

Mental Health Program

A guide for managers



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Introduction: the purpose of this guide

Awareness of the scale and impact of poor mental health at work is increasing – in 2018, the CIPD, (The Institute of Personnel and Development) found that poor mental health was the most common cause of long-term sickness absence in

UK workplaces and that stress-related absence had increased in nearly two-fifths of organisations (CIPD 2018), while a survey conducted by the mental health organisation 'Mind' found that 1 in 10 rated their current mental health as poor or very poor.

The CIPD found that more than four in ten (43%) employees would not feel comfortable disclosing unmanageable stress or poor mental health to their employer or manager. Why do you think this can be?

- **Worrying that their employer will think they can't do their job and that they would be treated differently**
- **It could harm their promotion and career opportunities**
- **Employees are reluctant to bring up the subject for fear of discrimination**
- **Managers often shy away from the subject, for fear of making matters worse or provoking legal consequences**
- **Fear of stigma**



This culture of silence means undetected mental health issues can spiral into a crisis, resulting in sickness absence, higher levels of presenteeism and increased staff turnover.

We have developed this guide to help people managers overcome these challenges based on CIPD and the Mind guide.

This guide contains information, practical advice and templates to help managers facilitate conversations about stress and mental health issues and provide support so that employees can stay well and in work – meaning they perform at their best for the business while the employer retains talent and expertise.

What is mental health?

We all have mental health, just like we have physical health. Mental health can fluctuate on a spectrum from good to poor. Poor mental health can therefore affect any of us irrespective of age, personality or background.

Mental health problems can appear as a result of experiences in both our personal and working lives – or they can just happen.

Poor mental health can affect the way people **think, feel or behave**. In some cases this can seriously limit a person's ability to cope with day-to-day life, which can have an impact on relationships, work and quality of life. However, many people effectively manage their mental health condition alongside the demands of a job and daily life, sometimes with treatment and **support**.

Others may experience symptoms of poor mental health but may never be diagnosed with a condition. The crucial thing to remember is that everyone's experience of poor mental health is different – two people with the same condition may have entirely different symptoms and coping mechanisms. That's why working with people on an individual basis is so important.

**WORKING WITH
PEOPLE ON AN
INDIVIDUAL BASIS
IS IMPORTANT**

Types of mental health

There are many different mental health problems. Some of them have similar symptoms, so you may experience the symptoms of more than one mental health problem, or be given several diagnoses at once. Or you might not have any particular diagnosis, but still find things very difficult. Everyone's experience is different and can change at different times.

Depression is a feeling of low mood that lasts for a long time and affects everyday life. It can make someone feel hopeless, despairing, guilty, worthless, unmotivated and exhausted. It can affect self-esteem, sleep, appetite, sex drive and physical health. In its mildest form, depression doesn't stop someone leading a normal life, but it makes everything harder to do and makes things seem less worthwhile. At its most severe, depression can make someone feel suicidal, and it can be life-threatening.

Psychosis (also called a psychotic experience or psychotic episode) is when you perceive or interpret reality in a very different way from people around you. You might be said to 'lose touch' with reality. The most common types of psychosis are: hallucinations and delusions.

Anxiety is what people feel when they are worried, tense or afraid – particularly about things that are about to happen, or that they think could happen in the future. If feelings of anxiety are very strong, or last for a long time, they can be overwhelming. Someone might also experience physical symptoms such as sleep problems and panic attacks. There are different diagnoses of anxiety such as generalised anxiety disorder (GAD), social anxiety (social phobia), panic disorder or post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

Why does good mental health matter?

Managing and supporting people's mental health at work is a critical and growing challenge for employers. Most people will be affected in some way by poor mental health, either personally or through family and friends, so mental health is an issue for every organisation in the UK.

