

Mental Health Guidance for Managers

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What is Mental Health?

Mental health is the mental and emotional state in which we feel able to cope with the normal pressures of everyday life. Factors both in and out of work affect the mental health of employees and move them up or down a continuum that ranges from good to poor.

For example, an employee may generally have positive mental health but a relationship break up or a bereavement may trigger a period of depression moving them into poor mental health. Alternatively, an employee with a mental health condition, such as depression, may have developed coping strategies that are working well and mean they move into having positive mental health.

Anyone can suffer a period of mental ill health. It can emerge suddenly, as a result of a specific event, or gradually, where it worsens over time. It can range from feeling stressed to common conditions such as anxiety and depression and, in limited cases, to severe mental health conditions such as bipolar disorder or schizophrenia.

Some conditions can be persistent and may be classed as a disability, while others come and go, giving the individual 'good days' and 'bad days'. While someone may be diagnosed with a mental health condition, with the right support they can still enjoy positive mental health.

What Causes Mental Ill Health?

Mental ill health can be triggered by a variety of factors, and could be from a specific or traumatic event, a number of events (build-up of things), the changing seasons (Seasonal Affective Disorder), hormones (Premenstrual Dysphoric Disorder), or even certain medication an employee might be taking for a physical health issue. Many causes of mental ill health are related to problems outside of the workplace. For example, a family bereavement or illness may lead to stress, anxiety and/or depression.

While work can be good for people's mental health (providing a sense of identity and personal achievement), the workplace can sometimes have a negative effect on mental health. Common workplace causes of mental ill health include:

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- Unmanageable workloads and/or demands
- Poorly defined job roles and responsibilities
- Lack of control over work
- Unhealthy work-life balance
- Poor relationships with management and/or work colleagues
- Organisational change and/or job insecurity

While the council may not be able to prevent all the causes of mental ill health, it can take steps to reduce the work-related causes.

Managers Responsibility

The overarching principle for managing mental ill health is for managers to be open, non-judgemental, supportive, empathetic and caring. Never downplay how someone is feeling, or judge someone for feeling a way that you would not. What might seem minor to one person could be huge for someone else, and it is not appropriate to cast judgement on this, everyone should be treated with respect.

It is a manager's responsibility to take all reasonable steps in supporting an employee experiencing mental ill health, as well as promoting positive mental health within their teams. This may include making reasonable adjustments, taking steps to remove the stigma attached to mental health, supporting staff to be open and honest about their mental health.

Managers must ensure that they do not discriminate against anyone who is experiencing mental ill health, either current staff or job applicants, as well as ensuring their staff also do not discriminate. It is your role to create and promote a supportive environment, where staff feel safe to discuss these issues.

A Legal Duty

Employers must make sure they comply with legal obligations when dealing with mental ill health. Where an employee's mental ill health amounts to a disability, managers must

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consider making 'reasonable adjustments' that will allow the employee to carry out their job.

A person is disabled if they have 'a physical or mental impairment' which has 'a substantial and long-term adverse effect' on their 'ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities'. For example, someone with a mild form of depression that has only minor effects on their daily life may not be covered. But someone with severe depression that has substantial effects on their daily life is likely to be considered disabled.

Managers must consider not just current employees, but also anyone with a mental health condition who is applying to join the organisation. It is unlawful to discriminate against applicants because of a previous or current mental health condition which amounts to a disability.

Managers must also assess the risks of stress-related mental ill health for all its employees arising from work activities and take steps to effectively manage and control them. For example, designing jobs to be within the capabilities of employees. The [Health and Safety Executive has detailed management standards](#) that employers should follow.

Spotting the Signs of Mental Ill Health

Whilst everyone will exhibit slightly different signs of mental ill health, there are some more common signs that you should look out for. The below are examples of how employees 'normal' behaviour might change:

- An increase in unexplained absences or sick leave.
- Poor decision-making or difficulty in making decisions.
- Lack of energy and uncommunicative or moody behaviour
- Looking tired and paying less attention to their appearance than normal.
- Producing a lower standard of work and making uncharacteristic mistakes.
- Decreased concentration levels and taking longer to complete tasks.
- Poor timekeeping and increased absences from work.
- Heightened emotional state or withdrawal from social interaction.

