you want to connect.
- You feel like your problems or trauma would disturb the happiness of your family.
- You might think they'd be better off without you.
- You frequently lash out or feel the urge to escape when you're frustrated.
- You overwork to avoid going home.

## *Intrusive Thoughts or Memories:*

- You find yourself frequently remembering bad calls that stick in your mind.
- Nightmares about difficult calls or flashbacks can become commonplace.
- You might catastrophically plan for unlikely scenarios.
- You could see family members in your mind being harmed in ways you've witnessed at work.
- Feelings of panic in crowded or unfamiliar places may arise, along with a desire to stay home when not at work.
- Hyper vigilance can set in, where you're constantly checking for security even after you've already secured your home.

## *Dissociation:*

*Note- feeling a little "in the zone", "autopilot", and "doing the job without feeling" is not necessarily a symptom when at a scene, since it is part of your training. If it shows up in other areas of your life, then we have a problem.*

- You might feel disconnected, going through the motions but not really being present.
- It can feel like you're watching yourself from the outside.
- You might lose track of time or forget things you've said or done.
- Constant "zoning out" can become common, making it hard to feel like what you've said or done is really you.

## *Suicidal Ideation:*

- You find yourself thinking about "not being around," or feeling like "the world would be better off without me."
- You might have active thoughts of suicide.
- Volunteering for risky situations could be a sign.
- Daydreaming about dying heroically during a work call can indicate deeper issues.