

This guide is
only for the UK



I CARE about mental health

A Manager's Guide to taking
care of your team (UK only)

Introduction

Mental health problems can affect any one of us at any time. We all have mental health and sometimes, like our physical health, it can become unwell. However, people can be hesitant to ask for the help they need because of the stigma that often surrounds these issues.

Together we will change that. We can create a supportive environment where people feel able to speak freely about mental health and are confident about seeking the support and treatment they need.

Everyone has a role to play, both in looking after their own mental health and creating a mentally healthy workplace. As a manager, you have an important part to play in making this happen – promoting a healthy culture where people feel valued and supported, and supporting your colleagues who may become unwell.

This booklet will guide you on what to do if you notice that one of your colleagues is struggling with their mental health.






You're not expected to have all the answers – your role is to listen, help them make decisions, work out what the next steps may be and let them know what support is available. And the steps in this book will help you do that...

What is mental health?

Mental health includes our emotional, psychological and social wellbeing. It affects how we think, feel and act. It also helps determine how we handle stress, relate to others, and make choices.

Mental ill health can range from feeling 'a bit down', to common disorders such as anxiety and depression, to more severe and far less common conditions such as bipolar disorder or schizophrenia.

Most people's mental health goes up and down depending on the pressures or experiences in their life. A person may therefore feel in good mental health generally, but also experience stress or anxiety from time to time.

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Identify

watch out for signs and symptoms

Sometimes, people may not realise that their mental health is deteriorating. Their symptoms may build up over time and it may take someone else close to them to recognise that they have a mental health issue.

Recognising early that someone is struggling with their mental health means that they can get the support they need before their condition becomes more serious.

Certain symptoms are common in specific mental health problems, but bear in mind that **no two people behave in exactly the same way when they are unwell**. And some people may not show any outward signs of being unwell.

One or two symptoms alone can't predict a mental illness. But if someone is experiencing several at a time, it may mean that they are unwell.

Have you noticed changes in...

...a person's thought processes?

...their personality?

...how they interact with people?

...their physical appearance?

Being tuned in to how your colleagues are feeling will help you to identify any uncharacteristic behaviours, which may indicate that they are struggling with their mental health.

I C A R E tip

Symptoms vary from person to person, so take care not to make assumptions or listen to gossip, but talk to the person directly.

Signs to look out for may include...



Someone making more mistakes than usual, seeming unable to concentrate on what they're doing or having difficulty making decisions. They may also be missing deadlines, or you may notice changes in their work output.



Someone who is irritable, tearful or demonstrating mood swings. They may also be less engaged or have an uncharacteristic loss of confidence.



You may notice someone starting to consistently arrive late or taking unofficial time off. Or they may be working longer hours and not taking breaks. Another warning sign is if someone is withdrawing from the team and no longer joining in on team or office conversations.



Someone who seems tired all the time or to have a constant cold. They may exhibit changes in eating habits, or have rapid weight gain or loss. Or they may look like they haven't made an effort with their appearance, which is not like them.

Connect

talk to them and let them know you're there to help

Many people don't feel they can ask for help or talk about how they're feeling. That's why it's important for you to regularly ask team members "how are you doing?" and create an environment where people feel able to be open and honest about mental health issues.

If you think one of your colleagues may be struggling with their mental health, you need to talk to them. Don't wait for them to raise the issue. A mental health problem can quickly get worse, so it's important for you to take the lead. One of the most important things you can do is listen. In some cases, this may be all the help an individual needs.

Every conversation on mental health issues will be different, but here are some ideas on how to get started:

- 1 Choose an appropriate place** – somewhere private and quiet and, if possible, neutral.
- 2 Reassure them of confidentiality** – let them know that the conversation is confidential and that their ability to do their job is not being questioned.
- 3 Give them time and encourage them to talk** – ask simple, non-judgemental questions ("How are you doing?", "Is there anything we can do to help?", "You seem a bit down/under pressure/upset/frustrated/angry. Is everything OK?") and let them explain in their own words.
- 4 Don't make assumptions** – don't try to guess what the problem may be – let them tell you what the problem is, how it impacts their work, what support they need etc. Remain open-minded and curious.
- 5 Listen and respond flexibly** – treat them as an individual and focus on them, not the problem.
- 6 Address any issues that may be affecting their performance at work** – do this early in the conversation in an open and non-judgemental way eg. "I've noticed that you've sometimes been arriving late recently and wondered if there was a problem?".

