

# Mental Health – A Line Manager Support Guide

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# Introduction

Managers having regular interactions with their team members means that they are the people most likely to notice when someone is having a difficult time or is in need of additional support.

This guide equips managers with the tools to recognise and support those struggling with their mental health and signpost them to relevant information and resources. It may also help you to create the right working environment, so colleagues feel comfortable talking about mental health and what to do to support those in crisis.

Mental health relates to an individual's emotional, psychological and social wellbeing and is a continuum ranging from good to poor health, with symptoms being short or long.

In the Civil Service, mental ill health is one of the leading causes of long-term sickness absence, accounting for 33% of all such absence. Mental ill health not only impacts upon the individual but also the business and the rest of the workforce.

## Things to note

This guide should be used alongside existing policies and procedures. Ensure you seek guidance and support from your HRBP HR Case Advice Team and/or occupational health as required.

### Legal obligations

Employers have a legal duty of care to all employees and must assess the risk of ill health arising from workplace activities. Please refer to the [Health, Safety and Wellbeing](#) intranet page for further information. You can also refer to the [Health and Safety Executive website](#) for access to the HSE Management Standards, [stress risk assessment toolkit](#) / [Wellness Plan](#) and other useful information.

Remember some mental health conditions may fall under the [Equality Act 2010](#), making it unlawful for an employer to treat those affected less favourably without a justifiable reason or failing to make reasonable adjustments which would help the employee remain in, or attend work.

## Manager's roles and responsibilities

### Identifying a team member that might be struggling with their mental health:

- If a team member is absent from work due to mental ill health i.e. anxiety, stress or depression – follow the [attendance management](#) policy, whilst also being sensitive to the circumstances of the individual's absence.

- Make a referral to OH on the first day of the absence where it is likely that the absence will be for multiple days, and no later than 14 days into the absence.
- Once advice from a General Practitioner' or Occupational Health has been received-you may need to consider the implementation of workplace adjustments in conjunction with the Workplace Adjustments team or the Civil Service Workplace Adjustment Service (CSWAS)
- Where there is the potential for work-related stress, or if there are significant changes to job role/work environment – undertake a [stress risk assessment toolkit](#) / [Wellness Plan \(WP\)](#).

### Fostering a positive mental health environment

Managers are key to supporting employee mental health and wellbeing. Where employees feel comfortable talking about mental health issues at an early stage, there is a greater chance that they will be able to access the support they need and remain in work.

Managers should ensure that they signpost individuals to the [Employee Assistance Programme \(EAP\)](#), as required.

### Engaging, informing and supporting employees

- Regular check-ins with employees, and ensuring you ask how they are and how they are feeling will help create a safe environment for employees to disclose their relevant information about their own mental health conditions.
- Engage with employees so they understand their own workplace objectives, team's objectives and the organisations' objectives. This includes giving employees the opportunity to ask questions and feedback their views about their workload and/or capacity.
- Avoid micromanaging and give employees as much control as possible over how they deliver their work while ensuring they have the right skills for the job will assist you in getting the best out of your staff.
- Regularly monitor workloads to ensure what individuals are expected to deliver are realistic within the timescales and resources available.
- Lead by example – “role model” good behaviour (staff will mirror your actions) and challenge negative attitudes towards mental health. *This will include being seen to take breaks as appropriate.*
- Keep employees informed of organisational or team changes, providing a rationale for actions and decisions taken and endeavour to seek employee views where possible.
- Encourage employees to maintain an effective work-life balance including facilitating flexible working where possible and taking adequate breaks, which works for them.
- Provide positive feedback on work, in a way that is acknowledged and understood by the individual, where appropriate to build confidence and boost self-esteem.

- If appropriate to the situation, encourage employees to be physically active and attend social and departmental health and wellbeing events. Physical activities are shown to boost people's health, teamwork and mental health and wellbeing.
- Ensure individuals are aware of the internal resources that are available to them such as the [EAP](#), ([FAQs](#)), Occupational Health ([Occupational Health Referral](#), [FAQs](#)), [Trade Union](#) representative, [Mental Health Allies](#) and the [Workplace Adjustments team](#).

