

28. Managing Mental Health in the Workplace

1 OVERVIEW

The term ‘mental health’ includes signs of stress and anxiety and mental health conditions that have been diagnosed by a medical professional, such as depression or PTSD. Mental health concerns make up one of the top three reasons for employee absence.

The guidance below will help you to provide initial and ongoing support and help for employees going through mental health problems. By creating an open and honest workplace where mental ill health can be discussed, you can help to ensure the necessary support is offered to employees when needed.

2 RELEVANT LEGISLATION

Health and safety legislation determines that organisations must undertake to create a safe workplace where risks to mental health and wellbeing are limited as far as possible. Additionally, employees with a disability have protection against discrimination under the Equality Act 2010, and therefore there is an obligation for employers to introduce reasonable adjustments for disabled employees.

3 INDICATORS

To prevent mental health problems from escalating, recognition and early intervention is important. Obvious indications that an employee is suffering from a mental health problem may not be present, however, some early signs can include:

- behavioral, mood or temperament changes, especially when communicating with others.
- decrease in productivity and focus.
- inability to make decisions and problem solving.
- showing signs of tiredness or being withdrawn.
- reducing intake of food or increasing intake of alcohol, cigarettes etc.

4 EMPLOYER RESPONSIBILITIES

When dealing with an employee with mental health concerns, you should be open, welcoming and friendly. You should invite the employee to regular private meetings and ask them to talk openly about their mental health problems. Actively encourage the employee to be open and honest and inform you of any issues to allow them to be addressed.

5 ACTION PLANNING

The mental health charity, Mind, recommends that where an employer identifies a mental health issue, they should work alongside the employee to create a personal wellness action plan that will help the management of their mental health. This will support ongoing open communication with the employee and may result in mutually agreed steps being set in place.

A wellness action plan should cover:

- actions and measures that can support the employee’s mental health
- symptoms and triggers for poor mental health
- the impact mental health problems have, or could have, on the employee’s performance
- any workplace support required from the employer or colleagues
- any positive actions the employee can take when suffering from poor mental health
- a review process to ensure the workplace support is having the required effect.

Any information in the plan should be kept confidential and regularly reviewed with the employee.

6 WORKPLACE ADJUSTMENTS

A disability is defined as “a mental or physical impairment that has a substantial long-term effect on normal day-to-day activities”. An employer is legally obliged to make reasonable adjustments to an employee’s role or workplace if they have a disability that places them at a disadvantage when performing their role. You should consider all reasonable workplace adjustments for an employee who is suffering from a mental health issue.

Examples of adjustments might include:

- adjusting hours of work or the location of work.
- adjusting or reallocating duties of the job role.
- making amendments to the workplace environment, for example adjusting lighting in the employee’s office.

Once the adjustments are agreed, they should be regularly reviewed to ensure they are having the required effect.

7 MANAGING ABSENCE AND RETURN TO WORK

Where the employee is absent from work due to mental health concerns, you should communicate with the employee on a regular basis during their absence. Your normal sickness absence policy and procedure will apply to the employee’s absence as normal, subject to putting any reasonable adjustments in place for the employee.

Upon the employee’s return from absence, a return to work plan may be agreed between you and the employee to ensure the necessary support is in place. This may include a temporary return on amended working hours or temporarily removing stressful duties.

8 IDENTIFYING AND RESPONDING TO MENTAL HEALTH IN THE WORKPLACE

- Ensure that you understand how to identify common signs of poor mental health. You should also be fully aware of how discrimination legislation can apply to mental health conditions.
- Ensure that your employees are fully aware of the issues of mental health and can recognise symptoms of mental ill health.
- Consider arranging for the introduction of mental health first aiders who are able to provide direct assistance in this situation.
- Encourage employees to raise mental health concerns or any workplace concerns to you.

- Look for the common signs of poor mental health - is the employee demonstrating unusual behavior, such as an increase in unexplained absences, poor performance, poor timekeeping, poor decision making, a lack of energy, uncommunicative or distressed behavior?
- Invite the employee to discuss their wellbeing and whether any workplace support is needed.
- Remind the employee that they can raise any concerns, at any time, and that you will support them.
- Explore reasonable adjustments that can be made in the workplace in order to assist the employee in their daily role.
- Consider referring the employee to a relevant third-party medical advisor or occupational health service.
- Encourage the employee to make use of your Employee Assistance Programme, where available.
- Implement an action plan, including any reasonable adjustments that can be made to the employee's working day.
- Continue to monitor the employee and hold periodic reviews.
- Maintain contact with an employee who is absent from work because of mental ill health. Agree how this contact will be carried out and by whom.
- Use this contact to provide updates to the absent employee, discuss their wellbeing and highlight workplace support available.
- Consider a phased return to work for an employee who is absent from work and agree what support can be provided to the employee during this period.
- If there are conduct or capability matters to address, consider whether adjustments need to be made to take mental ill health into consideration.
- If the problem remains unsolved despite changes that have been made, consider implementing your usual procedures to assess employee capability.
- Remain aware of how poor mental health in a colleague can affect others within the team. Be available to provide additional support and guidance to team members.

9 NEXT STEPS

- Develop an understanding of the signs of mental health conditions.
- Develop an open relationship with your employees so that you understand what behavior is 'normal' for them and you can identify any early indicators of mental ill health.
- Be aware of employee behavior in the workplace. Are your employees regularly working long hours? Are your employees taking their breaks? Encourage employees to make healthy choices in their behavior at work.

10 FACTSHEETS TO HELP

- Health and Safety in the Workplace
- Promoting an Equal Opportunities Workplace and Avoiding Discrimination

11 FOR MORE ADVICE AND INFORMATION

ACAS - (Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service) free and impartial information and advice to employers and employees on all aspects of workplace relations and employment law. www.acas.org.uk

Achieve in Bath & North East Somerset - free recruitment support, advice and help. Matching job seekers, employers and course providers to help employers recruit, train and retain employees. www.achieveinbathnes.co.uk

Future Bright - free help & support for businesses and employees to realise their full potential. Provide access to training and development, workshops and networking. HR support to promote career progression and best practice to attract and retain staff. www.futurebright.org.uk

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