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The mandatory Mental Health Awareness e-learning module will include further information, which can be revisited. As a manager, you will also receive mental health training for managers, if you haven't already received this training, please contact HR.

Reasonable Adjustments

A 'reasonable adjustment' is a change or adaptation to the working environment that has the effect of removing or minimising the impact of the individual's disability in the workplace so they are able to undertake their job duties, or apply for a job, without being at a disadvantage.

Whether an adjustment is reasonable will depend on the situation and available resources. However, many adjustments are simple and inexpensive, and just require good people management. Any adjustment should be made in collaboration with the employee.

Adjustments, with the employee's agreement, might include:

- Flexible working hours or changes to their start and/or finish times
- Changes to their role (this could be temporary or permanent)
- Moving their workplace (such as moving their desk to better suit their needs or homeworking)
- Increased help and support from their manager to ensure they can manage their workload
- Providing extra training, coaching or mentoring.

Once in place, an adjustment should be regularly reviewed to check it is still appropriate and/or working as intended.

Please read the Guide – Reasonable Adjustments for further information.

Work-Related Stress

Some stress is good, and it creates motivation, energy, and positive challenge. However, too much stress can be a negative and causes a person's resilience to lower, meaning they are less able to cope with changes or pressures that they previously have been able to deal with well.

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Negative stress can come from a variety of places, and could be a combination of causes, such as both personal and work related. Where factors in work are causing negative stress for an employee, managers must work with the individual to address this.

There are many ways to address unhealthy work-related stress, depending on the cause and the individual:

Adjustments to the work schedule	Allow more breaks Allow breaks to take place when needed, rather than a pre-determined schedule Change their working day to start earlier or finish later Allow them to use paid or unpaid leave for appointments related to their mental health Offer a phased return to work (in line with Phased Return to Work Procedure) Allow part-time working on a temporary basis (or permanently if it is what they want)
Adjustments to role and responsibilities	Review their workload and agree what duties they can do Re-assign duties they may struggle with among the rest of the team for a temporary period Discuss vacant positions in the organisation and temporarily transfer them to a different role they want to do

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<p>Adjustments to working environment</p>	<p>Provide partitions, room dividers etc. to enhance soundproofing and visual barriers between workspaces</p> <p>Offer a reserved parking space to make it easier for them to get to work</p> <p>Offer homeworking for some of the week or balancing remote working to being in an office environment.</p> <p>Increase the size of their 'personal work space'</p> <p>Position them as far away as possible from noisy machinery</p> <p>Provide a private space for them to use when they need privacy</p>
<p>Policy changes</p>	<p>Extend additional paid or unpaid leave during a hospitalisation or other absence</p> <p>Allow additional time for them to reach performance milestones</p> <p>Allow them to make certain personal phone calls during the day</p>
<p>Ways to provide additional support and assistance</p>	<p>Assign a mentor or buddy to support and help them</p> <p>Arrange a regular one-to-ones with management to discuss and prioritise tasks</p> <p>If they are able to work from home, allow them to do so when they do not feel able to attend the workplace.</p> <p>Offer additional training on the skills and duties their job requires.</p>

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Supporting Remote Staff

It can be especially difficult to notice the signs of mental health issues when you do not see your staff on a regular basis. This can mean that a staff member struggles with a mental health issue for much longer, which could lead to the issue becoming worse for them. Ultimately, worsening mental health could lead to self-harming or even suicide.

It is therefore especially important to ensure you maintain regular contact with those staff who work elsewhere, such as at home or at a different site. Be aware of any changes you notice to their behaviour, remember that these might be harder to identify with someone working remotely. For those working at home, be aware of the times they work and of their environment in video calls.

By regularly checking in with staff, you can build a good relationship so that they feel able to talk to you about any issues. Consider regular team building activities that can strengthen the team bonds so that staff can support each other. Be mindful to make mental health part of normal discussions, so staff feel safe to talk about mental health and know where to go for support.

