Resource 3

How to promote wellbeing and tackle the causes of work-related mental health problems

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60 per cent of employees say they'd feel more motivated and more likely to recommend their organisation as a good place to work if their employer took action to support mental wellbeing.[1]

We all have mental health just as we have physical health – it moves up and down along a spectrum from good to poor. And considering how much time we spend at work, it's not surprising that workplace environments and culture affect our wellbeing.

Smart employers know that organisations perform better when staff are healthy, motivated and focused. Research consistently shows that when employees feel their work is meaningful and they are valued and supported, they tend to have higher wellbeing levels, be more committed to the organisation's goals and, importantly, they perform better too. This strong relationship between levels of staff wellbeing and motivation and business performance is often called 'employee engagement'.

FTSE 100 companies that prioritise employee engagement and wellbeing outperform the rest of the FTSE 100 by 10 per cent.[2] By supporting staff wellbeing, they reap the benefits through enhanced morale, loyalty, commitment, innovation, productivity and profitability. Open and supportive workplaces benefit everyone – employees, employers and the bottom line.

Mind has developed a three-pronged approach to help employers manage mental health in the workplace by:

1. promoting wellbeing for all staff

2. tackling the causes of work-related mental health problems

3. supporting staff who are experiencing mental health problems.

This guide focuses on the first two. It sets out simple, practical and inexpensive steps that any organisation can take. In the first section we look at how adjustments to an organisation's culture can boost employee wellbeing and engagement. In the second we look at steps that line managers and HR teams can take to tackle the causes of mental health problems.

Mind is not providing legal advice but practical guidance – employers may also need to obtain their own legal advice on the approach to take in any particular case.

[1] Populus poll for Mind of 2,060 adults in England and Wales in employment - polled between 6 and 10 March 2013

[2] BITC Workwell FTSE 100 Public Reporting Benchmarking Research Findings, Business in the Community and Towers Watson, London, April 2013, retrieved from www.bitc.org.uk/our-resources/report/workwell-benchmarking-report

1. Promoting wellbeing

In this section we'll look at how adjustments to an organisation's culture can boost employee wellbeing and engagement.

Getting senior leaders on board

Employers should send a clear message that staff wellbeing matters. Colleagues take cues from how leaders behave. When the CEO speaks out about mental health it can have a huge impact. Leaders can also show the organisation's commitment to staff wellbeing by simple actions such as supporting a campaign to encourage all staff to take lunch breaks and to work healthy hours.

If you need help making the case to prioritise mental health, our first guide in this series, *Introduction to mentally healthy workplaces*, clarifies the close relationship between wellbeing, motivation and performance, and breaks down the cost of not acting.

Raising awareness of mental health and wellbeing

In many workplaces mental health is the elephant in the room. Too often, employees are scared to talk to their manager and problems can spiral[3]. Employers need to raise awareness and promote discussion of mental health and wellbeing to proactively challenge this harmful culture.

- **Embed mental health in induction and training** – Ensure staff are given information on how mental health is managed and what support is available as part of induction. Equality and diversity training should also cover mental health; for example, with a scenario exercise to challenge myths and prejudice.

- **Raise the profile** – Invite a speaker on mental health to an event as part of activities for diversity, disability or mental health awareness. We can help you with this – just email work@mind.org.uk. This service is available in England and Wales. Hearing what it's like to have a mental health problem from people who've experienced the issues first hand can help break down negative stereotypes.

- **Make the most of internal communications channels** – Raise awareness through blogs, myth-busters, factsheets, tips for managers, useful web links and FAQs. You can also use posters, noticeboards, staff newsletters, magazines, intranet and internet pages to get the message out.

- **Encourage mental health champions** – People at all levels talking openly about mental health sends a clear message that you will get support if you're experiencing a mental health problem and that this is not a barrier to career development.

- **Make a statement** – Sign the Time to Change pledge to make a public commitment to tackle mental health stigma and discrimination. This will send a powerful message that it's OK to talk about mental health.

[3] A Populus poll for Mind of 2,060 adults in England and Wales in employment (polled between 6 and 10 March 2013) found that, while stress has forced one in five workers to call in sick, 90 per cent say they lied to their boss about the real reason for not turning up. The survey also revealed that less than half of people with a diagnosed mental health problem had told their boss.

Involving staff in dialogue and decision-making

Employee engagement and wellbeing are interdependent – our guide *Introduction to mentally healthy workplaces* looks at this relationship in detail. When staff feel involved and well informed about what's happening in the organisation, it increases motivation and helps people understand how their role fits into the bigger picture.

