



# Workplace Mental Health Toolkit.

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## What is mental health and why it should matter to businesses

A mental illness is a disorder that has been diagnosed by a medical professional and it significantly interferes with an individual's cognitive, emotional or social abilities. There are different types of mental illness and they can vary in severity from depression, anxiety and bipolar disorder, to schizophrenia, eating disorders and personality disorders.

A mental health problem also interferes with a person's cognitive, emotional or social abilities, but may not be severe enough for a diagnosis. Mental health problems often occur as a result of life stressors, and are usually less severe and last longer. These often are solved with time or when the person's situation changes.

Mental health in the workplace includes everything from the most common symptoms of stress and anxiety, all the way to more complex mental health conditions, such as depression, bipolar disorder and obsessive-compulsive disorder. 1 in 4 people will experience mental health issues each year and 9 out of 10 people that suffer from mental health will face some kind of stigma or discrimination.

The UK has the **4th highest rate of antidepressant prescriptions in Europe**, standing at **£50million per year** and it has been researched that **56% of adults when asked said they would not hire someone who suffered from depression, even if they were the right candidate for the job.**

Poor mental health is one of the biggest issues in the workplace today, causing **over 70 million working days to be lost each year**. This not only has a massive impact on individual employees but poor mental health will have repercussions for employers. These include increased staff turnover, sickness absence, burnout and exhaustion, decreased motivation and productivity.

70 million working days are lost per year due to staff illness related to mental ill health. This costs businesses approximately £70-100billion. When asked, 1 in 5 people said that they would take a day off work due to stress and in the last 6 years the percentage of number of working days lost to due stress, anxiety and depression has increased by 24%.

Looking after employee mental health should matter to businesses because it benefits both employees and employers. If employees feel that they are looked after and listened to, then they will speak to managers about their feelings and worries and then days off work and decreased productivity could be avoided, therefore avoiding costing the company money.



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**70 million +** working days are lost per year due to mental ill health

This costs businesses £70-100 billion



Cost to NHS **£50million** per year

**56%** of adults said they would not hire someone with depression

# How to talk about mental health

Good mental health should be a priority for all businesses. A way to make this a priority is through communication. Talking is key in helping to raise awareness and to make staff feel comfortable and supported. Here are some ways that managers can talk about mental health and get it on the agenda.

## Have check-ins



Make it common practice in your business or workplace to have check-ins. These check-ins with managers should not be a time to discuss to-dos or status updates. Instead, they should be a chance for employees to open up about any anxiety, stress or worries at work, or at home, and to let their managers know. If these happen regularly, then it is more likely mental health issues will be picked up quicker by managers and can be addressed before they develop into something more serious.

## Acknowledge it may be awkward



Everyone has different levels of comfort when it comes to having conversations about mental health. Managers can address this issue by saying to staff "I know this may not be comfortable for us both, but we need to have this conversation because you are cared for as a member of staff". There are other ways to start the conversation, using a number scale for employees to answer questions, or other metaphorical references such as using weather is a way for staff to move past the first awkward stage of the conversation.

## Know when to stop



During a conversation with an employee, a manager may notice that the employee is consistently responding to questions with "It's fine" or they are changing the subject, so it is probably best to end the conversation there. An employee doesn't want to feel as if their manager is pushing them to answer something that they don't want. That would then have a negative effect as staff may shut down and not want to talk again.

## Staff don't have to share



During check-in meetings, staff members may not want to share any information with their managers. This is also OK. Employees need to be made to feel comfortable about sharing, or alternatively, not. Managers can address this by saying to staff "I invite you to share because I care about you. You absolutely don't have to answer. I don't want to pry. But please know that I'm happy to talk about anything you want to talk about." There are cultural differences in how people choose to ask for help, and these need to be acknowledged by managers.



## Spot the signs

The reason that mental health has become such an issue in the workplace is because so many cases go undetected for a long time and then they become severe and inhibiting. The signs of mental health problems can be difficult to spot in staff members, but employers can take part in a Mental Health at Work First Aid course, which will teach managers how to look for signs. Some of the easiest to spot signs are:

### Emotional

Employees may show signs of being overly emotional. They may be sensitive to criticism and exhibit signs of losing their confidence. An employee who previously had a strong sense of humour and was a role model for other staff may show changes in their personality.

### Physical

Employees who are struggling with mental health may show signs of being physically poorly. This could include having a constant cold or fatigue while at work. Employers may notice that staff members have suffered weight loss or gain and physical changes in their appearance. The staff member may stop making an effort with their appearance when coming to work.

### Cognitive

Managers may notice staff members making mistakes in their work that they were not making before. Someone suffering from mental health issues may struggle to make decisions, in their personal life and professional life. Managers should be on the lookout for staff members who have an unexplained drop in performance levels at work.

### Behavioural

Employees who are showing changes in their personal and professional behaviour may be struggling with their mental health. Things like arriving late for work, not taking a lunch break, not joining in with workplace jokes with other colleagues, missing deadlines and becoming more introvert/extrovert are common signs.

## Prevention

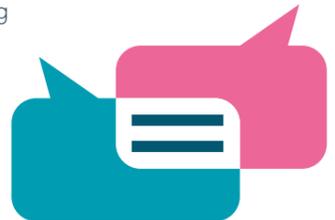
The best way to help with employee's mental health is to have systems in place that prevent employees from getting into a bad place with their mental health in the first place. This can be done by having an open and caring culture where employees feel safe, supported and listened to. Here are a few ways to help with prevention:

### #1 Mental Health Policy

Having a mental health policy shows to employees that the company they work for cares about looking after their wellbeing. It will also give them a place to look if they are beginning to feel that they are struggling. It also provides a starting point for conversations for employees and employers.

