



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Positive about Mental Health Guidance for Managers

Deimhinneach mu Shlàinte
Inntinn - Stiùireadh do
Mhanaidsearan

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At the Scottish Parliament, we aim to promote a positive and healthy workplace culture, where open and honest communication is encouraged, and mutual respect is the norm.

The health, safety and wellbeing of staff remains our priority and we believe that everyone can flourish and reach their full potential at work. Our managers play a vital role in achieving this.

Managers are the people most likely to have regular interactions with their team members. They have a role in:

- ensuring colleagues have the support they need with looking after their mental health;
- making themselves visible and listening to colleague's concerns; and
- letting them know that their opinions matter.

They may also be someone a team member turns to, either for advice and support or just to tell them about a problem with their mental health.

This guide will equip managers with the tools to create a positive working environment so that colleagues feel comfortable talking about mental health. It will also provide managers with practical guidance on:

- what is good and poor mental health;
- what are their early signs and symptoms; and
- what can be done to support a team member when they are struggling with their mental health at work, or if it reaches a crisis point.

We hope you find this guidance useful. Many of these basic tools and knowledge are the most powerful way you can offer support. However, these are often disrupted or forgotten during busy periods or a crisis, so it's important to maintain a focus on keeping them going, even more so when we're under pressure.

What do we mean by mental health?

As explained in the policy, mental health is our state of emotional, psychological and social wellbeing. It affects how we think, feel and act and how we cope with the pressures of everyday life.

The Health and Safety Executive defines mental ill-health (stress) as "the adverse reaction people have to excess pressure or other types of demands placed on them". This makes an important distinction between pressure, which can be positive if managed correctly and stress which can be detrimental to health.

Anyone can experience a period of mental ill health. Mental health is a complex area and while we can try to define it, the effects of mental ill health are unique to each individual. It can range from common mental health issues such as anxiety and depression to more serious conditions such as bipolar disorder or schizophrenia. Symptoms can emerge suddenly because of a specific event, or gradually, where they can worsen over time.

What does good and poor mental health look like?

It is important for you to have an awareness of mental health and be able to recognise signs of the more common mental health problems. Here are some examples of what good and poor mental health look like:

| Good mental health | Poor mental health |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• being able to think clearly• in control mentally• the ability to make good decisions• valuing self• being realistically optimistic/positive performing well• good sense of humour | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• irrational thoughts• feeling trapped inside• feeling worthless• excessive anxiety• constant fatigue• feeling angry• out of control of thoughts• sleeplessness |

How can I recognise the early signs of a mental health problem?

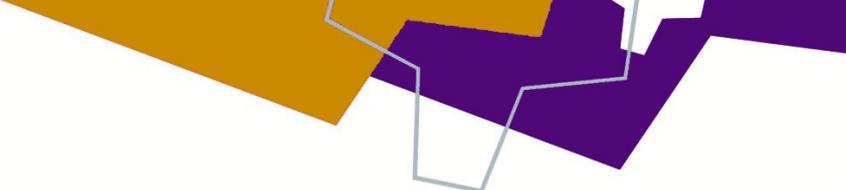
You are not expected to diagnose mental health problems but you may see a marked change in your team member's behaviour, mood or appearance. This will help you to recognise early signs of changes in mental health and wellbeing.

Colleagues experiencing mental health may demonstrate some or all of these symptoms:

- Changes in work performance, not getting things done/missing deadlines.
- Working longer hours than normal.
- Changes in social functioning, withdrawn, isolated or emotionally detached from colleagues.
- Changes in personality, mood, loss of motivation, showing anxiety or distress.
- Fatigue, tiredness, difficulty sleeping, increased sickness absence.

In extreme cases, suicidal comments such as talking about being a burden on others or feeling hopeless and having no reason to live.

Remember that a person's ability to cope at work will depend on a variety of factors including their levels of susceptibility, resilience, and their support systems and at home and work. This is why it is important to create an open and supportive environment where your team members can feel they can openly talk about how they are coping at work.



How can I create a positive working culture?

