



Mental health in the workplace

Support and advice for managers





Introduction

Work is a huge part of our lives so it's vital that while we're working, we're happy and healthy.

When we think about the phrase 'mental health', we often think about mental health problems. We think of symptoms like low mood and conditions such as depression or anxiety. In fact, everyone has mental health. You and your colleagues will have times when your mental health is good - and times when it is less good. Just like physical health.

As a manager, you have a really important role in supporting employee wellbeing and promoting good mental health in the workplace.



Supporting team members

30%

felt that they wouldn't be able to talk openly with their line manager if they were feeling stressed.

Just a thought

Stigma is reduced when people can talk openly about mental health.

This leads to more understanding, and a greater likelihood that people will seek support earlier.

As a manager of a team, you can improve working practices, encourage your team to speak openly, and reassure them you will offer support.

Here are just some of the reasons why it's important to think about your employees' mental health.

- Work can cause mental health problems or make them worse. Issues like bullying, uncertainty, lack of control and a demanding role are all linked to the development of common mental health problems.
- Positive work and line management can help people with mental health problems, providing identity, income and purpose.

It's good for everyone else too.

- Employees with good mental wellbeing are likely to be more creative, loyal and productive.
- Stigma is reduced when people can talk openly about mental health. This leads to more understanding and a greater likelihood people will seek support earlier.

It helps you as a manager.

- It's much easier to support employees at an earlier stage than wait until they reach crisis point.
- Effectively supporting employees with mental health problems means you can employ, retain and get the best from them.

And it's good for business. If employees aren't given the right support, the costs can mount up.

- Mental health problems are the leading cause of long-term sickness absence.
- Increased absence and reduced productivity can see workloads grow for other colleagues, which can exacerbate some of the root causes of poor mental health.



Common mental health conditions

1 in 6

people will be experiencing a common mental health problem at any one time.¹

*Just a thought
By understanding mental health conditions better, you'll be more informed and it'll be easier to connect with those affected.*

Anxiety disorders

Anxiety is a feeling of unease. We all get anxious when faced with stressful situations, and it's normal to feel anxious when you face something difficult or dangerous. But if you have anxiety that has lasted a long time and it's severe, it can interfere with your everyday activities.

Bipolar disorder

Bipolar affective disorder is characterised by extreme changes in mood. Your mood can vary from excitement and elation (known as mania) to depression and despair. You may also have mixed moods where you might feel depressed but at the same time restless and overactive. In between episodes of mood swings you might not have any symptoms at all.

Depression

Everyone has ups and downs. It's common for people to say that they're 'depressed' when they're feeling down. But if the sadness becomes persistent and you lose interest in your life, affecting how you think or behave, it's possible you have depression.

Obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD)

Obsessive-compulsive disorder is an anxiety disorder with two key parts: obsessions and compulsions. Obsessions are intrusive and unwelcome images, urges, thoughts or doubts that repeatedly appear in your mind. Compulsions are activities you feel you have to do to reduce the discomfort caused by the obsessive thoughts. If you don't act on the compulsions, your anxiety or mental discomfort becomes distressing and unmanageable.

Personality disorders

If you have a personality disorder, certain ways you think, feel and behave have a significant and negative impact on different aspects of your daily life. You might have particular patterns of thoughts, feelings or beliefs that are difficult to change.

Schizophrenia

Schizophrenia affects your mood and how you think, feel and behave. It doesn't mean you have a 'split personality'. There are lots of very different feelings, experiences and behaviours associated with schizophrenia. This means that some people think schizophrenia may not be one condition but actually different, overlapping conditions.

[Learn more](#) about understanding mental health problems.



What to
look out for

worldwide

mental health problems are one
of the main causes of disease.¹

Just a thought

*When you recognise signs of poor
mental health, check in and start
a conversation about how your team
member is coping right now.*

Everyone's experience of mental health is different and can change at different times. As a manager, it's important to get to know your team and understand what they need and when.

Understanding some of the signs of poor mental health doesn't mean you should make assumptions about what mental health problems your employees may have. Instead, use them as a way of noticing when you should check in and start a conversation about how your employee is coping right now.

Some ideas of early signs might be:

- poor concentration
- being easily distracted
- worrying more
- finding it hard to make decisions
- low mood
- feeling overwhelmed by things
- tiredness and lack of energy
- talking less and avoiding social activities
- talking more or talking very fast, jumping between topics and ideas
- finding it difficult to control your emotions
- drinking more
- irritability and short temper
- aggression



How to help your employees

x7

Workers absent due to mental ill health are seven times more likely to have further absence than those with physical health-related sick leave.ⁱⁱ

*Just a thought
Looking after your team's mental health is just as important as their physical health. This will lead to a more productive team in the long term.*

If you're a line manager, you play an important role in supporting your team's mental health and wellbeing. But it can be hard to know where to start. The suggestions in this section should help.

