How to implement the Thriving at Work mental health standards in your workplace

Foreword by Paul Farmer

With mental health problems affecting one in six British workers each year[1] and mental health being the leading cause of sickness absence[2] it is not surprising that employers are starting to look more closely at the crucial role they play in supporting the wellbeing of their staff.

The annual cost of poor mental health to employers is between £33billion and £44billion. This cost arises from presenteeism where individuals are at work but significantly less productive due to poor mental health, as well as from sickness absence and staff turnover. More crucially 300,000 people with a long-term mental health problem lose their jobs each year.

Money spent on improving mental health has shown a consistently positive return on investment. At a time when there is a national focus on productivity, the inescapable conclusion is that it is in the interest of both employers and Government to prioritise and invest far more in improving mental health.

Thriving at Work, an independent review of mental health commissioned by Government and led by Lord Dennis Stevenson and I, aims to address this issue. It sets out six mental health core standards for employers, drawn from best practice and the available evidence base. The report also outlines a series of more ambitious 'enhanced' standards for employers who can and should do more to lead the way.

It has a vision which includes that in ten years' time employees will have "good work", which contributes positively to their mental health, our society and our economy. To support this, all organisations, whatever their size, will be equipped with the awareness and tools to address and prevent mental ill health caused or worsened by work. They will be equipped to support individuals with a mental health condition to thrive and the proportion of people with a long-term mental health condition, who leave employment each year, will be dramatically reduced.

Mind is a sector leader in workplace wellbeing. We aim to support employers of all sizes and sectors to improve the mental health of their workforce through guidance, training, consultancy advice and sector benchmarking to improve accountability and opportunities for learning.

Mind has been working with employers in the private, public and voluntary sectors for over 10 years and draws much of its knowledge from direct experience of talking to people with mental health problems both within and outside the workplace. We have designed this guide to help employers understand and implement the *Thriving at Work* standards. It offers accessible, practical support for meeting the standards and will help employers to make the necessary changes within a realistic timeframe and without excessive cost. We hope that you find it useful.

Paul Farmer

Paul Farmer CBE, Chief Executive of Mind

1 CIPD in partnership with SimplyHealth. (2012). Absence Management Annual Survey Report. CIPD.

2 Chief Medical Officer. (2013). Annual Report of the Chief Medical Officer 2013. Public Mental Health Priorities: Investing in the Evidence. Department of Health and Social Care.

How to use this guide

Positively managing mental health underpins good employee engagement and benefits everyone – employees, employers and the bottom line. Every employer's success depends on a healthy and productive workforce, and if employees feel valued and supported they'll achieve more.

The Government's independent review, *Thriving at Work,* includes six core and four enhanced standards for how organisations can better support employees' mental health. By adopting these standards, the review suggests that all organisations, whatever their size, will be:

- equipped with the awareness and tools to both address and prevent mental ill-health which is caused or worsened by work

- equipped to support people with a mental health condition to thrive, from recruitment and throughout the organisation

- aware of how to get access to timely help to reduce sickness absence caused by mental ill health.

We strongly recommend that all employers, no matter what your sector, workplace type or size, adopt the six core standards. We've also included information on the four enhanced standards, for employers that can and should go further. These are designed for larger employers and the public sector – but any employer can put them into practice.

We know employers come in all shapes and sizes, with different working practices and environments. We hope that organisations in any sector and industry will be able to adapt the standards to their needs. What is reasonable for an employer and how long it will take to implement will be based on a number of factors. Therefore this guide is not intended to be a 'one size fits all approach' rather it is designed to equip organisations with the knowledge and tools to create a more inclusive working environment for all staff.

For those organisations who are at the start and are just now beginning to take action, use this guide to help you take the first steps and make a long-term commitment to a better way of working. Not only for individuals, but for the success and productivity of your business as a whole. For those organisations who are further along, use this guide to formalise your approach and use the standards to measure how well you support mental health and wellbeing in your organisation.

The current picture in workplace mental health

One in six
British workers are affected by mental health problems like anxiety, depression and stress every year

300,000 people
with a long-term mental health problem lose their jobs each year

Around
15 per cent
of people at work have symptoms of an existing mental health condition

The cost of poor mental health to the economy is between
£74billion and £99billion
per year

Core standard one

Produce, implement and communicate a mental health at work plan that encourages and promotes good mental health of all staff and an open organisational culture.

Why have a mental health at work plan?

Today, more employers realise that supporting mental health is good for people and business. Producing, implementing and sharing a mental health plan is a great way to improve everyone's wellbeing.

Results from Mind's Workplace Wellbeing 2017/18 Index showed that 6 in 10 employees had experienced poor mental health. Of these only 6 per cent said they would take time off compared to just over 20 per cent who said they would take time off for a physical health problem.