There are many things you can do to help create a safe and positive working environment which will encourage your team members to talk about mental health. You can:

- Understand your role in preventing mental ill-health and work related stress that can be caused or exacerbated by work.
- Have regular one-to-ones with your team members and ensure you ask how they are and how they are feeling. You can use individual wellbeing plans to support these conversations and make sure these are up to date. You can implement workplace adjustments when any additional support is required.
- Lead by example by taking reasonable care of your own mental health and wellbeing, promote our values, and challenge negative attitudes towards mental health.
- Role model inclusive behaviours that provide positive feedback, and praise colleagues to build confidence and boost self-esteem.
- Engage and communicate with colleagues about mental health and raise awareness of wider wellbeing events and activities. Encourage team members to participate and get involved. Make sure everyone knows that wellbeing is your priority.
- Monitor the impact of work pressures on colleagues to promote and improve their mental health and wellbeing.
- Monitor workloads to ensure what individuals are expected to deliver are realistic within the timescales and resources available.
- Encourage colleagues to have a good work-life balance including facilitating flexible working where possible and taking adequate breaks.
- Ensure individuals are aware of the internal resources that are available to them such as the Employee Assistance programme, Mental Health First Aiders, Trade Union representative, Healthy Living Scheme, Cycle to Work Scheme and at the Holyrood building we have a Gym and the Room for Contemplation.

Why might some colleagues not want to disclose they have a mental health condition?

We know there is a stigma attached to mental health and colleagues may not feel that the environment in which they work allows for open and honest conversation about their experiences at work.

They might be concerned that they will be judged on their performance or their ability to carry out work tasks.

They may also feel worried about confidentiality and others knowing their personal circumstances.



How can I have a conversation with someone about their mental health?

It's easy to worry about how to approach someone to have a conversation about mental health. Our [wellbeing framework](#) already provides the tools for you to facilitate these important conversation with your team members. Having these wellbeing conversations regularly can enable early intervention where it is needed.

If you think that someone in your team may be experiencing a mental health problem it is important that you take the lead if they do not raise it with you first.

You should:

- Create a safe space for the conversation.
- Encourage them to talk.
- Ensure confidentiality at the start of the conversation.
- Don't make assumptions and listen to understand how they feel.
- Develop a wellbeing action plan if the person needs additional support. You may need to make a referral to occupational health about how best to support their mental health at work.
- Speak to the People and Culture office if you need any advice or support for yourself.

What can I do to minimise stress in the workplace?

There are inevitably times when we are under pressure and other types of demands are placed upon us. This can especially be the case for the environment in which we work in at the Parliament.

There are potential triggers for workplace stress that unless managed, can lead to anxiety, depression, ill health or burnout. As a manager it is important you know the triggers from certain workplace impacts such as:

- Unmanageable workloads.
- Long working hours and not taking breaks.
- Lack of control at work.
- Unrealistic expectations or deadlines.
- Lone working.
- Negative relationships or poor communication.
- Poor managerial support.

If you're having regular wellbeing conversations with your team members you should be able to take early intervention to remove or minimise stress related triggers at work. The person's wellbeing must always be a priority.



What support or workplace adjustments can I put in place?

It is important to treat each person as an individual. An adjustment for one person might not be appropriate for someone else in a similar situation. The individual themselves might have ideas about what adjustments they need in place. You can use the adjustment passport to work through any adjustments to support their mental health. You can seek advice from the People and Culture Office when considering what support is required for the person.

Whilst adjustments should always be considered on a case-by-case basis the following adjustments might be considered. This list is not exhaustive and adjustments will need to be tailored for the particular individual:

- Take a flexible approach to start/finish times and/or shift patterns.
- Review the workplace or office space – to minimise noise/ provide quiet space etc.
- Support the team member with their workload by helping them prioritise their work, or adjusting the duties or responsibilities of a role.
- Organise support from others such as a MHFA, another colleague at work etc.

Remind me what the wellbeing plans do?

Individual wellbeing plans are a helpful tool to assist in structuring conversations with a team member around mental health and wellbeing. Essentially, this tool enables both parties to be proactive about managing mental health and wellbeing and can help prevent colleagues reaching crisis point at work.

If there is a need for an action plan to help your team member stay well, you should capture this information in the plan. For example: self-help and adjustments, early warning signs that their health is deteriorating and who to contact in a crisis. This can assist individuals in managing their mental ill health and by having regular conversations to review the action plan it can help them to identify when symptoms are changing so that they can take proactive and preventative action.

What resources and support are available?

Our [mental health and wellbeing intranet pages](#) provide more detail about the available resources:

Internal

- Employee Assistance programme
- Occupational health
- Stress risk assessment
- Mental Health First Aiders
- Mental Health network

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- Healthy Living Scheme
 - Gym/Room for Contemplation
 - Cycle to Work Scheme
 - Trade Unions

External

- [NHS Inform](#) - Advice on dealing with low mood, anxiety, phobias, stress and where you can get help
- [Clear Your Head](#) - practical steps to support your mental health
- [Breathing Space](#) - free confidential helpline
- [Mental Health Foundation](#) - provides mental health advice and support
- [LGBT+ Health and Wellbeing](#) - provides support to LGBT+ people
- [Young Minds](#) – mental health support and advice for young people and their parents

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For further information contact:

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