PROMOTING GOOD MENTAL HEALTH AT WORK

a guide for employers
This Topic Guide has been commissioned and reviewed by Public Health England (PHE), and developed by Health@Work. The purpose is to provide information to help organisations of all sizes and sectors promote good mental health at work. The information contained in this guide is not exhaustive and is intended to provide a brief overview of the topic in order for organisations to consider their current practice. Advice and signposting links towards sources of support for those who wish to develop a wellbeing strategy and enhance existing provision are also included.
PROMOTING GOOD MENTAL HEALTH AT WORK

1 in 4 adults will experience mental ill-health each year¹, and there are very likely to be people living with a mental health problem already working within your organisation. Fear of stigma and discrimination means that conditions are not always disclosed.²

Promoting good mental health can boost productivity and lower sickness absence. The majority of people living with a mental health condition are able to work productively. A job can also play an important part in their recovery and help with many of the effects of mental ill-health.

Businesses are encouraged to: (i) tackle the causes of work-related mental health problems, (ii) promote good mental wellbeing for all staff, and (iii) support staff currently experiencing mental health problems.

BUSINESS BENEFITS

1. Benefits of wellbeing

As well as the personal benefits, employees with good mental health and wellbeing tend to have better performance, productivity, attendance, increased commitment and job satisfaction whilst at work.

For businesses, this translates into reduced staff absenteeism, improved staff retention and economic benefits.³ It is more effective for workplaces to focus on these benefits and be proactive by supporting and encouraging staff to maintain good mental health and wellbeing, instead of managing problems once they arise.
2. Costs of mental health issues

There are significant costs to businesses related to employee’s mental health problems. These costs can be related to productivity, absenteeism and profits. Mental illness affects absenteeism significantly.

- Stress is still one of the main causes of absence from work. Four-fifths of public sector and half of private sector organisations are taking steps to identify and reduce workplace stress.⁴
- Over 40 million working days are lost each year due to stress-related disorders.⁵
- Mixed anxiety and depression has been estimated to cause one fifth of days lost from work.⁶
- Length of absence from work is 7.5 times longer for mental health problems than physical illnesses.⁷

3. Legal requirements

All employers have a legal responsibility under the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 and Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 to ensure the health, safety and welfare at work of their employees. This ‘duty of care’ includes responsibility for minimising the risk of stress-related illness or injury to employees.⁸

Also, mental illness can be classed as a disability and covered by the Equality Act 2010. Employers have a responsibility to consider whether an employee is being treated less favourably for a reason relating to the disability. Employers must make reasonable adjustments to support employees.⁹
WAYS TO SUPPORT AND ENCOURAGE GOOD MENTAL HEALTH

Businesses can take action under each of the following three areas:

Effective management is the key to unlocking the potential of employees and preventing stress or poor mental health. You can do this by:

- openly discussing mental health within organisation
- raising awareness about mental health and wellbeing
- encouraging a good work/life balance
- allowing flexible hours or home working
- ensuring all staff have autonomy in areas of their work
- promoting positive working relationships and social activities.


MENTAL HEALTH PROMOTION: PROMOTE WELLBEING FOR ALL STAFF

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MENTAL HEALTH PROMOTION: PROMOTE WELLBEING FOR ALL STAFF

Work environment and culture can be triggers for stress and poor mental health. Solutions include:

- being mindful of how work can cause unreasonable levels of stress
- training managers to recognise mental health problems
- supporting employees and helping them to manage their workloads
- improving the physical environment
- providing on-the-job coaching
- raising awareness of available support, such as Employee Assistance Programmes
- ensuring regular supervisions or one-to-one meetings are standard
- building trust and giving employees an opportunity to raise issues at an early stage with managers.

TREATMENT AND RECOVERY: SUPPORT STAFF EXPERIENCING MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS

Firstly, promoting an open discussion is important to address stigma around mental illness and ensure staff are treated supportively and empathetically by colleagues and managers. Remember to respond to mental ill-health just as you would respond to staff with physical health problems.