Your mental health at work plan should detail what support is available to employees if they are experiencing poor mental health whether it is due to problems inside or outside of work. A poor work/life balance can quickly lead to stress and burnout, which may lead to sickness absence. Encouraging staff to work sensible hours, take full lunch breaks, rest and recuperate after busy periods, avoid working at weekends and take their full annual leave entitlement can all help avoid burnout.

Supporting small and large organisations

Not all workplaces are the same. But it doesn't matter whether you're a microbusiness, or multinational, creating your plan is the first step towards better mental health at work. In larger organisations the mental health plan may be an organisation-wide policy or strategy on mental health. Smaller organisations may be less likely to have formal mental health policies in place. This means the plan can be woven into current procedures with different representatives across the organisation responsible for each part.

What to include

Your mental health at work plan should help to create a positive culture where people feel able to talk about their mental health. Make sure your plan is formally written down and will show your current and future employees that you care about their wellbeing. Your plan should include:

- how you will promote the wellbeing of all staff

- how you will tackle the work-related causes of mental health problems including routinely taking stock of the wellbeing of your staff

- how you will support staff experiencing poor mental health

- signposting to relevant sources of information and support both inside and outside your organisation

- offering clear objectives which are shaped around your organisational vision

- reference to the Equality Act 2010, acknowledging that mental health may be classified as a disability.

Ensure that staff can easily access it at all times. Putting your plan in the staff handbook, on the intranet, website or hard copies around the office is an easy way to do this.

Ask your staff

Designing your plan with input from employees boosts buy-in and gives you a clearer idea of the support they might need. If your organisation is quite large you may prefer to set up a smaller group of staff for initial consultations and another group to feedback on the finished plan. Building your plan with input from employees from across the organisation builds their commitment to supporting their own mental health and that of their colleagues. Trust and integrity are key drivers of engagement. Organisations that support staff reap the benefits in terms of loyalty and commitment from employees.

Before you begin, explain why you're developing the plan, future plans for roll-out and review, and why employees' views matter. This conversation doesn't end when the plan's finished. Set up regular communication, so you can keep asking people what works, and tweaking your level of support in response. You could also consider asking other organisations in your sector for best practice ideas.

Who's responsible?

Everyone in your organisation is responsible for putting your plan into action.

Human resources (HR): should take responsibility for providing advice and support to managers and employees. They should also lead on reviewing employee wellbeing and monitoring sickness absence across the organisation. If you are a SME or micro business that has no HR function, responsibility may need to be split between different representatives across your organisation. The owner must be most accountable.

Senior leaders: should play a key role in creating change by ensuring reliable processes, checks and action plans are in place which are regularly monitored.

Line managers: should take responsibility for assessing their teams' mental health. They can do this through regular team meetings, quarterly mental health audits and regular one-to-ones. Managers should seek and take any appropriate action from regular feedback on their approach.

Employees: are responsible for accessing support when they need it and raising any concerns with their line manager, HR or occupational health. All employees, irrespective of their seniority in the organisation, should also try to have a healthy work/life balance.

Wider organisational policies

It would also be helpful to carry out a review of other policies and practices that shape staff wellbeing. Check that mental wellbeing is at the heart of other policies relating to staff wellbeing such as health and safety, working time, sickness absence and return-to-work.

Need advice?

Mind's Workplace Wellbeing team provides expert guidance and support for employers who want to support their staff's mental health. Please contact: work@mind.org.uk

Core standard one: employer tool

What to consider when you are developing your mental health at work plan

Promoting employee wellbeing

1   Get senior leaders on board.

They play a key role in progressing the mental health agenda within organisations. Colleagues take cues from how leaders behave.

Senior leaders should promote employee wellbeing by:

- speaking out about mental health

- supporting a campaign to encourage all staff to take lunch breaks and work healthy hours

- signing the Time to Change Employer pledge.

2   Raise awareness of mental health.

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.

Your action plan should aim to raise awareness of mental health by:

- embedding mental health in induction and training

- celebrating key dates in the mental health calendar

- running internal communication campaigns

- recruiting Mental Health Champions.

3 Involve staff in dialogue and decision making to create a culture of openness.

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.

Your action plan should set out how you will involve staff by using methods such as:

- 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.

4 Promote a healthy work/life balance.

A poor work/life balance can quickly lead to stress and burnout, reducing levels of employee productivity, performance, creativity and morale.

Your action plan should set out how your organisation encourages 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.

5   **Provide opportunities for learning and development.**

Research on employee engagement tells us employees need to feel valued, supported and that their work is meaningful.

Your mental health plan should outline ways in which you provide staff with learning and development opportunities including:

- coaching
- training
- job-shadowing.

6   **Offer positive working relationships and social connections.**

Organisations should take positive action to make the workplace a mutually supportive environment where good work relationships thrive.