A good support will increase:

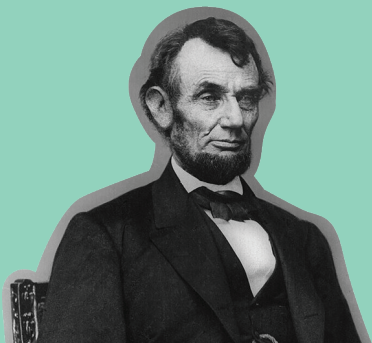


**Happiness
& retention**

**Employee
engagement**

Productivity

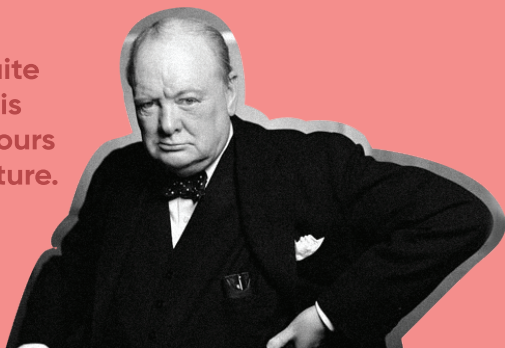
Remember, many people are able to manage their condition and perform to a high standard in their role



“Remember in the depth and even the agony of despondency, that very shortly you are to feel well again.

Abraham Lincoln

“My black dog seems quite away from me now – it is such a relief. All the colours come back into the picture.



Winston Churchill

“Everybody passionately seeks to be well-adjusted. But there are some things in our world to which men of good will must be maladjusted.



Martin Luther King Jr.

Prevention: helping people to stay well and manage stress

Managing people

How people are treated and managed on a day to day basis is central to their well being. It is important to:

Create realistic deadlines

Clearly communicate job objectives

Deal with problems as soon as they arise

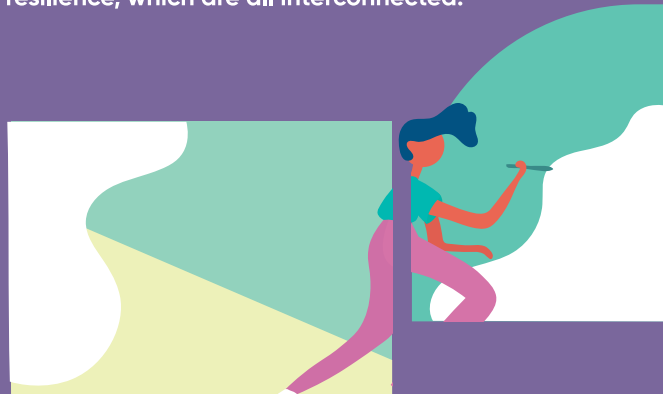
Give employees the right level of job responsibility

Regularly ask team members, 'how are you?'

Act as a mediator in conflict situations

Building resilience

Employers can help employees cope with pressure and adversity in the workplace by focusing on building resilience or coping techniques. Resilience can be defined as the ability to recover or bounce back in the face of adverse conditions, change or pressure. Successful approaches focus on building individual, team and organisational resilience, which are all interconnected.



Early intervention: spotting the signs of stress and poor mental health

Workplace triggers

A key part of spotting the signs is for managers to be alert and aware potential **workplace triggers** for distress such as:

- People working long hours and not taking breaks
- Unrealistic expectations or deadline
- High-pressure environments
- Unmanageable workloads or lack of control over work
- Negative relationships or poor calendar communications
- High-risk role
- One working

External triggers

External triggers may also have an effect on an employee's mental health and well-being, such as:

- Childhood abuse, trauma or neglect
- Social isolation or loneliness
- Bereavement
- Severe or long-terms stress
- Having a long-term physical condition
- Drug and alcohol misuse
- Domestic violence, bullying or other abuse as an adult

Indicators of poor mental health

Physical

- Fatigue
- Indigestion or upset stomach
- Headaches
- Appetite and weight changes
- Joint and back pain
- Changes in sleep patterns
- Visible tension or trembling
- Sweating
- Constantly feeling cold

Psychological

- Anxiety or distress
- Tearfulness
- Feeling low
- Mood changes
- Indecision
- Loss of motivation
- Loss of humour
- Increased sensitivity
- Difficult relaxing
- Lapses in memory
- Irrational thought processes
- Difficult taking information in

Behavioural

- Increased smoking & drinking
- Using recreational drugs
- Withdrawal
- Resigned attitude
- Irritable, anger or aggression
- Over-excitement or euphoria
- Restlessness
- Lateness, leaving earlier
- Working for longer hours
- Repetitive speech or activity
- Inconsistent performance
- Uncharacteristic problem with colleagues
- Increased sickness absence
- Apparent over-reaction to problems

Encouraging people to talk about their mental health:

Supporting staff to stay well and in work

1 Conversation Checklist

CONVERSATION CHECKLIST

QUESTIONS TO AVOID

- You're clearly struggling. What's up?
- Why can't you just get your act together?
- What do you expect me to do about it?
- Your performance is really unacceptable right now – what's going on?
- Everyone else is in the same boat and they're okay. Why aren't you?
- Who do you expect to pick up all the work that you can't manage?

