People Manager's Mental Health Toolkit

Introduction

This toolkit has been designed to equip the University's people managers in essential knowledge and tools on how to manage mental health in the workplace.

As a people manager, you are not expected to be a mental health expert. However, you are expected, as far as possible, to safeguard the health, safety and wellbeing of your staff, including mental health by:

- taking steps to avoid staff being placed under unreasonable pressure.

- providing ongoing support so staff are able to meet their targets and perform effectively.

- making reasonable adjustments if work conditions may be contributing to stress or mental ill health.

In short, managing mental health in the workplace is no different to good people management, and a good general understanding of mental health will help you manage your team more effectively.

What is mental health?

Mental health includes people's emotional, psychological and social wellbeing. It affects how we think, feel and act. Staying in good mental health allows people to:

- Realise their full potential
- Cope well with the pressures of life
- Work productively
- Have positive relationships
- Make good choices

Mental health, similarly to physical health, can fluctuate anywhere on a spectrum from good to poor. Mental health problems can affect anyone irrespective of their age, personality or background. Problems can appear as a result of experiences in both personal and working lives – but the causes of mental ill health are complex and it may not be possible to identify a specific cause.

Mental ill health includes a variety of different conditions, ranging from depression, anxiety and stress-related disorders to schizophrenia and personality disorders. In the workplace, the most common manifestations of mental ill health are stress, anxiety and depression. Although work might not be the direct cause, they are frequently exacerbated by it.

Despite the fact that stress, depression and anxiety are very common, some people find it difficult to talk about due to its personal and complex nature. There is still a stigma

associated with mental health due to a lack of understanding and those affected may want to keep the information to themselves because of fear of being treated differently and judged.

Mentally Healthy Organisations

Organisations that take a positive, proactive approach to mental health can benefit from:

• Attracting the best talent
• More engaged and motivated staff
• Retaining staff, less turnover
• Reduction in absence
• Improved professional reputation
• Improved productivity and fewer mistakes

Because it is impossible to separate the impact of various factors on mental health, it is in the University's interest to support its employees independently of the original cause or trigger. Treating staff well and extending support not only allows them to remain productive, it also creates a working environment where all can thrive and increases engagement with the organisation.

People manager's role in supporting employees' mental health

"Good line management can lead to good health, well-being and improved performance. Line managers also have a role in identifying and supporting people with health conditions to help them to carry on with their responsibilities, or adjust responsibilities where necessary." Dame Carol Black, National Director for Health and Work

As a people manager you can influence a culture that promotes positive mental health and helps prevent people from experiencing mental ill health or helps them better manage mental health problems.

The way you manage and interact with your team members directly affects their mental health. With the requirement to 'do more with less', managers are a guardians of their staff's wellbeing and play an important role in preventing mental health problems from arising.

Even with the best intentions and most robust preventative measures, it is likely some people will still experience mental health problems, for a range of reasons, so it is also essential for the University's people managers to know how to provide support.

This may include knowing how to spot the early warning signs, being confident to have a conversation about mental health and signpost colleagues to appropriate support.

One of the biggest challenges for people managers is to know how to have a conversation about mental health. A good starting point for this is to learn more about mental health, and particularly mental health problems.

The University offers Mental Health Awareness session for People Managers. Contact the Organisational Development team for more information.

Pressure and Stress

A certain level of pressure in a working environment is desirable. Pressure can help to motivate people and may boost their energy and productivity levels, however when pressure exceeds people's ability to cope, and particularly when there is no respite, it can become a negative rather than a positive factor and it can lead to unmanageable stress.

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) defines work-related stress as "the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressures or other types of demand placed on them at work".

Stress is not technically a medical condition, and most of us can cope with short bursts of stress, but research shows that prolonged stress is linked to mental health conditions such as anxiety and depression.

In addition, the term 'stress' is not always helpful as it means different things to different people. We all feel under pressure some of the time but not everybody suffers the adverse reaction of stress, or the same level of stress. The same amount of pressure can spur one person to perform at a higher level

and another person to underperform. Someone's ability to work under pressure may also vary according to what's happening outside work.