What if...

...they are reluctant to talk?	Do reassure them of confidentiality and let them know that you want to help.	Don't rush them or pressure them to talk, but let them know that you are always available.
...you think you are part of the problem?	Do ask someone else trustworthy to get involved so it's easier for them to talk.	Don't use your involvement in the issue as a reason to put off doing anything.
...they are tearful or upset?	Do let them know it's OK to be upset and that you are there to help them.	Don't be overly concerned – getting upset may be a natural part of the process they need to go through. But be sensitive to what they can cope with – if the session is not proving helpful, then rearrange another time in the near future to discuss the issues when they are less upset.
...the conversation becomes heated or confrontational?	Do stop the conversation and make arrangements for a more formal meeting with OH or HR.	Don't get pulled into an argument or heated discussions.

I C A R E tip

You don't need to be an expert to talk about mental health. Stay curious, show empathy and understanding, actively listen, speak calmly, and be patient – be prepared for some silences.

Address

be proactive in providing support

Having started the conversation, the aim is to get to a point where you can explore together, and agree on, some positive, practical support measures to address the key issues they're struggling with. This may take some time and it's important that you don't rush but allow them to move forward at a pace that they're comfortable with.

People often have a pretty good idea about the support they need and how they can manage the triggers of their mental health. If, however, they can't identify appropriate support, work with them to explore what they need.

Questions you could ask to help them identify appropriate support are provided to the right.

Even if the cause of their mental health problem is not work-related, making adjustments to their role, how they do their role, or providing extra support often means that people can continue to work successfully.

Remember:

Any changes to roles or responsibilities will need to be done in line with any local procedures and you should always check this with your local HR first.

I C A R E tip

Develop an action plan with them that suits their needs and agree when you will review it together. Focus on what they CAN do, not what they can't.

If work appears to be an issue, you should complete the assessment tool 'Identifying workplace pressures' to identify their specific triggers and develop an action plan with them.

Would it help them to make changes to...



...the support they get?

- Additional training, coaching or job shadowing.
- Allocation of a mentor or 'buddy'.
- Support with managing/prioritising workload and trouble-shooting issues.
- Identification of a 'safe space' where they can take time out if necessary.
- Increased levels of feedback.
- Mediation if there are difficulties between colleagues.



...the way they do their role?

- Different work options: working from home, part-time, job-share, flexible working around agreed outputs.
- Changes to shift patterns.
- Agreement on time off for going to counselling etc.
- Earlier or later start/finish times.
- Changes to break times (eg. shorter, more frequent breaks).
- Changes to working environment/workspace (eg. quieter space).



...their role (short or long-term)

- Are there tasks/responsibilities they find particularly stressful?
- Is there a need to review their job description/responsibilities?
- Do they need training or support to apply for vacancies/secondments in other departments?

Recommend

let them know what additional help is available

As well as the support you provide to your colleague as their manager, there is a lot of additional support available, both internally and externally, which you can make them aware of and, if necessary, help them to access.

Details of the formal support available is provided to the right. **There are also many informal ways in which you can help your colleague and they can help themselves which, if you feel it's appropriate, you can discuss with them.**

- **Provide information** on sources of self-help and 'sharing experiences' – people talking about their experience of mental health problems (you will find information on this on the HSE Wellbeing intranet).
- **Encourage them to do positive things** to support their mental health eg:



keeping active – regular exercise helps to relieve stress, improve sleep and boost overall mood



eating well – eating plenty of wholegrains, nuts, beans, fruit and vegetables provides the nutrients the mind needs to function well. Sugary foods have a negative effect on mood and energy levels



practising mindfulness – meditation, breathing and yoga increase awareness of thoughts and feelings and help manage them (see the HSE Wellbeing intranet for further information).

- **Provide regular opportunities to discuss**, review and reflect on their positive achievements to help develop their self-esteem and better manage their mental health triggers.