Talking About Mental Health

It can be difficult to know where to start when discussing mental health with staff, especially if you are not comfortable with this yourself. If you haven't already received training, please contact HR to receive mental health training for managers, or speak to a Mental Health First Aider.

Discussions about mental health could be as a general topic for discussion in a team meeting, it could be part of a one-to-one, it could be because you are worried about a member of your team, or it could be because the employee has disclosed a mental health issue or concern to you.

As a general principle, any discussions regarding mental health should be conducted in a supportive, non-judgemental, and empathic way. Consider if the discussion should take place in private, and ensure you have allowed sufficient time to talk through this topic

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properly. Employees will not feel encouraged to talk if they feel they may be interrupted, rushed, or judged.

Be mindful that they might not be ready to talk and they should not be pressured into doing so, they may need some time to build confidence and trust and therefore it may take a few attempts of a conversation to get them to open up. Let them know that you are there for them for whenever they are ready and provide some advice on where they can access support. Every conversation a manager has with a team member who may be experiencing mental ill health will be different, however below is a general outline of approaching a sensitive conversation:

- **Encourage the person to talk** - ask simple, open and non-judgmental questions. Let your employee explain in their own words how their mental health problem manifests, the triggers, how it impacts on their work and what support they need.
- **Don't make assumptions** – don't try to guess what symptoms an employee might have and how these might affect their ability to do their job. Many people are able to manage their mental health problem and perform their role to a high standard but may require support measures when experiencing a difficult period.
- **Listen to them and respond flexibly** – everyone's experience of a mental health problem is different so treat people as individuals and focus on the person, not the problem. Sometimes all they will need is for you to just listen, and not to suggest or come up with solutions. Adapt your support to suit the individual and involve them as much as possible in finding solutions to any work related difficulties they're experiencing.
- **Be aware of risks outside the workplace** - Be aware of what is happening in people's personal lives as stress outside of work, for example due to illness, bereavement or financial worries might be contributing to them struggling to cope in the workplace – take interest.
- **Develop an action plan** – work with your employee to develop an individual action plan which identifies the signs of their mental health problem, triggers, the possible impact on their work, who to contact in a crisis, and what support they might need. The plan should include an agreed time to review the support measures to see if they're working.

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- **Encourage people to seek advice and support** – there are lots of places staff can access support, encourage them to use Care First, or speak to their GP to access NHS support such as talking therapy. Show staff the Wellbeing pages on Linc, or print this page off so they can find support from groups online such as Mind Cymru, Samaritans, CALM, Papyrus and more. Ensure that they know who the Mental Health First Aiders are should they need to speak to them.
- **Reassure them** – They may not always be ready to talk fully about the problems they are experiencing so it's important you outline what support is available, tell them your door is always open and let them know you'll make sure they get the support they need. Check in regularly with them and don't forget not everyone is ready to open up in the first conversation.

Please see the [Guidance - Holding a sensitive conversation about mental ill health](#) for more information.

Mental Health First Aiders

The council has a list of qualified Mental Health First Aiders, who will be able to respond and support employees experiencing a mental health crisis. Their role is to keep someone safe during a crisis or when experiencing a severe mental health issue. This could include, but is not limited to:

- An employee experiencing a panic attack
- An employee is wanting to take their own life
- An employee is self-injuring/harming themselves
- An employee has experienced a traumatic event
- An employee experiencing a psychotic state

If an employee discloses that they are harming themselves, or have expressed that they have thought about/have a desire to take their own life, please contact either HR or a Mental Health First Aider for advice on how to support them. Never assume the employee does not mean it or downplay this, it takes a lot of courage to express this feeling to

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someone. Your role is to support them, so be empathetic, understanding and non-judgemental, and seek further advice on how to help the employee.

If a manager is worried about an employee's mental health and safety, but the employee has not disclosed they are in crisis / having a severe issue, please contact HR as all HR Specialists and Business Partners are qualified Mental Health First Aiders.

A list of [Mental Health First Aiders](#) can be found on the Denbighshire County Council website.