Your mental health plan should:

- promote 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.
- hold 'lunch and learn' sessions' – these are a great way to support staff to take their full lunch break away from their desk
- consider offering mentoring and buddy schemes. They can help new starters to understand your organisation faster and support all staff to gain confidence and develop new skills.

Tackling the work-related causes of mental health problems

① Routinely take 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.

Your action plan should detail how you plan to routinely take stock of staff mental health allowing 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

- take part in Mind's Workplace Wellbeing Index.

② Upskill 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 mental health plan should outline ways you will support your managers to recognise poor mental health among their team members. You could do this by:

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

- having clear guidelines for managers on managing mental health issues

- encouraging and supporting positive manager behaviours.

3   Regular one-to-ones.

Regular one-to-ones have significant benefits for employers, employees and the bottom line.

In your mental health plan detail how you support managers to have regular one-to-ones by:

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

- putting in place appraisal and supervision procedures which 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.

4   The physical work environment.

Noise levels, space, temperature and light can significantly affect staff wellbeing.

In your action plan set out how you will create a good working environment for staff by:

- consulting with employees on how to improve the work environment and take action to ensure it is suitable

- providing space dividers and quiet spaces for when employees need to carry out focused work

- reaching an agreement on respectful behaviours to help manage noise levels may help tackle some of the typical issues.

Supporting staff experiencing a mental health problem

Create an open and supportive environment.

Organisations need to send a clear signal to staff that their mental health matters and being open about it will lead to support, not discrimination.

In your action plan you should detail the support available to staff if they are experiencing a mental health problem. This could include:

- signposting to medical services, such as NHS services or another healthcare provider

- signposting to mental health and/or wellbeing peer support groups

- offering employees free or subsidised access to private medical insurance

- offering employees the right to request flexible working

- an internal wellbeing or mental health network for colleagues to share experiences and tips for managing mental health and wellbeing at work

- a formal or informal internal buddying system for individuals to have the opportunity to talk to someone outside of their line management structure and be signposted to support

- offering or encouraging employees to access online peer support communities such as Elefriends

- offering an EAP to employees

- encouraging staff to use a Wellness Action Plan.

Useful links

Time to Change campaign: **www.time-to-change.org.uk/employerpledge**

Elefriends – our online peer support community: **mind.org.uk/elefriends**

Core standard two

Develop mental health awareness among employees by making information, tools and support accessible.

How stigma impacts staff wellbeing

In many workplaces mental health is still a taboo subject. Too often, employees are scared to talk to their manager and problems can spiral. By raising awareness of mental health, and encouraging discussion, you can challenge this harmful culture.

Building people's mental health literacy so they can support each other

Building mental health literacy means boosting employees' knowledge and skills so they better manage their own mental health and improve their ability to support that of others. Ensuring staff and managers have a good understanding of mental health, and the factors that affect workplace wellbeing, is essential for building a healthy, happy and productive workforce.

You can do this by:

- Embedding mental health in your induction and training: Ensure your staff are given information on how best to manage mental health and what support is available. You should detail this in your action plan.

- Raising the profile of mental health: Why not invite a speaker on mental health to an event as part of diversity, disability or mental health awareness activities? 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.

- Making the most of internal communications: Raise awareness through blogs, myth busters, factsheets, tips for managers, useful web links and FAQs. You can also use posters, noticeboards, staff newsletters, magazines and intranet and internet pages to get the message out. The next section includes useful information you could share.

Share these tips with staff to help them support their own wellbeing. The Five Ways to Wellbeing can also help.

Useful links

We offer expert training and consultancy to help you put wellbeing into practice. Visit **mind.org.uk/training** to find out more.

For more information on mental health problems visit: **mind.org.uk/a-z**

We've a whole host of other resources on workplace mental health, including information on the Five Ways to Wellbeing at: **mind.org.uk/work**

Five ways to tackle stigma in your organisation

1 **Help people understand mental health.**
Improving mental health awareness is the best way to beat stigma. Provide staff with reliable information – our website is a great place to start.

2 **Talk about mental health.**
It's easy to believe there's no right place to talk about mental health. But the more we talk about it, the better life is for all of us.

3 **Share your experience.**
If you have a story to share you can help improve people's understanding and change their attitudes. People follow leaders' behaviour, so lead by example.

4 **Support co-workers and colleagues.**
Put in place, and shape, mental health programmes and policies at work. Play your part and others will follow.

5 **Recruit Mental Health Champions.**
Champions are self-appointed employees at any level of your organisation who help challenge stigma and change the way employees think and act about mental health.

Core standard three

Encourage open conversations about mental health and the support available when employees are struggling, during the recruitment process and at regular intervals throughout employment, with appropriate workplace adjustments offered to employees who require them.

Offering mental health support

Supporting staff's mental health isn't just a one-off action. Having open conversations about, and offering support for, mental health should happen from recruitment to returning to work after absence.

