

Wellbeing at Work Forum

Mental health in the workplace

What is mental health?

Mental health includes our emotional, psychological, and social well-being. It affects how we think, feel, and act. It also helps determine how we handle stress, relate to others, and make choices.

Mental ill health can range from feeling 'a bit down' to common disorders such as anxiety and depression to more severe and far less common conditions such as bipolar disorder or schizophrenia.

Most people's mental health will not just be continuously good. Usually it will rise and fall depending on pressures and/or experiences in their life. A person may therefore feel in good mental health generally but also experience stress or anxiety from time to time.

Why is understanding and addressing mental health important?

People that feel good about themselves often work productively, interact well with colleagues and make a valuable contribution to the workplace.

A recent Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development study highlighted the impact that mental ill health can have on organisations. The study found that:

- 37% of sufferers are more likely to get into conflict with colleagues
- 57% find it harder to juggle multiple tasks
- 80% find it difficult to concentrate
- 62% take longer to do tasks
- 50% are potentially less patient with customers/clients.

The study also found that, for the first time, stress is the major cause of long-term absence in manual and non-manual workers.

Promoting positive mental health in the workplace

Promoting positive mental health in your workplace can be hugely beneficial. Staff with good mental health are more likely to perform well, have good attendance levels and be engaged in their work.

For a step by step approach to help employers improve the mental health of staff and provide support for staff that experience mental ill health, go to Promoting positive mental health in the workplace.

Managing staff experiencing mental ill health

Managers should be confident in supporting staff experiencing mental ill health. It is important that managers are able to spot the signs of mental ill health, know how to approach conversations sensitively and how they can support staff experiencing mental ill health.

Dealing with stress in the workplace

Reducing work-related stress can be hugely beneficial to an employer - reducing absence levels and improving overall performance. Employers also have a legal obligation to ensure the health, safety and welfare of their employees.

Organisations should be thinking about the causes of workplace stress, how to reduce them in their workplace and how best to support staff when they do experience stress.

For more information, go to [Dealing with stress in the workplace](#).

[Workplace Anxiety & Work Related Anxiety](#)

Anxiety is a feeling of worry, fear, nervousness or unease about something. Employers and managers should understand what can cause anxiety and what signs may indicate a team member is experiencing anxiety.

It is widely reported that mental ill health will affect one in four people at some point in their working lives. People with mental health problems frequently suffer discrimination in the workplace and unemployment affects those with long-term mental health disorders more than any other group of disabled people. The term mental ill health covers harmful levels of stress, depression, anxiety, schizophrenia, bi-polar disorder (manic depression), psychosis, obsessive compulsive disorder and is often associated with drug and alcohol abuse and eating disorders (e.g. anorexia nervosa and bulimia).

The mental health charity, [Mind](#) found:

- 30 per cent of staff disagreed with the statement 'I would feel able to talk openly with my line manager if I was feeling stressed'
- 56 per cent of employers said they would like to do more to improve staff wellbeing but don't feel they have the right training or guidance.

As the largest public sector employer in the UK, the NHS can make a significant contribution to combating discrimination against people with mental health problems, not only benefiting the individuals concerned, but also having a positive impact on the diversity of the workforce and the experience the NHS is able to offer patients. Mental health is one of the key reasons for sickness absence within the NHS. The [Mental Health Foundation](#) state that:

- 1 in 6.8 people are experience mental health problems in the workplace
- evidence suggests that 12.7 per cent of all sickness absence days in the UK can be attributed to mental health conditions.

Ensuring staff are supported and cared for with their mental ill health is paramount. The [NHS Health and Wellbeing framework](#) encourage NHS organisations to ensure that prevention and self-management is available for all staff by:

[Creating a healthy and supportive working environment:](#)

- The organisation's culture does not stigmatise people with mental ill health and actively encourages people to maintain good mental health and feel able to talk about it.
- Line managers have training and support to assist staff who disclose a mental health issue.
- Working conditions promote good mental health.
- Policies and practices are embedded that encourage a good work/life balance.
- Access to taking regular breaks.

[Upskilling staff and line managers:](#)

- Staff and line managers have access to information about how to improve their own and others' mental health and wellbeing through self-management.

- Training for line managers covers how they can promote the mental health and wellbeing and be aware of the signs and symptoms of poor mental health.
- Training or advice is available on making reasonable adjustments for mental health e.g. changes work hours, temporary redeployment.

Making sure that staff have access to interventions, such as:

- peer support
- stress management exercises
- mindfulness
- physical activity
- sleep advice.

Access the [full NHS Health and Wellbeing framework](#) for more information on how you can support your staff to feel well, healthy and happy at work.