Mental Health Conversation Starters for Teams

A Practical Guide for Managers

Why Checking In Matters

Employee well-being is no longer a "soft" topic; it's a performance, retention, and culture issue backed by decades of organizational research. Teams with psychologically safe environments show:

- Higher engagement and productivity
- Lower burnout and turnover
- Greater innovation and collaboration
- Earlier identification of stress before it becomes crisis

Yet many managers hesitate to check in about mental health because they worry about "saying the wrong thing," crossing boundaries, or accidentally stepping into clinical territory.

Here's the good news: **You don't need to be a therapist to support your team.**

You just need to create consistent, judgment-free opportunities for employees to share how they're doing, and know how to direct them to appropriate resources, such as employee mental-health benefits through Tava Health.

This guide gives you **safe, practical conversation starters and scripts** for checking in on well-being at both the individual and team level.

How to Approach the Conversation
(Quick Guidelines)

Before diving into questions, keep these principles in mind:

1. **Ask open, non-invasive questions.**
   Avoid anything diagnostic or personal. Focus on work experience, workload, and general well-being.

2. **Create psychological safety.**
   Normalize that everyone experiences stress, especially during high-pressure cycles.

3. **Listen more than you speak.**
   Your goal is to understand, not fix, solve, or advise.

4. **Follow up consistently.**
   One-time check-ins don't build trust; ongoing conversations do.

5. **Know when to refer.**
   If an employee expresses emotional distress, burnout, or ongoing difficulty, remind them of mental health resources like Tava Health.

Conversation Starters for 1:1 Meetings

These prompts help employees open up without feeling pressured or exposed.

General Well-Being

- "How has your energy been this week?"
- "What has felt manageable, and what's felt more challenging lately?"
- "Is anything affecting your stress levels that I might be able to support?"

Workload & Balance

- "Do you feel clear on your priorities, or are things starting to feel overloaded?"
- "Are there any deadlines or expectations that feel unrealistic?"
- "How is your workload feeling; balanced, stretched, or somewhere in between?"
- "Would it help to redistribute anything or adjust timelines?"
- "What's one thing that would make work feel more sustainable for you right now?"

Team Dynamics

- "How supported do you feel by the team right now?"
- "Is there anything getting in the way of collaboration or communication?"
- "Do you feel comfortable bringing up obstacles when they appear?"

Stress Early Detection

- "Have you noticed any changes in your focus, motivation, or energy lately?"
- "What's been draining you most at work?"
- "What signals tell you you're hitting your limit?"

Conversation Starters for Team Meetings

These help build group culture, reduce stigma, and normalize discussing well-being.

Quick Check-Ins

- "On a scale from 'coasting' to 'swamped,' where is everyone landing today?"
- "What's one word that describes how your week is going so far?"
- "What's one thing helping you manage stress this week?"

Reflective Prompts

- "What helps us as a team stay grounded during busy periods?"
- "What norms or practices help reduce stress for us, and which ones add to it?"
- "Is there anything we could simplify or streamline in our workflow?"

Team Support

- "How can we better support each other during high-intensity cycles?"
- "Where are we unintentionally creating pressure, and how can we adjust?"
- "What's one small shift that would make our team feel more sustainable?"

Scripts for Common Scenarios

1 When You Notice an Employee Seems Off

"I've noticed you've seemed a bit more overwhelmed than usual these last few days. No pressure to share anything personal, but I wanted to check in. How are things feeling for you lately?"

2 When Someone Shares They're Struggling

"Thank you for telling me; that takes courage. I'm here to support you within my role, and I also want to make sure you have access to the right resources. We offer mental health support through Tava Health if talking with a professional would be helpful."

3 When an Employee Minimizes Their Stress

"That makes sense. Even small amounts of stress build up over time, so I want to make sure you have what you need to manage your workload. Is there anything that feels especially heavy or draining right now?"

4 When You Need to Reinforce Healthy Boundaries

"I want to support your well-being, but I also want to be mindful not to cross into personal territory. If you'd like support, Tava Health is available, and I'm here to help with anything related to workload or expectations."

Closing the Conversation

End with clarity and support:

- "Here's what I'll take off your plate..."
- "Let's revisit this next week."
- "Please keep me posted if things shift."
- "Remember, Tava Health is available if you'd like professional support."

Consistency builds trust.
Trust builds psychological safety. And psychological safety builds resilient, connected teams.