If you're an HR manager or senior leader, think about:

- What support is provided for staff experiencing a mental health problem?

- Do employees have a good understanding of how mental health is managed in the workplace and what support is available?

- Do you provide stress coaching?

Offering the right support at different stages

Stage one – recruitment

Supporting mental health starts with getting the right person for the job. If there's a mismatch between a new recruit and your workplace, or their skills and abilities and your business needs, it can lead to intense stress. Always be realistic about the role in interviews, and be careful to select people on their skills and competencies, or realistic potential. Some top tips for providing an effective recruitment process include:

- Communicate the organisation's commitment to equal opportunities during the recruitment process, including in the job advert.

- Provide guidelines and, where possible, training for staff involved in recruitment to ensure that candidates are not discriminated against at any stage.

- Make it clear in adverts and interviews that the organisation values staff mental health, as this sends a signal that disclosure will not lead to discrimination. For example, include a statement such as: 'As an employer we are committed to promoting and protecting the physical and mental health of all our staff.'

- State clearly that reasonable adjustments are available – for the interview and the job itself – so applicants understand why disclosure might be beneficial.

- Ensure people can disclose confidentially and that any information about health or disability is kept separate from the application form, so the recruitment panel does not see it.

Stage two – induction

Delivering an effective induction programme is essential. Starting a new role can feel unsettling, and if employees aren't given the right expectations and guidance, it can destroy their confidence and trigger existing mental health problems. At this stage, make sure you are providing information about what support is available for staff to look after their mental health and wellbeing, this will send a message that mental health is a priority for your organisation.

Stage three – responding to disclosure

If someone tells you they have a mental health problem, or you think they do, it's important that line managers have an early conversation about the person's needs. Managers should find a safe, quiet place to talk to them about their needs so you can provide the right level of support, including necessary adjustments.

This is where good people management skills, plus basic empathy and common sense, are essential. Managers need to ensure they are seen as approachable and listen when staff ask for help. They should also be mindful of whether people would feel safe sharing their problem at work.

Stage four – supporting an employee when they are unwell and off sick

Sometimes an employee may be so unwell they need time off work to recover. How well you manage sickness absence is key in shaping how well and how quickly people are able to return to work, and get back to feeling healthy and able to work again.

Stage five – supporting people to return to work

Effective return-to-work interviews can ensure mental health problems are identified at an early stage before they get worse. However, to be effective, managers must understand how to use them to build trust and engagement. Before the interview, make sure managers tell people what to expect in advance. Make it clear that it's a supportive way to help them make a successful and lasting return to the workplace and address any on-going health needs.

Workplace adjustments

Workplace adjustments for mental health are often quite small, simple, practical and cost-effective changes. They could include everything from offering rooms for quiet work, to starting a buddy system. Often the change isn't physical, but about attitude, expectation or communication. Learn more about workplace adjustments on page 25.

Remember, once aware that something about work is causing a problem for someone with a disability, employers have a legal duty to make reasonable adjustments.

Useful links

Our Wellness Action Plans are a smart, practical way to support wellbeing at work: mind.org.uk/waps

Our Managing Mental Health at Work Training will upskill your line managers so they are better able to support their staff. Find out about all our training at mind.org.uk/training

Find our *Guide for Line Managers* which provides useful information on managing a team's mental health at: mind.org.uk/workplaceresources

Our *Guide for Employees* offers advice on how staff can manage their own mental health: mind.org.uk/mentalhealthatwork

Ten tips for supporting an employee who is off sick with a mental health problem

1   Send a get well soon card as you would with a physical health problem.

2   Make it clear that your organisation will support the employee during their absence, and reassure them their job will still be there when they return.

3   Maintain regular, open and meaningful communication with the employee. Agree how often this should take place early on and confirm in writing.

4   Ask the person how they want to communicate – whether by phone, email, text or face-to-face. Reassure them that they can change this at any time.

5   Have an open-door policy so the employee can approach managers with any concerns.

6   Ask how they are doing and focus conversations on their wellbeing.

7   Make it clear the person should not rush back to work or push themselves too much.

8   Consider visiting the employee at home, but only with their consent.

9   Agree what information they would like shared with colleagues.

10 Keep the employee in the loop about important work developments, so they feel connected.

Core standard three: employer tool

Suggested adjustments for employees with mental health problems

Below are some types of adjustments that will help to support employees to manage their own mental health at work. They are not prescriptive but employees with mental health problems have found some or all of these useful. It is important to always be guided by what a person experiencing a mental health problem says. This list could act as a prompt for line managers and employees exploring symptoms and support needs together.