You should be as open as possible about strategic vision and direction and try to involve all staff in decision-making – not only about how they do their job but also about the strategic direction of the organisation.

Manage organisational changes, such as cost-saving and efficiency measures, new work content and technology, in a way that involves and listens to staff, and take positive action to address any issues identified. When employees are involved in finding solutions they feel ownership of the final decision and morale and productivity levels are less likely to be affected.

How to promote dialogue, feedback and engagement

- staff surveys and focus groups
- staff forums and diversity networks
- engagement steering groups
- monthly or quarterly performance review meetings
- improvement or planning 'away days'
- regular group problem-solving meetings or innovation events
- work-stream groups that bring together different parts of the organisation
- feeding back board decisions to all staff
- effectively using internal communication channels.

A culture of openness

Speak regularly with team members to check how they're doing and to reflect on what might be causing them stress. You can do this at a team level by adding a standing item to team meetings where people talk about wellbeing and stress as a group. Building temperature checks into the organisation's culture in this way can:

- promote open dialogue and embed positive attitudes and behaviours

- help to normalise conversations about mental health

- help staff to think more about their own and colleagues' mental health and what factors can affect this.

Two-way communication

Poor communication can be a significant cause of stress. Levels of staff wellbeing and engagement will be negatively affected if staff feel:

- overloaded with information they cannot process

- excluded from key knowledge and conversations

- unable to feed their views upwards.

Where communication is clear, open, effective, manageable and responsive, staff will be able to access all the information they need to do their job while avoiding overload.

Work/life balance

In the short term long hours might seem manageable, but sustained pressure and a poor work/life balance can quickly lead to stress and burnout, reducing levels of employee productivity, performance, creativity and morale. This can be avoided by encouraging staff to:

- work sensible hours

- take full lunch breaks

- rest and recuperate after busy periods

- avoid working at weekends – especially from home

- take their full annual leave entitlement.

Flexible working, in terms of working time, location or the pattern of working, can support healthier and more productive ways of working for all staff. For example, it can help an employee to manage stress by allowing a later start time twice a week to accommodate exercise. Flexible working benefits employees and employers alike.

- Employers benefit from increased morale, commitment and productivity and reduced sickness absence.

- Employees are able to fit their lives around their work, helping them balance busy lives while remaining healthy and focused.

- Flexible working can be a vital early intervention to prevent mental health problems from getting worse and resulting in sickness absence, and can support a phased return to work after a period of sickness absence.

Wherever possible, senior leaders and managers should be role models for healthier work habits and encourage staff by example.

Learning and development

Research on employee engagement tells us employees need to feel valued, supported and that their work is meaningful. A positive culture that values all staff and invests in their skills and development builds the trust and integrity essential to maintain commitment and productivity levels.

Give staff development opportunities where possible. This can be done in a cost-effective way by using skills and knowledge within the organisation to develop coaching, learning, training and job-shadowing opportunities. Managers should also make themselves available for regular work-related conversations with employees.

Peer support, buddy systems and mentoring

In some cases, people find it easier to speak to someone who isn't their manager. Peer support allows colleagues to support one another outside of the line-management structure and offers a great way to maximise the range of skills and experience held within your organisation. Mentoring and buddy schemes can help new staff to understand your organisation faster and can support all staff to gain confidence and develop new skills.

Positive working relationships and social activities

If you want to take positive action to make the workplace a mutually supportive environment where good work relationships thrive:

- encourage and support a culture of teamwork, collaboration and information-sharing
- promote positive behaviours to avoid conflict and ensure fairness
- ensure robust policies on bullying and harassment are in place and well publicised
- encourage exercise and regular social events to boost staff health, team work and mental wellbeing, such as lunchtime walking clubs or 'Lunch and Learn'.

2. Tackling the causes of mental health problems

In this section we look at steps that line managers and HR teams can take to tackle the causes of mental health problems.

Taking stock

If you don't take stock of your employees' mental wellbeing you won't have a clear picture of what's really going on, so action to achieve good mental health in the workplace may be less effective. Routinely taking a temperature check allows you to:

- understand the factors that affect staff mental wellbeing in your workplace
- identify what you're already doing to support it
- assess the impact your current approach is having
- plan further improvements, enhance morale and increase productivity.

Our guide, *How to take stock of mental health in your workplace*, has practical advice on how to collect vital information about your employees' wellbeing in a joined-up and comprehensive way.