### #2 Talk about Mental Health

Most companies have communication boards, staff newsletters/bulletins or briefing meetings where they will discuss important information and news regarding the business. This is a prime time for the managers to discuss mental health. This could also be a time to check in with staff to see how they are feeling, are there any deadlines they are worried about or is anything happening in their department. They may not want to discuss it at that moment, but employees know that they can come and talk to managers if there is a problem.



### #3 Survey Your Staff

A good opportunity for staff to open up about issues is through a survey. A simple questionnaire where staff can let managers know on a scale of how they are feeling, some may choose to do this anonymously or others may want to put their name. Either way, do this at regular intervals throughout the year, not just once.

### #4 Encourage Staff Breaks

In an office type situation, employees can find it hard to take breaks that actually take them away from their desks or workspace. Employers can encourage employees to go to a break area, or coffee area and have a short break, as long as employees respect this time and don't let it become too long. Employers can also introduce something called a 'power-down hour' where they encourage employees to take an hour break from their emails once a day.

### #5 Expectations of Staff

With mental health on the rise, it is a good time for employers to review their job descriptions and expectations of staff to make sure these are clear and realistic. If employers notice that these are not realistic, then it might be what is contributing to staff struggling with their mental health. Employers should think about how employee's success is measured and how people are rewarded.

# Intervention

Employers can put into place strategies to help prevent employees suffering from mental health but issues may still arise, and that is expected. Employers need to know what to do and how to intervene appropriately when issues arise.

## #1 Provide Guidance

When an employee is struggling, managers can offer guidance documents, policies and support to employees on how to manage stress. Problems with stress occur when there is an imbalance between what is being asked and expected of someone, and what they believe they can achieve related to those demands. This guidance and support can also help employees to understand how to become more resilient and positive to changes in the workplace.

## #2 Have a Peer-to-Peer support system

This is a great opportunity for employees to talk to people of the same level about similar experiences, worries, or stresses. Or it could be an informal drop-in session with a manager or someone from HR, where people can go and discuss and talk through anything they may be going through that might be affecting their mental health.

## #3 Flexible Working

Employers could encourage periods of flexible working hours, or working from home during times of stress for employees. Coming into the office may be a trigger for some people or make their situation worse. Working from home means employees are in an environment they feel relaxed in and can help them overcome their stresses or worries, to then return to work when they are better.

## #4 Communication

Talking is one of the points in prevention as well as here in intervention. That is because communication is key! Employees need to know that they are being listened to and supported. Remind staff throughout the calendar year of the support available to them inside and outside of work. This will keep them engaged with the workplace and will help their mental well-being.



# Protection

Staff need to be protected and feel they are being well looked after if their illness becomes serious and they need time off work. There are certain things that companies can do to protect their employees, should this happen.

## #1 Payments

It is important that staff need to know how their pay will be affected if they need to have time off for mental health reasons. This needs to be clear and easy for staff to access so their questions are answered, and it won't add to their stress. Some companies offer employee benefits that will offer a regular income if a staff member is unable to attend work.

## #2 Use Outside Help

Occupational Health is there to offer guidance and support for employers and the workplace. There are also charities that offer support and guidance on changes that can be made in the workplace to support staff if they are suffering from mental health. It may be that you have an employee support package that offers them counselling or CBT sessions free of charge.

## #3 Return to Work Plans and Meetings

Companies should have return to work and plans and meetings for those who have been off work due to mental health reasons. These should be tailored to the needs of the particular staff member. The plans should allow for employees to have a phased return to work when they are ready, maybe only working a few hours a day, or half days throughout the week. They should also include the tasks and expectations for the employee during that time, but there should not be too much pressure placed on them during this phased return. These meetings should happen regularly to ensure the employee has not returned to work too early.

## #4 Communication

Again, keep the conversation and the talk going. Often, support for staff can be dropped or forgotten about once they are settled back in their work. It is important to have ongoing meetings to prevent any problems from reoccurring and to continue the support for staff who have been struggling.



# Mental Health First Aid

Mental Health First Aid teaches people to identify and support colleagues at work who may be experiencing or at risk for a mental health crisis and connect them with the correct employee resources for help.

The course is based around three Core Components:



Managers are Your Front Line to Healthier Environments.

- 84% of UK line managers believe they are responsible for employee wellbeing.
- 49% of line managers reported a wish for basic training in common mental health conditions.
- 15% of employees who disclosed mental health issues to their line manager reported being disciplined, dismissed or demoted – Data source: Centre for Mental Health.

Organisations can reduce these costs by up to 30% by implementing small changes, including **Mental Health First Aid Training.**



## Mental Health First Aid + Training for Your Business.

Oxford CBT's 2-Day Mental Health First Aid training course ensures that every participant comes away with the five skills key to spotting and managing a potential mental health event.

- 1 Assess the situation.
- 2 Encourage self help.
- 3 Listen non-judgmentally.
- 4 Encourage professional help.
- 5 Give reassurance and information.

There are long term benefits to your organisation as well.

- **Reduced Mental Health Stigma** – Increased mental health literacy across your team.
- **Mental & Physical Wellbeing** – Healthy employees make for healthy workplaces.
- **A Team of First Responders** – Employees and managers who know what to look for, do and say.