- flexible working or changes to start and finish times

- change of workspace – quieter, less busy, dividing screens

- changes to role (temporary or permanent)

- equal amount of break time, but in shorter, more frequent chunks

- extra training or coaching (during work hours)

- increased supervision or support with managing workload

- lightbox or seat with more natural light

- mediation if there are difficulties between colleagues

- mentor or buddy systems (formal or informal)

- quiet rooms

- phased return to work – reduced hours gradually building back up

- redeployment to a more suitable role

- relaxing absence rules for those with disability-related sickness absence

- temporary reallocation of some tasks

- time off for appointments, at short notice if needed

- working from home.

Core standard four

Provide your employees with good working conditions and ensure they have a healthy work/life balance and opportunities for development.

What makes work good?

For some people it might be the free cakes in the kitchen on Friday. Others might value their colleagues, and the way they help them stay smiling after a tough day. Good working conditions inspire loyalty and high performance from staff. Plus, they can also prevent people developing new mental health problems, and support those living with them to thrive. We also know that good work is stable and secure, allowing people to plan for the future and to stay financially secure.

Research shows that a good job is where people feel in control, have some control over their work, and can build social networks. It's also where people feel they have a healthy work/life balance and get opportunities to develop. Next you'll find some ideas for building a more positive workplace.

Five ways to build a positive workplace

1 **Be open**

Managers should check-in regularly with staff to see how they're doing and find out what's causing them stress. They can do this by adding a regular item to team meetings where people talk about stress and wellbeing as a group.

2 **Use two-way communication**

Poor communication can cause stress. Staff can be affected if they are:

- overloaded with information they can't process

- excluded from key knowledge and conversations

- unable to tell managers how they're feeling.

If 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.

3 **Promote work/life balance**

Long hours might seem manageable in the short term. But over time, constant pressure and a poor work/life balance can quickly lead to stress and burnout, reducing people's productivity, performance, creativity and morale.

To avoid this, managers can encourage 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.

4 Offer flexible working

Giving people some control over where, when and how they work can help everyone be more healthy and productive. For example, it can help an employee manage stress by allowing a later start time twice a week so they can exercise. You can achieve this by creating a flexible working policy. Flexible working can be a vital early intervention to prevent mental health problems from getting worse and resulting in sickness absence. It can also help staff who've been absent return to work gradually. Wherever possible, senior leaders and managers should be role models for healthier work habits and encourage staff by example.

5 Provide opportunities to develop

Research shows 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. Encourage managers to 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.

Core standard four: employer tool

Quick guide: What makes good work?

The job

- Workloads that match employees' abilities and experience.

- Reasonable and agreed deadlines for completing work.

- Job security.

- A suitable working environment (consider noise, office lighting, equipment).

- Clearly defined roles.

- Employee involvement in planning their workload.

- Freedom for employees to express any concerns.

- Plans for employee training and development.

- Financial stability.

The organisation

- Impartial and supportive supervision structures.

- Widely publicised and available supervision and support policies.

- Encouragement and promotion of mental disclosure within the workforce. Employees need to feel confident that they can be open about mental health issues and that they will be taken seriously.

- Clear guidelines around mental health issues for managers.

- Detailed records on sickness absence used to analyse causes for absence.

- Accessible and well-promoted and accessible policies and guidance to challenge inappropriate behaviour such as racism, sexism and bullying.

Relationships in the workplace

- A supportive environment for employees: examples of good productive team work should be encouraged and shared.

- Employees should not be made to feel isolated due to the nature of the work they do or as a result of cultural or religious beliefs, race, sexuality, disability, age or gender.

Career and personal development

- Clear supervisory and appraisal structures involving the employee.

- Sufficient opportunities for staff to take part in training or apply for promotion.

- The views of employees should be considered with respect to job satisfaction, career development and training needs.

Personal issues affecting staff

- Managers' awareness of relevant personal issues affecting staff such as illness, bereavement, financial worries or stress-related factors which might be contributing to them struggling to cope in the workplace.

- Policies in place for dealing with such issues.

- Training for managers to deal with them.

Core standard five

Promote effective people management to ensure all employees have a regular conversation about their health and wellbeing with their line manager, supervisor or organisational leader and train and support line managers in effective management practices.

Why good management matters

Managers have an important part to play in workplace wellbeing. Research shows that good line management is linked with good health, wellbeing and improved performance. Meanwhile, poor quality leadership has been linked with stress, burnout and depression. Investing in good management doesn't have to be complex, or expensive. It's often about managers taking simple steps to support staff. Developing a management style that is open, approachable and self-aware goes a long way. Managers can do this by asking simple, open and non-judgemental questions about a person's mental health.

These can include:

- regular catch-ups with staff

- setting clear priorities

- celebrating individual and team successes

- involving staff in decision making

- flexing management style to suit individual needs.

Training line managers

The way staff manage and support people 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

- have clear guidelines for managers on managing mental health issues

- encourage and support positive manager behaviours.