Workplace triggers for stress and mental health problems

- long hours and no breaks
- unrealistic expectations or deadlines
- overly pressurised working environments
- unmanageable workloads or lack of control over work
- inability to use annual leave
- a poor physical working environment
- high-risk roles
- lone working
- geographical isolation
- difficult interpersonal relationships
- poor internal communication
- poor managerial support
- job insecurity or poorly managed change.

Policies and practices that support staff wellbeing

An organisation-wide mental health strategy is essential. Your organisation should have clear policies about promoting wellbeing for all staff, tackling the causes of work-related mental health problems and supporting staff.

Mental health should be at the heart of policies such as: health and safety, working time, sickness absence and return-to-work.

Policies for performance management, disciplinary action, recruitment, change management and redundancy should take account of the impact these processes can have on employees' mental wellbeing. Staff should be signposted to appropriate support and made aware they can have an advocate.

Policies on performance management and disciplinary action also need to recognise that an employee's performance or behaviour can be affected if they are experiencing a mental health problem. Appropriate support and adjustments should be explored before proceeding with formal action.

Policies that relate to the workplace culture such as equality, diversity, inclusion and bullying and harassment should reference mental health.

The organisation's approach to employee engagement and personal development should recognise the key role these approaches play in maintaining staff mental wellbeing.

Training for line managers

The way you manage and support staff who are experiencing a mental health problem can be key in shaping how they cope and recover. Your organisation should:

- provide training on mental health and stress management – including how to spot the signs and how to have supportive conversations with staff

- have clear guidelines for managers on managing mental health issues

- encourage and support positive manager behaviours – see top tips.

Regular one-to-ones

Ask people how one-to-ones can be tailored to suit their particular needs. Staff should also be able to request a meeting outside of the normal schedule if they need to discuss anything important. Regular one-to-ones have significant benefits for employers, employees and the bottom line by:

- boosting employee engagement and building mutual trust

- identifying issues early so employees can get the support they need

- ensuring staff wellbeing is routinely monitored throughout the organisation.

Employers can help by:

- encouraging managers to speak regularly with staff about how they're doing, and explore with them what might be impacting on their mental wellbeing

- ensuring appraisal and supervision procedures ask about mental wellbeing and stress and give staff permission to talk about home as well as work issues if they wish

- maintaining regular, clear lines of communication with all staff, especially those working in isolation, for example with monthly team meetings or regular phone catch-ups.

The work environment

The physical work environment – noise levels, space, temperature and light – can significantly affect staff wellbeing. Make sure you consult people on how to improve the work environment and take action to ensure it is suitable. Space dividers, quiet spaces and reaching agreement on respectful behaviours to help manage noise levels may help tackle some of the typical issues.

Internal and external support pathways

Employees and managers often aren't aware of all the ways they can get support. Make sure all staff understand how mental health is managed in the workplace and what support is available.

To do this you can use the tips on communication channels suggested in the first section. Your organisation should also signpost to external sources of information and advice. For example, the Mind Infoline (0300 123 3393) has details of available local services and employers can also explore partnering with local Minds – there are over 20 local Minds in Wales, providing a range of services to meet the needs of the local community.

Top tips

Line Managers

1. Lead by example

Send a clear message to your staff that their wellbeing matters. Actively encourage your team to adopt healthier working habits by working sensible hours, taking full lunch breaks, taking annual leave and resting and recuperating after busy periods.

2. Build your confidence on mental health

Familiarise yourself with your organisation's mental health policies and practices and the ways staff can seek confidential advice and support. Routinely publicise internal and external support pathways to staff.

3. Normalise mental health

Touch base regularly with your employees to check how they're getting on and think about what might be causing them stress. Create space for them to ask questions and raise issues, and give them permission to talk about home as well as work issues if they wish.

4. Take stock

Include an agenda item at team meetings to together discuss people's wellbeing and what factors are affecting this. A planning session can look at the issues in detail and develop a team action plan to address these. If the organisation runs a staff survey, this could form the basis of the discussion. This will normalise conversations about mental health and help staff think more about their own and colleagues' mental health and what factors can affect this.

5. Be available for your staff

Regular one-to-ones and catch-ups can help maintain good working relationships and build mutual trust. Managers should also help staff to manage workloads — by ensuring work is clearly defined, by communicating expectations clearly, and by agreeing reasonable deadlines with individual staff members.

6. Treat people as individual

Treat employees with respect, praise good work, offer support if there are skills gaps, and try to use a coaching style of management. Listen to your staff and flex your management style to suit the needs of each team member and task. Ask for feedback about the support you provide and what support they need to help them achieve their goals.