I C A R E tip

Your colleague's family doctor can also give advice about what support and treatment is available for someone suffering with a mental health problem.

Where they can find information, help and support...

Occupational Health

The OH team offer an impartial, independent advisory service, responsible to both the employee and manager. Managers can refer to OH for advice and support when a person's health appears to be affecting their work, or if their work appears to be affecting their health.

Employee Assistance Programme (EAP)

The EAP provides free and confidential support and advice for life's challenges, whether they're at home or at work. It is available to all employees and can support them to resolve personal and work-related problems which may be affecting their health, wellbeing and work performance.

HSE Wellbeing intranet

Useful information and resources on mental health, nutrition, physical activity and smoking, as well as our social networking platform, **Yammer**, where people can join and create groups relevant to their work and interests.

Mental health charities

These raise awareness and promote understanding, as well as provide advice and support to empower anyone experiencing a mental health problem. The sites below can provide general information on a range of topics including:

- types of mental health problems
- where to get help
- medication and alternative treatments.

Mind (UK): <https://www.mind.org.uk>

Beyond Blue: <https://www.beyondblue.org.au>

Encourage

keep track of their progress and continue to care

Regardless of whether someone needs to take time off work while they are unwell or carries on working, your continued support is essential to their recovery.

Supporting your colleague at work

Do...

- Keep communicating with them – find out if the support measures you've put in place are working or need tweaking.
- Continue to offer practical support – adjust your support and involvement to match their changing needs.
- Find out what they wish colleagues to be told, by whom and when
 - be guided by them and watch out for any negative reactions from other team members.

Don't...

- Micromanage – people may feel they aren't trusted, which may make self-esteem or anxiety issues worse.
- Remove all challenging and meaningful work – people may lose motivation to work.
- Be distant – this may reinforce feelings of stigma or shame around mental health.



Just because people are back at work and looking fine, they may still be unwell and will continue to need your support, particularly during their first few weeks back. Continue to check-in with them and let them know you're always there to help.

Supporting your colleague who's off sick

Do...

- Reassure them about practical issues.
- Agree with them the frequency and method of communication that suits them best.
- Offer the same support as someone with a physical health problem eg. in some countries, this may mean sending a 'get well soon' card or flowers.
- Agree what information they would, and would not, like shared with colleagues (and encourage colleagues to stay in touch if that's what the person would like).

Don't...

- Avoid communication – people may feel that they are not missed or not valued.
- Put pressure on them to disclose personal or medical information – it's their choice to disclose this or not.
- Put pressure on them to name a return date – it may be impossible for them to know how long their recovery will take.

Supporting a colleague who's returning to work

Do...

- Offer to meet up at a neutral place to plan their return together – this helps to build trust and engagement.
- Discuss what, if any, adjustments would help to ease them back into work such as a phased return (see also page 5 for ideas on adjustments which may support their successful return to work).
- Make them feel welcome on their return and update them on what's been happening while they were away, including social and work developments.
- Monitor workload (some people may try to take on too much).
- Continue to have informal chats with them to see how they're doing and give positive and constructive feedback.

Don't...

- Let them return to an impossible in-tray, thousands of emails or a backlog of work.
- Make them feel they are a special case – this may build resentment with them and their colleagues.

What support do you need?

As their manager, you know your colleague well and are best placed to support them. And following the information in this guide will give you some tools to do that.

However, **if you feel that your support is not helping or you are concerned that the problem is becoming more serious, you may want to seek further guidance from HR, senior management or OH.**

Looking out for your own wellbeing is also important. You can explore the following resources for additional information on taking care of your own, as well as others', health and wellbeing.



Employee Assistance Programme:

your local EAP may have resources, eg. factsheets, to help you support your colleagues. You can also personally access free, confidential support and advice for your own challenges, whether work-related or personal (provision varies per country).

Healthy High Performance:

free course available for all via myLearning. Find out how to look after your own wellbeing, as well as promoting and supporting your team's.

People Skills Hub:

toolkit of resources including practical exercises, how-to guides, self-assessments and audio lessons to address a wide range of behavioural and leadership skills.

