



A Guide to Health And Wellbeing in the Workplace

Gain a greater awareness of mental ill health in the workplace, and build your understanding of preventative measures and how you can support colleagues who are suffering.



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Overcoming Mental ill Health at Work

The scale and impact of mental ill health at work is increasing. In 2018 it was found by the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development that mental illness was the most common cause of long term sick leave in the UK, with two-fifths of absence being attributed to stress.

Combating mental ill health at work can only begin with raising awareness. More and more employers have begun to encourage good mental health and implement strategies which promote this. However statistics still show that only 49% of employees feel that their mental health was being supported by their employer, showing that there's still work to do.

This Health and Wellbeing guide is designed to help employers, friends and colleagues alike gain a greater awareness of mental ill health in the workplace, and understand how they can support colleagues who are suffering.

Types of Mental Health Problem

Mental health problems affect roughly one in four people in any given year. Understanding common types of mental illness can help you better support your colleagues, or seek support for yourself if you feel you may be struggling. Below are some commonly diagnosed forms of mental health problems with examples of some of their symptoms.

Depression:

- Low mood for a prolonged period of time.
- Feeling hopeless, despairing, guilty, worthless, unmotivated and exhausted.
- Depression can affect self-esteem, sleep, appetite, sex drive and physical health.
- At its most severe depression can make someone feel suicidal and can be life threatening.
- Different types of depression include; pre or post natal depression or seasonal depression.

Anxiety:

- Occasional anxiety (feeling worried, tense or afraid) is a normal emotion experienced by everyone.
- When these feelings are existent for a prolonged period of time or experienced very strongly, they can become overwhelming.
- Different types of anxiety include; generalised anxiety disorder (GAD), social anxiety (social phobia) and panic disorder or post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).
- It's possible to experience problems with anxiety without a specific diagnosis.
- Physical symptoms include sleep problems and panic attacks

Panic Attacks:

Sudden bouts of intense terror which can cause the following symptoms:

- Difficulty breathing,
- Trembling
- Rapid heartbeat
- Feeling faint
- Choking sensations
- Be aware! The memory of a panic attack can trigger another.
- Chest Pain

Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD):

- OCD has two main parts: obsessions and compulsions.
- Obsessions include; unwelcome thoughts, images, urges, worries or doubts that repeatedly appear.
- Compulsions; repetitive activities that you feel you have to do to reduce the anxiety, are the result of these obsessions.

Phobias:

- An extreme form of fear or anxiety which is triggered by a particular situation, even when that situation is unlikely to be dangerous.
- A fear becomes a phobia when; the fear is out of proportion to the danger, it lasts for more than six months, and has a significant impact on how you live your day-to-day life.

Bipolar Disorder:

- Everyone experiences changes in their mood, but when someone is suffering from bipolar disorder they may experience extreme mood swings which affect their day to day lives.
- With this diagnosis someone may experience manic or hypomanic episodes (feeling high), depressive episodes (feeling low) and potentially some psychotic episodes.
- In between there might be stable periods where they experience fewer symptoms.

Schizophrenia:

- A schizophrenic diagnosis is generally given when someone experiences the following symptoms.
- psychosis (such as hallucinations or delusions)
- Disorganised thinking and speech
- Experiencing disconnection from your feelings
- Difficulty concentrating
- Desire to avoid people
- Lacking interest in things
- Reluctance to look after yourself

Personality Disorders:

- This type of mental health diagnosis can cause lifelong problems.
- Having this diagnosis doesn't mean that you're fundamentally different from other people, but you may regularly experience difficulties with how you think about yourself and others, and find it very difficult to change these unwanted patterns.
- There are several categories of personality disorder, and most people who are diagnosed don't fit into a single category clearly or consistently.

Psychosis (Sometimes known as a psychotic experience or psychotic episode):

- Psychosis is typically diagnosed when you experience or interpret reality very differently from the people around you.
- The most commonly experienced types include; hallucinations, delusions.