QUESTIONS TO ASK

- How are you doing at the moment?
- You seem to be a bit down/upset/under pressure/frustrated/angry. Is everything okay?
- I've noticed you've been arriving late recently and I wondered if you're okay?
- I've noticed the reports are late when they're usually not. Is everything okay?
- Is there anything I can do to help?
- What would you like to happen? How?
- What support do you think might help?
- Have you spoken to your GP or looked for help anywhere else?

- Avoid interruptions
- Ask simple, open, non-judgemental questions
- Avoid judgemental or patronising responses
- Speak calmly
- Maintain good eye contact
- Listen actively and carefully
- Encourage the employee to talk
- Show empathy and understanding
- Be prepared for some silences
- Focus on the person, not the problem
- Avoid making assumptions
- Follow up in writing, especially agreed actions or support

Broaching the subject

Responding to disclosure

If you suspect a member of your team is experiencing poor mental health, or they disclose it to you, it's essential that you have a conversation with them about their needs. This will help you to evaluate and introduce appropriate support or adjustments. You'll need good people management skills, as well as empathy and common sense. You should try to ensure you are seen as approachable, and listen when staff ask for help.

Choose an appropriate place

Somewhere private and quiet. Sometimes a neutral space outside the workplace will help the person to feel equal and at ease.

Avoid making assumptions

keeping an open mind and giving them space to talk it out. Avoid trying to guess what symptoms an employee might have and how these might affect their ability to do their job. Remember, many people are able to manage their condition and perform their role to a high standard.

Embed confidentiality

Create strict policies about who is made aware of disclosures; as a rule, it should involve as few people as possible. Reassure the individual that any private information they disclose will not be leaked to their colleagues. Discuss with the individual any information they would like shared with team colleagues and how, as this can be very supportive for some people.

Respond flexibly

Mental distress affects people in different ways and at different times in their lives, so be prepared to adapt your support to suit the individual.

Be honest and clear

It's important to recognise that an employee's performance or behaviour can be affected if they are experiencing a mental health problem. If you have specific grounds for concern, such as high absence levels or impaired performance, it's important to address these at an early stage.

Develop an action plan

It's important that the plan identifies the signs of the individual's mental health problem, triggers for stress, the possible impact on their work, who to contact in a crisis, and what support they need. The plan should include an agreed time to review the support measures to check if they have been effective or whether any further adjustments are needed. Include a date to follow up on this action plan and set up a subsequent meeting.

Encourage people to seek support

People should speak to their GP about available support from the NHS, such as talking therapies.

Reassure people

People may not always be ready to talk straight away, so it's important that you outline what support is available. Reassure the individual that your door is always open and they can speak to you as their line manager at any time

Develop an action plan

If you're still unsure, the person lacks insight or an issue is particularly complex, seek advice from expert organisations such as the CIPD, Mind, Centre for Mental Health, Mindful Employer, or your local Mind or GP – encourage your employee to do so too. If available, employee assistance programmes can also help line managers and employees