7. Embed employee engagement

Promote a culture of open dialogue and involve employees in decisions about how the team is run and how they do their job. Empower staff by using a management style that allows them to be autonomous while ensuring they still feel supported. Make sure employees understand their role in the bigger picture and make clear their contribution to the organisation's vision and aims.

8. Create opportunities for coaching, learning and development

Make sure employees are confident, well equipped and supported to do their job to a high standard. You can help them gain confidence and skills by developing and rewarding their capabilities and by being available for regular work-related conversations as well as providing formal training.

9. Promote positive work relationships

Support a culture of teamwork, collaboration and information-sharing both within the team and across the organisation and role model these positive behaviours to staff. For example, feeding back as soon as someone does good work (rather than waiting until the next scheduled one-to-one meeting) can develop a culture of praise which helps staff feel their efforts are recognised and keeps lines of communication open.

10. Raise awareness

Managers are in a great position to challenge stigma and prejudice throughout the organisation and to get mental health on the agenda with senior leaders. See section one for inspiration about how to raise awareness and promote discussion of mental health and wellbeing at all levels of your organisation.

HR professionals and senior managers

1. Develop a mental health strategy

A clear policy should set out how the organisation will promote wellbeing for all staff, tackle the causes of work-related mental health problems and support staff experiencing them.

2. Carry out a policy and practice review

Make sure your HR policies are joined up and inclusive of mental health. You may want to consider policies on health and safety, working time, sickness absence and return-to-work, recruitment, bullying and harassment, disciplinary action, redundancy, equality and diversity, stress/wellbeing, employee engagement, personal development and performance management (see p.8). Staff should also be given information on how mental health is managed and what support is available as part of induction and equality and diversity training.

3. Ensure line managers are confident discussing mental health

Managers need training and clear guidelines so they're well equipped to support staff experiencing a mental health problem. Mind can help with this – we've developed a range of practical resources for employers and our training and consultancy team can tailor a package to suit your needs. Publicise internal and external support pathways so all staff are clear on how mental health is managed and what support is available.

4. Normalise mental health

Building temperature checks into your organisation's culture helps to normalise conversations about mental health and promote open dialogue and positive attitudes and behaviours. Regular one-to-ones embed this and ensure that staff wellbeing is routinely monitored. Make sure managers regularly meet with staff, ask them how they're doing and are open to discuss issues such as personal development, workload and personal issues.

5. Routinely take stock of mental health

To plan effective improvements, you need a clear picture of the organisation's mental health. Our guide, How to take stock of mental health in your workplace, provides practical advice on how to collect information about your employees' wellbeing so you can identify priorities for action. Look out for areas of the organisation or job roles where there's a risk of poor wellbeing – if timesheets show excessive hours, or if sickness absence rates increase in one area, this may indicate a problem.

6. Promote a good work/life balance

Encourage staff to work sensible hours, take full lunch breaks and recuperate after busy periods. Senior leaders should role model these positive behaviours where possible. Supporting employees to fit their lives around their work with more flexible working practices can also keep people healthy, committed and productive and help reduce sickness absence.

7. Promote positive work relationships

Encourage staff exercise and social events, support a culture of teamwork, collaboration and information-sharing and back this up with robust policies on bullying and harassment. Peer support, buddy systems and mentoring allow colleagues to support one another outside of the official line-management structure and help promote positive work relationships.

8. Prioritise personal development

Support managers to have regular work-related conversations with employees, to coach them and share learning. This type of mentoring helps staff to gain confidence and develop new skills without breaking the bank.

9. Foster employee engagement

Staff need to feel the organisation values and supports them and their work is meaningful. Promoting two-way communication and involving staff in decision-making helps build trust and integrity. Seek out the views of staff, listen to what they say and take action to address any issues identified. This can help you better understand and improve your organisation and staff will repay you with stronger commitment.

10. Ensure the voices of people with mental health problems are heard

Staff forums, diversity networks and other structures that represent the voice of employees should involve and include staff with mental health problems. This helps ensure employers understand people's experiences and can also encourage colleagues with mental health problems to become role models and advocates across the organisation.

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We believe no one should have to face a mental health problem alone. We're here for you. Today. Now. Whether you're stressed, depressed or in crisis. We'll listen, give support and advice, and fight your corner.

Mind's Workplace wellbeing Team aims to provide employers with simple, inexpensive and practical ways to improve mental wellbeing and employee engagement.

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