The employer has a legal duty to ensure that work doesn't make employees ill. Failing to assess the risk of stress and mental ill health and to take steps to alleviate them could lead to employees' mental ill health. Fortunately, making adjustments can typically be done easily and relatively cheaply e.g. adjusting hours, temporary change in duties etc.

Please familiarise yourself with the University's Stress at Work Policy and Stress Risk Assessment which will help you assess employees' stress levels and design an action plan for both you and your employee to take forward to decrease the unmanageable stress the employee may be experiencing.

Identifying the early warning signs and talking at an early stage

There are four broad categories of people in the workplace:

• People with a mental health diagnosis who are healthy and performing well because they are managing their condition through medication, counselling, support at work and so on.

• People with a diagnosis who are unwell.

• People with no diagnosis who are well.

• People with no diagnosis but who are very unwell and may not even realise it, but whose performance is likely to be impaired.

Line managers should know their team better than anyone. They are therefore ideally placed to spot the early warning signs that someone is mentally unwell. There will be times when you notice that someone whom you manage is behaving out of character or seems unhappy.

Some of the key things to look out for are changes in an employee's usual behaviour, such as poor performance, tiredness, sleep problems or increased sickness absence.

You might notice they are smoking or drinking more, or experiencing problems with colleagues. A normally punctual employee might start turning up late, or, conversely, they might start coming in much earlier and working later. Other signs might be tearfulness, headaches, loss of humour and mood changes.

Early warning signs of mental ill health

Key take away: Is this person acting out of character or differently to their usual behaviour?

Here's a list of behaviours and warning signs to watch out for:

• Not getting things done – missing deadlines or forgetting tasks.
• Erratic or unacceptable behaviour.
• Irritability, aggression, tearfulness.
• Complaining about the workload.
• Being withdrawn and not participating in conversations or out-of-work activities.
• Increased consumption of caffeine, alcohol, cigarettes and/or sedatives.
• Inability to concentrate.
• Indecision.
• Difficulty remembering things.
• Loss of confidence.
• Unplanned absences.
• Arguments/conflicts with others.
• Increased errors and/or accidents.
• Taking on too much work and volunteering for every new project.
• Being adamant they are right.
• Working too many hours – first in, last out/emailing out of hours or while on holiday.
• Being louder or more exuberant than usual.
• Negative changes to ways of working or socialising with colleagues.

Physical signs might include the following:

• Constant tiredness.
• Sickness absence.
• Being run down and frequent minor illnesses.

- Headaches.
- Difficulty sleeping.
- Weight loss or gain.
- Lack of care over their appearance. - Gastrointestinal disorders.
- Rashes/eczema.

Using day-to-day management to identify problems and needs

If an employee is experiencing mental ill health at work, ideally they should feel able to raise this with you, as their manager. Regular work planning sessions, appraisals or informal conversations about progress are the kind of day-to-day management processes that provide neutral and non-stigmatising opportunities to talk about any problems they may be experiencing.

But if they don't bring up an issue, and you have noticed a change in their behaviour that you think might indicate they are becoming unwell, it may be worth addressing it tactfully with the employee.

A sudden dip in performance or punctuality are likely to be signs of a deeper underlying problem, so it is inappropriate and unhelpful to take a hard line approach. It may be necessary to talk about the issue at an early stage, but ask questions in an open, exploratory and non-judgemental way. For example: "I've noticed that you've been arriving late recently and wondered how you are?" That gives the employee the opportunity to express their concerns in their own way.

If you listen and are empathetic, positive and supportive, an employee will feel more able to open up and be honest with you, which then makes it easier for you to offer the help they need. Frame the conversation in the context of exploring the issues and working out how you can help. Sometimes concerns may be such that you need to have a conversation outside the regular informal conversations.

Think carefully about how, when and where to have the conversation

- Ask for a private meeting at a mutually convenient time and give yourself plenty of time so you don't have to rush or are perceived to be in a hurry.

- Meeting outside the office – in a coffee shop, for example – might feel more private and less intimidating.

- Back up your concerns over particular behaviours or performance with concrete examples, dates and times

- You don't want to be disturbed, so turn your phone off or onto silent.

- When you ask them how they are, don't take 'I'm fine' for an answer. Be prepared for them to be evasive or defensive. Use specific examples to underpin your concern and move the conversation forward.