Useful links

Through the Mind Infoline, we can provide support on managing mental health problems. Contact details can be found at: mind.org.uk/infoline

Our local Minds across the country can also help source advice and support. Use our online tool to find your local Mind for more information: mind.org.uk/localminds

The *Guide for Line Managers* on Wellness Action Plans gives information on managing your team's mental health: mind.org.uk/waps

Core Standard five: employer tool

Checklist for managers

1 **Lead by example.**

Actively encourage your team to adopt healthier working habits by working sensible hours, taking full lunch breaks, taking annual leave and resting 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.

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 discuss everyone's wellbeing together, 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.

5 **Be available for your staff.**

Regular one-to-ones and catch-ups can help maintain good working relationships and build mutual trust.

6 Treat people as individuals.

Treat employees with respect, praise good work, offer support if there are skills gaps, and try to use a coaching style of management. 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. 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 enable them 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 model these positive behaviours to staff.

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.

Core standard six

Routinely monitor employee mental health and wellbeing by understanding available data, talking to employees, and understanding risk factors.

Monitoring mental health and wellbeing

Developing a clear picture of the mental health of your organisation helps you understand what affects staff's mental wellbeing and how well you're supporting them. It also lets you assess whether your approach is effective and supports you to plan further improvements.

Achieving this may sound complicated. But if you already ask your staff about their experiences, perceptions and wellbeing levels – formally or informally – you've probably got a lot of the information already.

Think about how you could adapt the tools you already use – like staff surveys, HR data and appraisals. Putting relevant questions into these existing tools will help you build a comprehensive picture, without creating extra work.

If you are a SME or micro business and do not collect traditional HR data, then focus on the advice below around team audits, these could be put in place at an organisational level.

Using different types of data

Staff surveys

Your staff survey can be a great tool to capture information about wellbeing. It will probably already ask staff about things like their workload, leadership and management, opportunities for personal development and internal communication. However, it may not make the links between these issues and the impact they have on employees' mental wellbeing. Think about how you can integrate mental health into the existing survey to generate this information.

Do you know how many of your staff have a mental health problem? A question in a staff survey can be a good way of capturing this data, reinforced by the message that your organisation will respond proactively and reassurance that their personal information will be kept confidential. Also, if you run a staff satisfaction survey, these are a great tool to help you understand what affects your staff's wellbeing at work.

Team mental health audits

It's important managers regularly take stock of the mental health of their staff, the types of pressures they're under and how to alleviate them. A useful way of doing this is to carry out a regular mental health audit which allows staff to share their challenges and work together to identify solutions.

HR data

HR data can also be an important source of information on wellbeing. Sources you can use could include absenteeism data, staff turnover and exit interviews.

How often staff take sickness absence, and the reasons they give for it, can provide some useful clues about mental health. However, don't make assumptions without getting the whole picture.

Be particularly careful if mental health isn't often spoken about at work. Just because staff don't give mental health problems as the reason for being absent doesn't mean they don't exist. It could be that people just don't feel comfortable sharing problems because of the reaction they'll get.

A Mind poll found that 95 per cent of employees calling in sick with stress give a different reason for their absence. This is why it is vital that managers routinely ask staff how they are doing and discuss their mental health – it helps build up people's confidence to speak up earlier on and get the help they need sooner. Increased employee confidence to disclose their mental health also helps to ensure reliability in HR data.

Useful links

The Mind Workplace Wellbeing Index is a useful tool for assessing the wellbeing of your organisation. Find out more at mind.org.uk/index.

Core standard six: employer tool

How to take stock

How to take stock at an organisational level

Our Workplace Wellbeing Index takes the form of both a staff and employer survey to help you assess where the gaps lie between your organisational approach to workplace wellbeing and staff perceptions.

How to take stock of wellbeing at a team level

Regularly carry out mental health audits

If your organisation has a staff survey, which asks about employee experience, organisational culture and mental health, you may be able to gather information about your team's wellbeing. With HR support, you could take this further, by holding a session at a team meeting.

You could ask your team:

- what they think a mentally healthy team looks like

- what they already do well to promote good mental health, and how you can build on this together

- if anything is having a negative impact on the team's mental wellbeing.

Ask team members to group these issues under the following headings:

- what do we have control over? – these can then be captured as part of your action plan

- what can we influence? – these can then be captured as part of your action plan

- what issues are beyond our control or influence? – these can be captured as an issue that needs to be acknowledged but cannot be mitigated against at the present time although it may well be something that can be influenced or controlled in the future.

Workplace triggers of poor mental health

Typical workplace triggers for stress and mental health problems include:

- 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

- poor relationships with managers

- poor relationships with colleagues

- poor internal communication

- poor managerial support

- job insecurity or poorly managed change

- bullying

- financial worries.