Providing support is crucial. Everyone’s experience of a mental health problem is different and so is the support they need. It is important that the individual member of staff feels safe to talk about their difficulties and the things that could help them regain their health again.

Ensuring that workplaces have policies on reasonable adjustments and phased returns to work is essential. Adjustments could include:

- flexible hours or change to start/finish time
- changes to role (temporary or permanent)
- increased support from managers in prioritising and managing workload.
A number of initiatives are working to encourage more businesses helping to take the mental wellbeing of their staff seriously, and to do more to support staff who are experiencing mental health problems. Here are three examples:

**TIME TO CHANGE**

England’s biggest programme to end the stigma and discrimination faced by people with mental health problems works with organisations, engaging them on this issue and generating tools and resources for them. Over 260 organisations have made a public commitment to tackle mental health stigma by signing the pledge, including BAE Systems, British Gas, BT, Channel 4, E-ON, Lloyds TSB, and PepsiCo.

**MENTAL HEALTH FIRST AID (MHFA)**

Mental Health First Aid is an educational course which teaches people to recognise the signs and symptoms of mental health issues, provide help on a first aid basis, and signpost for further support.

**BUSINESS IN THE COMMUNITY (BITC)**

This group provides clear leadership from business, for business, on mental wellbeing. Its goal is to help mental health become a strategic boardroom issue, and encourage employers to take preventative and supportive action on employee mental health just as they do on physical health. Founding members include BT, Bupa, Royal Bank of Scotland, and Mars.

More on this information can be found under the further support and guidance section.
MEASURING IMPACT

• Conduct staff surveys to evaluate mental health and wellbeing, including stress levels. These can be carried out prior to the implementation of any initiatives and then at regular intervals thereafter. Questions about stress or wellbeing could also be added to existing staff surveys, rather than running a separate questionnaire.

• Carry out organisational and individual stress risk assessments in order to set action plans targeting areas for improvement. These actions can be reviewed at agreed intervals to assess whether targets have been achieved. The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) toolkit provides a useful starting point: (www.hse.gov.uk/stress/standards/downloads.htm)

• Encouraging workplace conversations about mental health and wellbeing (either as part of health checks or as a standalone initiative). Recognised mental health evaluation tools such as the Short Warwick Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale can support this process and provide data for analysis 11 or lighter-touch apps to encourage staff to notice and take action on their wellbeing day to day, such as Moodzone and other resources on NHS Choices website.

• Monitor sickness absence data both before and after the introduction of any intervention. Stress has consistently been one of the leading causes of sickness absence in recent years. Completing return to work interviews and recording reasons for absence allow an organisation to monitor incidences of stress causing absence from work. The statistics can be compared to previous levels and against the national average from sources such as CIPD Absence Management survey.

• Staff turnover should also be monitored and compared to previous levels. Employee wellness programmes – like the Workplace Wellbeing Charter – have been shown to be a cost-effective way of improving workplace health and reducing staff sickness absence, with an estimated cost of £3 per sickness-absence day saved 12.
DEFINITION OF MENTAL HEALTH

The World Health Organisation defines mental health as ‘a state of well-being in which every individual realizes his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution.’

This state of wellbeing has been defined as “the ability to develop their potential, work productively and creatively, build strong and positive relationships with others, and contribute to their community.”

TYPES OF MENTAL ILLNESS

Mental illness can include a range of conditions, including stress, anxiety, depression and psychosis.

Stress is an adverse reaction that people have to excessive pressure or demands placed upon them. Stress has mental and physical health consequences. Pressure can be a helpful motivator. However, when the level of pressure is more than a person’s ability to cope – this can cause stress.