## What isn't part of the manager's role?

- You are not a medical expert. If you have concerns about an individual's mental health you should briefly discuss the situation with them and then seek appropriate expert advice to help manage the situation.
- You are not a counsellor. Colleagues needing expert emotional support should be directed to an appropriate professional. Utilise the [EAP](#), [Occupational Health](#) and [Mind Matters](#) (volunteer peer support group for any colleagues with an interest in mental health and wellbeing). If you are not sure, with the individual's consent, make a call to the EAP then hand the phone over to the individual.
- Be clear about relevant boundaries and the remit of your role as a manager. Managing staff with complex mental health issues may have a detrimental impact on your own health ensure that you are practicing effective self-care.

### Top Tip

You are not expected to have all the answers. If someone comes to you with something you are unsure about, say so – that is more helpful than offering advice which may be well meant but wrong.

## Individual's Responsibilities:

We are all responsible for recognising if or when we are experiencing undue stress and when we should seek help. Stress and anxiety are normal, experiencing symptoms of stress and anxiety is not a measure of someone's character or sign of weakness.

- Identify (where possible) signs and symptoms of stress and anxiety.
- If you are experiencing stress in your job, discuss it with your line manager and/or your HR Case Advisor, and complete an Individual Stress Risk Assessment. From the assessment you should agree a plan of action with your manager which will aim to reduce stress in the workplace for you.

# Some symptoms of mental ill-health

According to [Mind/CIPD guidance](#), employees experiencing mental ill-health may demonstrate of the following general symptoms:

- Changes in work performance, not getting things done/missing deadlines
- Working longer hours than normal
- Changes in social functioning, withdrawn and isolated from colleagues
- Changes in personality/mood swings/ overly self-critical
- Physical signs; tiredness, difficulty sleeping, increased sickness absence
- Alcohol or drug misuse
- In extreme cases, suicidal or self-harm comments such as e.g. talking about being a burden on others, or feeling hopeless and having no reason to live.

## Having a conversation

If you have concerns about an individual's mental health, suggest having a conversation somewhere quiet and private. Explain what you have observed and why you have concerns, and that the objective of the conversation is to support the employee.

When having a conversation, you should actively listen without judging, encouraging the individual to talk freely and openly without interruption. It is good practice to follow up from the meeting in writing, especially any agreed actions or support.

### **Using closed questions should be avoided.**

Consider using the following to start a conversation:

- I have noticed...
- When did you start feeling like this?
- When did this start?
- At your worst, how bad is it (risk)
- What helps you most?
- How can I as your manager best support you?
- You need to know that as your manager I care about you

- What can we as an organisation consider in terms of helping going forward?
- How are you doing today?
- You seem a bit down / upset / under pressure / frustrated / angry. Can you tell me more about what has been happening?
- I've noticed you've been arriving late recently could you explain what has been happening? I've noticed the reports are late when they're usually on time could you explain what has been happening? What would you like to happen? Are there any adjustments you think may help at work?
- What support do you think might help?
- Have you spoken to your GP or looked for help anywhere else?

Make sure you keep the door open: If an individual doesn't want to talk or they do not recognise they are unwell, make it clear they can come to you at any time. Signpost them to other sources of support such as a [Health and Wellbeing Champions](#), [Case Advisory Team](#), [MIND Matters](#) and keep an eye out for any deterioration in their wellbeing. If their workplace behaviour gives you cause for concern you should seek advice from the HR Case Advice Team.

#### Top Tip

Silence can be really powerful in helping employees talk about their mental health. Simply explaining that you have noticed some potential distress and then letting silence fall to allow them space and time to talk can be really helpful.