How to take stock at an individual level: one-to-ones

Regular one-to-one meetings and catch-ups are a great place to ask your staff how they're getting on. Doing so regularly will help build trust and give employees a chance to raise problems at an early stage.

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

Benefits of one-to-ones:

- boosting employee engagement and building mutual trust

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

- ensuring employee wellbeing is monitored throughout the organisation.

Managers can help by:

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

- ensuring appraisal and supervision procedures cover mental wellbeing and stress, and give employees permission to talk about home as well as work issues

- 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.

Useful links

We have a range of free resources to help you improve mental wellbeing in your workplace: mind.org.uk/workplaceresources

Enhanced standard one

Increase transparency and accountability through internal and external reporting to include a leadership commitment and outline of the organisation's progress on mental health

Throughout this guide we've seen how important producing and promoting a mental health at work plan is for wellbeing at work. Creating a plan with input from your employees will help you adopt the core standards to meet the needs of your organisation. But setting up your plan is just the first step. It's also important to regularly assess the progress you're making, and what you can do better, for people both inside and outside your organisation. This shows your on-going support for mental health, and sends out a clear message that you value your staff.

Producing an annual wellbeing report

In core standard six we considered how to routinely monitor employee mental health and wellbeing by using both HR and team data. The data you have collected can be used to produce an annual mental health and wellbeing report which can be shared internally with staff but also externally with key stakeholders and potential recruits. This will help increase accountability and encourage discussion.

However, it is important to ensure confidentiality. It's sensitive information, therefore in surveys make sure you don't ask any questions which might identify an individual such as name, address or email. Create strict policies to ensure this and emphasize that the survey is anonymous so you collect genuine experience and honest feedback. For further information on data protection see the Information Commissioner's Office.

Your report could include:

- a statement on your commitment to adopting the mental health core standards

- initiatives currently in place and priorities for the future

- evidence of the impact of your initiatives or support through case studies and data like staff survey results, sickness absence and engagement in mental health activities.

Use Mind's Workplace Wellbeing Index

Our Workplace Wellbeing Index is a benchmark of best policy and practice. It will help you find out where you are doing well and where you could improve your approach to mental health in the workplace. It can also help you gain public recognition for what you're doing, and find out where you benchmark in comparison to peers and other participating organisations.

Sign the Time to Change employers' pledge

Showing the public that you've made a commitment to protecting and improving the mental health of your employees will make your workplace an attractive place to be.

The Time to Change employers' pledge is a simple way to demonstrate your commitment to change how we think and act about mental health in the workplace.

Enhanced standard two

Demonstrate accountability by nominating a health and wellbeing lead at Board or Senior Leadership level, with clear reporting duties and responsibilities

Core standard one is about producing, implementing and communicating a mental health at work plan. Additionally, having a lead at Board level helps ensure that mental health is taken seriously by everyone. In large organisations this could be part of the senior leadership in Human Resources or Health and Safety teams.

It's important that the lead has clear accountability for protecting and supporting mental health throughout your organisation, and looking for opportunities to increase collaboration.

You could also think about requiring senior leaders to include supporting employees' mental health as one of their performance objectives, and make them accountable for adopting the mental health core and enhanced standards.

To make this happen part of their performance review could include measurements like sickness absence, staff survey results, take-up of Employee Assistance Programmes or Occupational Health Services and disclosure rates.

If you are a smaller organisation who may not have a large senior leadership team then consider nominating a manager to demonstrate accountability and show leadership commitment. If this is too large of a task for one person consider sharing the role with a group of more senior staff members.

Supporting high-risk staff

Employees working in some sectors, like the emergency services, can be at high risk of stress and trauma. This makes it even more important to support their mental health with clear accountability.

Our Blue Light Programme offers specific support for emergency services employers: mind.org.uk/bluelight
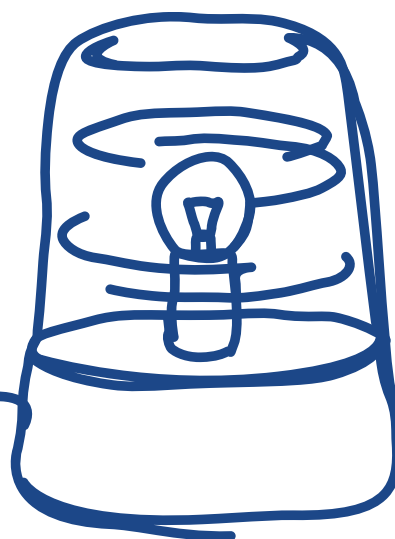
Enhanced standard three

Improve the disclosure process to encourage openness during recruitment, ensuring employees are aware of why information is required and make sure the right support is in place to facilitate a good employer response following disclosure

Core standard three emphasises that it's important to be open about mental health.

However, to encourage this open culture, employees must be confident how information they share will be used when talking about their mental health. Policies must be clear and fair to avoid discouraging them from sharing sensitive issues.