Wellness Action Plan

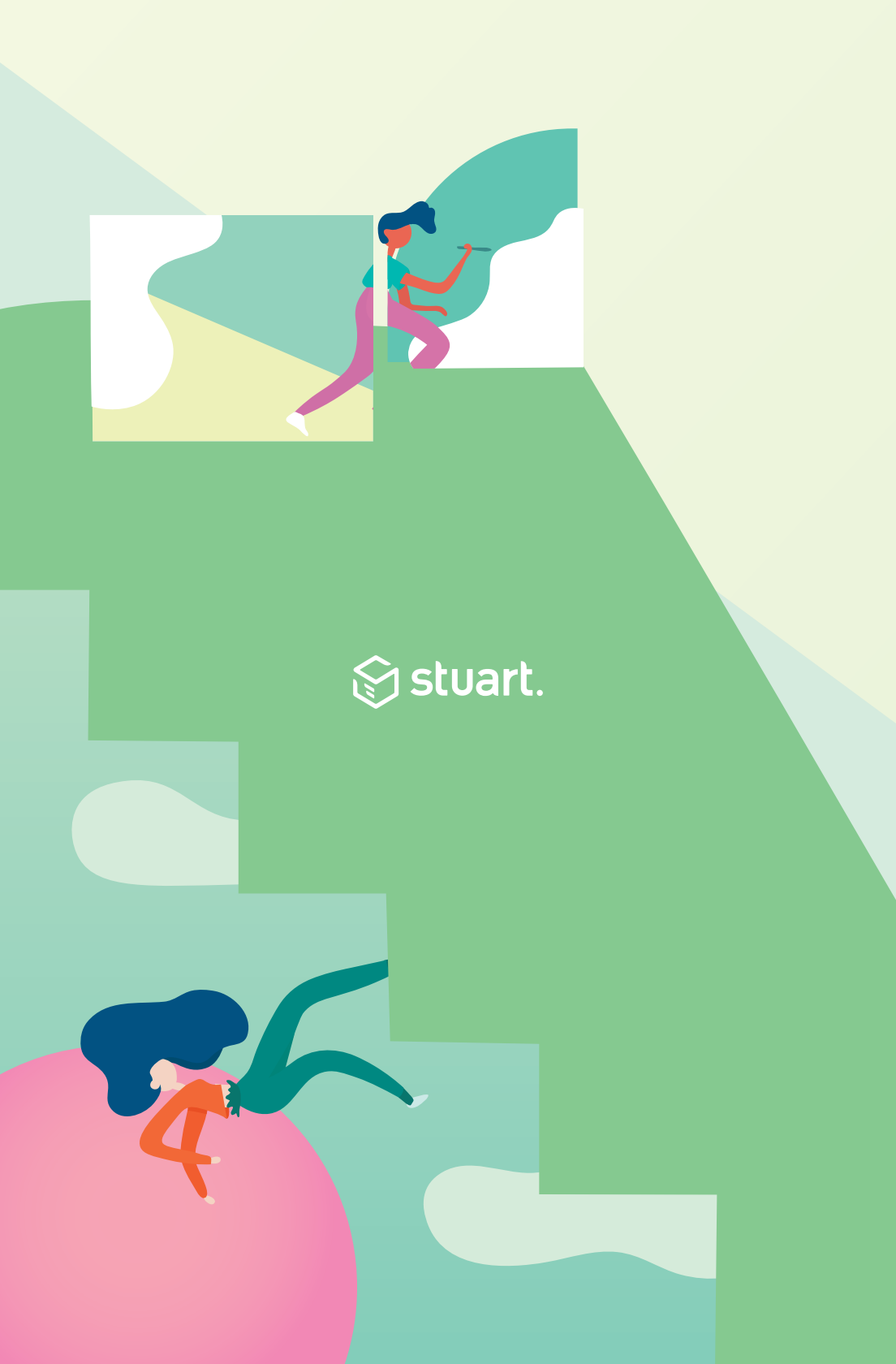
A WAP is a personalised, practical tool we can all use – whether we have a mental health problem or not – to help identify what keeps us well at work, what causes us to become unwell and the support we would like to receive from our manager to boost our well-being or support us through a recovery.



As a manager, encouraging your staff to draw up a WAP gives them ownership of the practical steps needed to help them stay well at work or manage a mental health problem. It also opens up a dialogue between you and your team member, to help you better understand their needs and experiences and therefore better support their well-being.

Action Plan for the manager WAP:

1. What helps you stay mentally healthy at work?
2. What can your manager do to proactively support you to stay mentally healthy at work?
3. Are there any situations at work that can trigger poor mental health for you?
4. How might experiencing poor mental health have an impact on your work?
5. Are there any early warning signs that we might notice when you are starting to experience poor mental health?
6. What support could be put in place to minimise triggers or help you to manage the impact?
7. Are there elements of your individual working style or temperament that is worth your manager being aware of?
8. If we notice early warning signs that you are experiencing poor mental health – what should we do?
9. What steps can you take if you start to experience poor mental health at work? Is there anything we need to do to facilitate them?
10. Is there anything else that you would like to share?



 **stuart.**