## Wellness Plan

We encourage our staff to take responsibility for their own mental health and wellbeing and we want to make sure that everyone knows where and how to access support.

A Wellness Plan (**WP**) or Wellness Recovery Plan (**WRP**) is an evidence-based system for supporting those with mental health issues. It enables an employee to share appropriate information with an employer in order that they can obtain the necessary support if unwell and help improve wellbeing as well as support recovery.

## Workplace adjustments

The Equality Act 2010 requires employers to consider the provision of reasonable adjustments to the workplace to support them to remain in work or return to work.

[Occupational Health](#) provide advice about reasonable adjustments both before and during employment, following OH assessment, so that managers can consider their implementation.

In deciding whether adjustments are reasonable consider:

- How much the adjustment will reduce or remove the barrier faced by the individual?
- An adjustment appropriate for one person may not be appropriate for someone else with the same condition
- Arranging a meeting or discussion with the individual as soon as practicable let them know they can be accompanied by a union representative, disability network member or colleague if they wish
- The individual may know what adjustments they need and what has or hasn't worked for them in the past
- Consult with HR and Occupational Health for clarification
- What is reasonable for the individual, business, and the rest of the team

The [Case Advisory Team](#) or [Workplace Adjustments team](#) can provide further advice as necessary.

The manager should encourage the individual to record any agreed adjustments on a [Workplace Adjustment Passport](#). This can complement the use of the Wellness Plan.

Examples of workplace adjustments:

- Take a flexible approach to start/finish times and/or shift patterns
- Equal amount of break time, but in more frequent shorter breaks during the day
- Reduce background noise where possible – e.g. providing private office/room dividers/partitions, reducing pitch or volume of telephone ring tones
- Provide a quiet space for breaks away from the main workspace
- Move the employee's workstation
- Support employee's with their workload by helping them prioritise their work, consider job sharing or allowing them to focus on a specific piece of work
- Consider the provision of a coach, buddy or mentor.

# Away from work

It is important to keep in touch with employees during any absence. *In terms of the KIT (Keeping in Touch) process, ask the individual what works best for them in terms of contact*

If an employee has failed to turn up for work without notifying you, refer to HR Case Adviser team. You should advise them if you have concerns about the individual's mental health and follow the appropriate policy.

If you are extremely concerned about an individual's behaviour and or personal safety, contact the Case Adviser Team. If this is not possible call 999 and ask for the emergency services.

## Handling difficult workplace situations

### Managing someone who is tearful or upset

People may become emotional at work for different reasons, and it is not always linked to mental ill health and may not constitute a crisis. The following may be of benefit:

- Listen
- Normalise
- Facilitate
- Remain professional (hold your boundary)
- Refer on if appropriate
- Support them to find somewhere quiet and private to allow them to compose themselves if necessary
- Listen: often people just want to talk and don't want advice. They want to feel someone is really listening
- Try not to judge or compare to your own experiences - everyone reacts differently to situations
- Provide reassurance that help may be available
- Allow "time out" for them to recover. Consider whether being accompanied at a meeting by someone (a colleague or member of the Case Advice Team) would be helpful
- Give the individual the EAP number (0800 023 9387) and a quiet place to call them if they wish

- If the employee does not want to talk to you for whatever reason, ask them if they would want to talk to another member of the management team or another colleague.

### Managing an individual who is unfit for work but attending work

There will be occasions where an employee doesn't realise they are seriously unwell. Their behaviour may be causing concern or distress to others and could be posing a risk to themselves or their colleagues and/or the public.

Keep in mind that an employee may not be well enough to make the right decision for themselves when they are unwell. If a Workplace Adjustment Passport is in place, this should capture the employee's Wellness Plan information. Using this you can remind them that they agreed to a particular course of action in this scenario if appropriate.