Mental health issues also include depression and anxiety – which are quite common. More than one in four adults in the UK have had some type of depression and anxiety in the last week.
FURTHER SUPPORT AND GUIDANCE

**NHS Choices**
Provides a comprehensive health information service to help put you in control of your healthcare.

**Mind**
Information and advice, including ‘How to be mentally healthy at work’ guide
[www.mind.org.uk/information-support/tips-for-everyday-living/work](www.mind.org.uk/information-support/tips-for-everyday-living/work)

**We’ve Got Work to Do report**
[www.mind.org.uk/media/1690126/weve_got_work_to_do.pdf](www.mind.org.uk/media/1690126/weve_got_work_to_do.pdf)

**Health and Safety Executive**
Information on reducing stress in the workplace including a free tool kit to download.
[www.hse.gov.uk/stress](www.hse.gov.uk/stress)

**Time to Change**
Provides information and resources to reduce the stigma around mental health conditions. Organisations can make a pledge to do what they can in the workplace.
[www.time-to-change.org.uk/take-action/work-place](www.time-to-change.org.uk/take-action/work-place)

**Mental Health First Aid (MHFA)**
Mental Health First Aid is an educational course which teaches people how to identify, understand and help a person who may be developing a mental health issue.
[www.mhfaengland.org](www.mhfaengland.org)

**Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development.** Stress pages which offer toolkits and resources for the workplace together with up to date surveys and reports on how to tackle stress.
[www.cipd.co.uk/hr-topics/stress.aspx](www.cipd.co.uk/hr-topics/stress.aspx)
ABOUT THIS TOPIC GUIDE

This Topic Guide has been jointly produced between Public Health England, health@work and Liverpool City Council. The purpose of this guide is to provide information and support to help organisations of all sizes and sectors improve health in the workplace and to work towards achieving accreditation of the Workplace Wellbeing Charter.

ABOUT THE WORKPLACE WELLBEING CHARTER

The Workplace Wellbeing Charter is an opportunity for employers to demonstrate their commitment to the health and well-being of their workforce. The positive impact that employment can have on health and wellbeing is now well documented. There is also strong evidence to show how having a healthy workforce can reduce sickness absence, lower staff turnover and boost productivity - this is good for employers, workers and the wider economy.

The Workplace Wellbeing Charter provides employers with an easy and clear guide on how to make workplaces a supportive and productive environment in which employees can flourish.

Organisations of all sizes can use the Charter standards. The Commitment level has been developed as a baseline for all businesses to achieve and acts as a useful checklist for smaller organisations to ensure legal obligations are met. The criteria for small businesses should not involve significant financial investments, and there are lots of free resources and guidance on the Charter website as well as support from your local provider.

Employers who volunteer to sign up will find help and support available through the Charter website. This will include a network of providers who can offer employers the services and advice they need to be accredited with the Charter, and help them to build the healthy workforce that business needs for the future.

www.workplacewellbeing.org.uk

WHAT YOU CAN DO TO SUPPORT YOUR ACCREDITATION

If you are considering applying for Charter accreditation we recommend you search for a provider in your area using the Charter website www.wellbeingcharter.org.uk

Complete a self-assessment using the benchmarking tool on the website. Your local provider can offer advice and support to help with this process and advise on next steps.
FURTHER SUPPORT AND GUIDANCE

Mental Health Foundation. National charity who provide information, resources, latest news and research and signposting links on a wide range of mental health and wellbeing topics. www.mentalhealth.org.uk

New Economics Foundation Wellbeing at work review by the creators of the five ways to wellbeing www.neweconomics.org/publications/entry/well-being-at-work

Institute of Health Equity Several reports on health and wellbeing in the workplace www.instituteofhealthequity.org/projects/increasing-employment-opportunities-and-improving-workplace-health

Mindful Employer Information, guidance and sources of support on mental health in the workplace. www.mindfulemployer.net/support/links-library

Reading Well – The Reading Agency Reading Well Books on Prescription helps people understand and manage their health and wellbeing using self-help reading. There is a book list for common mental health conditions. www.readingagency.org.uk/adults/quick-guides/reading-well

One You A key resource to promote adult health is the One You campaign. One You encourages people to reappraise their lifestyle choices, put themselves first and do something about their own health. Simply search One You online for a free online health quiz. There is also information and links to local sources of support to make a behaviour change. https://www.nhs.uk/oneyou#F3opDqKxBdb5p25L.97
REFERENCES


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