Indicators of Poor Mental Health

Knowing which signs to look out for in both yourself or your colleagues could help you seek treatment or preventative action. While the below symptoms are often indicators of poor mental health, this list is by no means exhaustive. Equally, if you or a colleague is exhibiting these signs, the cause may be entirely unrelated to mental health.

Physical Symptoms:

- Fatigue
- Indigestion/ An upset stomach
- Headaches
- Appetite or weight changes
- Joint and back pain
- Changes in sleep pattern
- Visible tension or trembling
- Nervous or trembling speech
- Chest or throat pain
- Sweating
- Constantly feeling cold

Psychological Symptoms:

- Anxiety or distress
- Tearfulness
- Feeling low
- Mood changes
- Indecision
- Loss of motivation
- Loss of humour
- Increased sensitivity
- Distraction or confusion
- Difficulty relaxing
- Lapses in memory
- Illogical or irrational thought processes
- Difficulty taking information in
- Responding to experiences, people or sensations which are unobserved by others
- Increased Suicidal thoughts

Behavioural Symptoms:

- Increased smoking or drinking
- Using recreational drugs
- Withdrawal
- Resigned attitude
- Irritability, anger or aggression
- Over excitement or euphoria
- Restlessness
- Lateness, leaving early or extended lunches
- Working far longer hours
- Intense or obsessive activity
- Repetitive speech or activity
- Impaired or inconsistent performance
- Uncharacteristic errors
- Increased sickness absence
- Uncharacteristic problems with colleagues
- Apparent overreaction to problems
- Risk-taking
- Disruptive or anti-social behaviour

What You Can Do To Help

If you or your colleagues are exhibiting the above symptoms, or if mental ill health is suspected, opening up a dialogue is vital. Shying away from the subject can perpetuate the stigma around the topic, and make it harder for those suffering to seek the help they need.

Managers and line managers, as well as friends and colleagues should facilitate early conversation surrounding poor mental health in order to identify and implement appropriate support or adjustments.

Conversational Do's And Don'ts

DO:

- Ask colleagues and friends how they are feeling on a regular basis.
- Talk openly about mental health and encourage open communication.
- Learn how to spot the warning signs of poor mental health early.
- Think about attending/offering to send a colleague on a mental health first aid course to learn more.
- Consider offering staff a mental health risk assessment.
- Make adjustments to the work environment or patterns in order to support employees/ colleagues mental health.
- Help people find the right support for them- this can be outside support from charities like MIND, or internally by listening and providing support.

DON'T:

- Make assumptions about how someone's mental health affects them.
- Try to diagnose someone's problems.
- Share friends or colleagues personal information without consent.
- Address employees poor performance without considering any health issues.
- Offer counselling or medical advice unless properly qualified.

Your Conversational Checklist:

Get the most out of your conversations about mental health with your colleagues using the following checklist:

- Avoid interruptions by switching off phones and ensuring colleagues can't walk in and interrupt.
- Ask simple, open, non-judgemental questions and avoid judgemental or patronising responses.
- Speak calmly.
- Maintain good eye contact.
- Listen actively and carefully.
- Encourage your colleague to talk.
- Show empathy and understanding.
- Be prepared for some silences and be patient.
- Focus on the person, not the problem.
- Avoid making assumptions or being prescriptive.
- Follow up in writing, especially agreed actions or support.

About Park City

As a specialist HR and Health and Safety consultancy in Essex, Park City provides a broad range of services across HR and Health and Safety in the workplace to a client base of over 200 companies. We can advise you on legislation to do with workplace mental health, and help you improve your knowledge and ability to handle workplace mental health more effectively. We can also sign post you to a range of experts in this field if specialist support is required.

Our extensive range of services includes, bespoke HR and Health & Safety documentation, systems, contracts, procedures, staff surveys, audits, and management support. As well as this, we also regularly run training and development courses in our state of the art training suite in Colchester.

Our expert consultancy team can help support your business through a variety of challenges, including culture and engagement, employee relations management and health, safety and wellbeing requirements. We can guide your staff through training to help them develop their leadership, performance management and health and safety skills.

If you're worried about yourself or a colleague, or want some support to improve the approach towards mental health in your workplace, **talk to us.**

Get in touch:
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