- Consider advising them to go home and encourage them to speak with their GP.
- Consider seeking their consent for you to call their next of kin/nominated contact.
- Make arrangements to follow up with them later to ensure they are safe.
- **Seek HR advice.** ([HR Business Partner](#), [Case Advice Team](#))

### Managing an individual who is attending work, but is unfit for work and/or is a risk to themselves or others

- Ensure your own personal safety.
- Call the emergency services, explain the situation, follow their advice and do not leave the employee alone where this can be done safely without risk to yourself. They will send appropriate support and decide on the best course of action.

**\*Be aware that in the vast majority of cases restraining an individual against their will, will not be appropriate and may constitute assault.**

- The ambulance staff/paramedics, have no legal duty to remove someone to a hospital or place of safety without full client cooperation. The individual can refuse to go in the ambulance with them.
- ***If there is a serious risk of harm to self or others then it would be a call to the police***
- Where able obtain the employee's consent to notify the next of kin/nominated contact of the situation.
- **Contact HR.** ([HR Business Partner](#), [Case Advisory Team](#), HR Helpdesk or someone in your line management chain)

### Managing an individual who is talking about or attempting suicide

**If you consider that an individual is very distressed and is in immediate danger, contact the emergency services immediately. Alert senior management, HR and security as soon as possible.**

- You do **not** need consent to contact the emergency services in these circumstances - but you should tell the individual what is happening and why.
- If they are not with you tell the emergency services, the individual's location – along with any other relevant details you have. Give the emergency services your contact number in case they need further information to locate the individual.
- Seek support from a colleague who could call the emergency services while you keep the employee talking.
- **Contact HR.** ([HR Business Partner](#), [Case Advisory Team](#), HR Helpdesk or someone in your line management chain)
- **Do not leave the individual alone where this can be done safely without risk to yourself.**

### If an individual is distressed

**If the situation is non-urgent**, and there is no risk of suicide or self-harm but they are in a state of general distress you should support the employee by suggesting that they seek professional help.

Provide them with the contact details for appropriate support organisations such as:

- Samaritans – **116 123** (free from any phone)
- Mind - **0300 1233393**
- NHS – **111** (free NHS helpline 24/7 for urgent medical concerns)
- EAP - Free phone on 0800 023 9387. If you are abroad, you can contact them on +44 800 023 9387 (please note this will incur a charge).

Once the crisis situation is resolved, also consider the impact of a distressing situation on you and your colleagues. EAP services offer individual or group de-briefing sessions to provide crisis support after an incident.

If you, or the individual, needs support, contact your HR Business Partner or HR Case Advice Team.

## Support for managers

### Internal support

- Consider providing training (online or face to face) for managers to enable them to effectively manage complex situations.
- **Employee Assistance Programme** - provide immediate telephone access to trained and qualified counsellors for individuals they triage individuals and source the appropriate level of support, which may include counselling, information, or sign-posting to other sources of support. Confidentiality is guaranteed.
- The EAP service will not inform line managers that employees are seeking help unless they give them permission to do so. Don't forget that EAP are also there to support managers. They can, for example, coach you on how best to approach sensitive situations or subjects with employees, provide information on mental health conditions and help if the situation is impacting on your health.
- **Occupational Health:** Provides independent medical advice. Through the provision of a report detailing the information which may be relevant for an employer to know and may provide guidance on adjustment.
- **Human Resources:** including the HR Case Advice Team, HR Business Partner or HR helpdesk.
- **Mental Health Allies:** provide a safe support to a member of staff who may be struggling with their mental health and will provide a friendly, empathetic, non-judgemental, 'active listening' ear, to employees and line managers, by facilitating open, honest and sensitive conversations about mental health.
- **Workplace Adjustment Team**
- **Charity for Civil Servants:** Provides a range of support for civil servants in need of mental health support.
- **Mind Matters:** – a volunteer peer support group for any colleagues with an interest in mental health and wellbeing

# Annex A: Mental health conditions

[Mind](#) have extensive resources for learning more about mental health.