For example, employers should explain why people are being asked to share information about mental health problems and what will happen with that information.

Handling disclosure effectively

Someone applying for a job at your organisation may be worried about sharing information about their mental health. They might be anxious their mental health problems will lead to them being rejected, or that the interviewer will view them in a negative light. Therefore, it is important that organisations provide a fair and unbiased recruitment process.

Since the Equality Act 2010 came into force, it is unlawful for employers to ask questions about health before making a job offer, including about mental health.

However, there are ways to support people to disclose their mental health problems lawfully. This helps ensure they have equal access to job opportunities and are offered the support they need without discrimination.

Recruitment decisions should be based on whether candidates have the necessary qualifications and competence for the job, without making assumptions about health or disability.

If you do have concerns about whether health or disability will affect their ability to do the job, you must assess these with your legal duty to make reasonable adjustments for disabled people.

Five ways to improve your recruitment processes

1. Communicate your organisation's commitment to equal opportunities during the recruitment process, including in the job advert.

2. Provide guidelines and, where possible, training for staff involved in recruitment to ensure candidates are not discriminated against at any stage.

3. Make it clear in adverts and interviews that you value staff's mental health – this sends a signal that disclosure will not lead to discrimination. For example, include a statement such as: 'As an employer we are committed to promoting and protecting the physical and mental health of all our staff.'

4. State clearly that reasonable adjustments are available – for the interview and the job itself – so applicants understand why disclosure might be beneficial.

5. Ensure people can disclose confidentially and that any information about health or disability is kept separate from the application form, so the recruitment panel does not see it.

Enhanced standard four

Ensure provision of tailored in-house mental health support and signposting to clinical help and signposting to clinical help, including digital support, employer-purchased Occupational Health or Employee Assistance Programmes, or NHS services, amongst other sources of support

Some employees might be struggling with mental health problems, and so may need support from external mental health services or other practical support. Both internal and external support should be detailed in your organisational mental health at work plan from core standard one.

You can provide support in-house or buy in additional support for employees. This could include:

- access to Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (including through digital platforms)
- counselling through Access to Work
- Occupational Health
- Employee Assistance Programmes and other tailored mental health and wellbeing support.

Some employers extend support to organisations in their supply chain, particularly smaller employers, to help them improve the mental health of their employees.

Different ways to support staff

The table below shows the different support available to staff, inside and outside of your organisation.

Internal support:	External support:
Internal mental health or wellbeing groups	Employee Assistance Programmes
Peer support groups	Occupational Health
Internal wellbeing or mental health network for people to share experiences and tips for managing mental health and wellbeing at work	Signposting to local voluntary sector providers, such as local peer support groups and online peer support
Formal or informal buddying systems for people to have the opportunity to talk to someone other than their managers	Free or subsidised private medical insurance
Mental health first aiders or Mental Health Champions employees can talk to if they are struggling	Signposting to medical services, such as NHS services or another healthcare provider

We can help you support staff wellbeing

Mind is the leading mental health charity in England and Wales. No one else is better placed to support your business to improve your approach to mental health in the workplace and to support you to achieve the standards set out in the *Thriving at Work* report.

With our experience and expertise you can:

End stigma and discrimination of mental health problems in your workplace

The Time to Change employers' pledge is a simple way to demonstrate your commitment to change how we think and act about mental health in the workplace.

Access effective policies and best practice

Our Workplace Wellbeing Index is a benchmark of best policy and practice, and the only benchmark dedicated to workplace mental health in the UK. It will help you find out where you are doing well and what you could improve. Register today at mind.org.uk/index

Get expert training and consultancy

Our training offers a cost-effective way to support your staff's mental health. We can work with you to devise a programme specifically for your organisation and deliver it at your workplace – or staff can attend courses at our offices in Stratford, London.

Partner with us

There are lots of different ways to partner with us to achieve both your corporate responsibility goals and your wider business needs. Our experienced account managers will provide innovative ways to tailor the partnership and engage your workforce.

Download essential mental health information

We've produced a series of free resources to help improve mental wellbeing in your workplace which you can read online or download.

Coming soon

The Royal Foundation have funded Mind to deliver two new initiatives over the next year: the Mental Health at Work gateway: a first-stop website for workplace mental health resources and e-learning modules to support employees working in small to medium enterprises.

To find out more about any of our services please visit **mind.org.uk/workplace** or email **work@mind.org.uk**

We're Mind, the mental health charity.
We want to support a million people
to stay well and have good mental
health at work by 2021.

Be part of our movement for change in workplace
mental health.

work@mind.org.uk

mind.org.uk/work

t   @MindCharity

f   /mindforbettermentalhealth

in Search for Mind.

Mind

15-19 Broadway

Stratford

London

E15 4BQ

mind
for better mental health