Look after your mental health

As a manager, your focus is on supporting your team in the workplace but remember, your own wellbeing is just as important. You have a duty to yourself to look after your own mental health at work. Taking care of your mental health doesn't always mean you can avoid problems entirely. But it's still important we treat our mental health the same as our physical health - with care.

Ask for training

Most companies offer training on mental health and stress management. You should feel confident about dealing with disclosure and managing and supporting an employee with mental health problems. Talk to your own manager about your training needs.

Familiarise yourself with policies

Make sure you understand any policies your organisation has relating to mental health and wellbeing. This may include sickness absence and health and safety. Make sure your team understand where to find these, what they include and what will happen if they ask for support.

Make sure you have a good knowledge of common mental health problems and signs of poor mental health

Get to know your team so you notice any changes in their behaviour. Make sure you're prepared to have a conversation about their mental health. Bear in mind that mental health problems affect people in different ways. You may have to adapt your approach to suit the individual and their needs. If you feel you need more support and training from your company, talk to your manager.

Show your team that their wellbeing matters to you

Encourage them to work sensible hours, take full lunch breaks and attend wellbeing initiatives in the organisation. Looking after their mental health is just as important as their physical health. This will lead to a more productive team in the long term.

Make sure you're available

Prioritise regular one-to-ones and catch ups with your team. Make sure you use this time to check how they are and talk through any difficulties at home or work. Knowing your team's 'normal' outlook and activities will give you a frame of reference to spot changes in these early. This will make conversations easier if problems do arise.



How to help your employees

90%

of people who commit suicide (estimated at 800,000) have a diagnosable mental disorder.^{iii,iv}

Just a thought

It might help to add staff wellbeing as a standing item on your agenda at team meetings. Give staff an opportunity to talk about how they've been doing and anything that might be affecting their wellbeing.

Create a Wellness Action Plan

Wellness Action Plans can be a good way to start regular conversations about mental health and wellbeing with your team. They're a tool to help you and your employees share what keeps you well at work and when and why you might become unwell. It helps you improve wellbeing or support recovery. It's a personal document written by employees and shared with individual managers and works as an agreement and a tool to promote ongoing discussion.

Keep asking questions

It might help to add wellbeing as a standing item on your agenda at team meetings. Give your team an opportunity to talk about how they've been doing and anything that might be affecting their wellbeing. Ask for feedback about your management and any additional support you could provide.

Help your team prioritise their workloads and feel confident to work effectively

While it may not be possible to offer people complete control over their workload and hours, think together about areas where they could make their own decisions and manage their own time. Make sure your team are trained to do their jobs. Look for development opportunities and make sure you're available to offer support and suggestions too.

Praise team members and show you appreciate their efforts

Employees who don't feel properly rewarded for their efforts are more at risk of common mental health problems and increased stress. It's also important to distribute praise and benefits fairly and make sure you don't show favouritism within the team.

Make reasonable adjustments in the workplace

A reasonable adjustment is a change to how your employee works to help them overcome any disadvantages they might face. Effective reasonable adjustments can support employees with mental health problems to work to their full capacity. Whether an adjustment is 'reasonable' or not depends on its effectiveness, practicality, cost, your organisation's resources, and whether any additional financial help is available.

Prepare for your employees to return to work

There may be times when employees need time off because of their mental health. Supporting return to work is about good people management. You need good communication skills and sensitivity to the individual and the context of their absence. Before they return, consider lighter duties and/or a phased return. It takes time to recover after a period of mental ill health. It may help your employee to come back to work slowly, especially if they've been off work for a long time.

<https://www.bupa.co.uk/Health-Information/workplace-mental-health>



Legal obligation

As a manager, it's important to understand any policies your organisation has relating to mental health and wellbeing. It's also important to understand any legal obligations on you as an individual, or on your organisation, which protect people with a disability – either physical or mental.

References

- i** Mental health statistics: UK and worldwide. Mental Health Foundation. www.mentalhealth.org.uk/statistics/mental-health-statistics-uk-and-worldwide, accessed 26 September 2017
- ii** Fundamental facts about mental health. Mental Health Foundation. 2016. www.mentalhealth.org.uk/file/2518/download?token=RUGlzcSK
- iii** Suicide. WHO. www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs398/en/, updated August 2017
- iv** Salvatore T. Do 90% of suicide victims really have serious mental illness? Psychological autopsy studies, psychopathology, and suicide. www.researchgate.net/publication/274710108_Do_90_of_Suicide_Victims_Really_have_Serious_Mental_Illness_Psychological_Autopsy_Studies_Psychopathology_and_Suicide, published 8 April 2015.