# Annex B: Learning Support

- 5 Steps to Mental Wellbeing:
  - **Connect** – connect with family, friends, colleagues and neighbours. Learn more in [Connect for mental wellbeing](#).
  - **Be active** – you don't have to go to the gym. Take a walk, go cycling or play a game of football. Find an activity that you enjoy and make it a part of your life. Learn more in [Get active for mental wellbeing](#).
  - **Keep learning** – learning new skills can give you a sense of achievement and a new confidence. So why not sign up for that cooking course, start learning to play a musical instrument, or figure out how to fix your bike? Find out more in [Learn for mental wellbeing](#).
  - **Give to others** – even the smallest act can count, whether it's a smile, a thank you or a kind word. Larger acts, such as volunteering at your local community centre, can improve your mental wellbeing and help you build new social networks. Learn more in [Give for mental wellbeing](#).
- Learning Lab: a wide range of learning for health and wellbeing, including emotional resilience, health, safety and wellbeing, resilience, mindfulness and much more!  
<https://www.wglearninglab.gov.wales/workspaces>
- **Emotional Resilience:** Resilience is not just your ability to bounce back, but also your capacity to adapt in the face of challenging circumstances, whilst maintaining a stable mental wellbeing. Resilience isn't a personality trait – it's something that can be learnt.
  - Make some lifestyle changes
  - Look after your physical health
  - Develop new hobbies and interests
  - Build your support network
- **Mindfulness:** – paying attention to the present moment, to your own thoughts and feelings and to the world around you can improve your mental wellbeing and your ability to cope with everyday stressful living. Learn more in [Mindfulness for mental wellbeing](#)
- **HSE Line Manager Competency Indicator Tool** - enables managers to assess whether stress management behaviors are part of a colleague's repertoire or not, identify any gaps in skills or behaviours and support positive development
- **Mindful Employer** - Line Managers' Resource – this is a PDF guide, aimed at helping managers and colleagues, support members of staff with Mental Health problems

- **Health Challenge Wales** – Mental Health and Wellbeing – this webpage offers individuals information on how to look after your own health and wellbeing, from eating right to getting enough sleep
- **Wellbeing and Resilience online training** – via [Civil Service Learning](#).
- **Emotional Resilience training** – via [the Learning Lab](#).
- **Getting to know you and your personal impact** – via [the Learning Lab](#).
- **Employee Assistance Programme** – [EAP Playlist](#).
- **Supporting Your Health and Wellbeing** – [Playlist](#)

# Annex C: HR Policies

- **Let's Talk Respect:** The Permanent Secretary's 'Let's Talk Respect' campaign aims to help all Welsh Government colleagues know that:
  - o We all have the right to work in an environment where we are enabled to be ourselves, where we are treated fairly, and our contributions are valued equally
  - o We all have a responsibility to treat each other with dignity and respect, being mindful of each other's differences and understanding the value of diversity and inclusivity
  - o We should all be able to challenge unwelcome behaviour if we encounter it, be confident in the process and feel supported throughout.
  - o Anonymous telephone helpline –to discuss any issues relating to bullying, harassment or discrimination in a safe environment with a trained, impartial third party. The Unwelcome Behaviour Support Line is available, 24 hours a day and 7 days a week via the EAP on 0800 023 9387 (please use code INCI-000222 to access the dedicated support line)
  - o Bullying and Harassment Advisors – informal advice and support
  - o Speak to your line manager or HR Case Advice Team.
  - o If you would like to make an informal or formal complaint – find out more in the Dignity at Work policy.
- **Social model of disability** – take action to remove barriers and ensure a fully inclusive workplace.
- **Wellbeing hour** – the wellbeing hour allows you to take a small amount of time each week to focus on your own health and wellbeing. It forms part of your working hours and is in addition to normal breaks.
- **HR Policies** and HR case adviser mailbox - [HRCaseAdviserTeam@gov.wales](mailto:HRCaseAdviserTeam@gov.wales) are also there to support your wellbeing.