- Be considerate about your language. Say 'I' not 'we' to avoid the employee getting the impression that 'everyone is talking about them'.

- Reassure them that you are there to help them, not censure. This is not a disciplinary meeting and they aren't in trouble. If they get upset, let them take their time, and resist the temptation to offer water or tissues as they may perceive that as an attempt to stop them. They will tell you when they are ready to continue.

- Listen to them in a non-judgemental way (see below)

- Don't be tempted to rush into action. Tell the employee you need to reflect on what you've heard. Thank them for talking to you, reassure them that you will sort it out between you and fix another time to talk. Switching to the pronoun 'we' at this stage is helpful, because it includes them

Non-judgemental listening

The listener uses verbal and non-verbal listening skills to:

- Hear and understand exactly what's being said.

- Allow the person to speak freely and comfortably without feeling judged.

It requires three key attributes.

- Acceptance – respecting the person's feelings, experiences and values although they may be different from yours. Not judging or criticising because of your own beliefs and attitudes. You accept them as they are.

- Genuineness – showing that you accept the person and their values by what you say and do. You don't make a moral judgement.

- Empathy – the ability to place yourself in the other person's shoes and demonstrate to them that you hear and understand what they are saying and feeling. You get on their wavelength.

It requires a combination of verbal and non-verbal skills.

Verbal

- Listen without interrupting.

- Pay attention.

- Ask appropriate questions to make sure you are both clear about what is being said.

- Listen to the words and the tone of voice and observe the body language.

- Check you understand what the person is saying by restating it.

- Summarise facts and feelings.

- Use minimal prompts ('Mmm', 'Ah', or 'I see') to keep the conversation moving.

- Don't worry about pauses or silences, as the person may be simply thinking or temporarily lost for words.

- Avoid the temptation to fill the silences as you may break their train of thought or the rapport between you.

Non-verbal

- Be attentive.

- Keep appropriate eye contact (don't stare or avoid their eyes).

- Maintain an open body position.

- Sit down even if the other person is standing, to make you seem less threatening.

- Try not to sit directly opposite the other person, which can seem confrontational.

Managing an employee who becomes tearful and upset

Emotions are a natural part of life and sooner or later it is likely that a member of your staff will become upset. This can happen for any number of reasons and can be connected to something at work or outside work.

When this situation arises do the following:

• Stay calm.

• Reassure them that it is OK to be upset and that you are listening. In fact, the process of listening may provide an important space for both you and the employee to gain insight into the problem and possible actions to help resolve it.

• Ask them if they would like you to contact anyone or if they would like someone to be with them.

• Make sure you give them an appropriate space where they can express emotion freely and compose themselves in privacy.

• Alternatively, you might suggest that you both leave the building for a short time, and have a hot drink or a short walk to give them time to collect themselves. They may choose to go on their own, but it is advisable to accompany them – or have someone else of their choosing to accompany them – if they are still very distressed.

- Respect their wishes. Once they have recovered sufficiently, they may want to carry on working. Alternatively they might want to take a break or even go home.

- Reassure them that you value them and support them, because they might feel embarrassed at breaking down.

- Don't ignore someone who's upset, even if you're worried about how they will react to your intervention. Doing nothing may make the situation worse.

Wellness Action Plan (WAP)

The WAP tool was designed by the charity Mind. It is not only a tool to support staff when they are experiencing problems - it also helps identify how an individual's wellbeing can be proactively improved.

A WAP can help employees to develop approaches to support their mental wellbeing, leading to a reduced likelihood of problems such as work-related stress.

If your team member does experience a mental health problem, you will then both have an idea of the tailored support that could help, or at the least a tool to use in starting that conversation.

By regularly reviewing the agreed, practical steps in the WAP, you can support your team member to adapt it to reflect their experiences or new approaches they find helpful. By allowing the individual to take ownership of the process and of the WAP itself, you will be empowering them to feel more in control.

The form on pages from 7 to 11 is available to you to co-design a Wellness Action Plan with your member of staff.

WELLNESS ACTION PLAN (WAP)

A WAP reminds us what we need to do to stay well at work and details what our line managers can do to better support us. It also helps us develop an awareness of our working style, stress triggers and responses, and enables us to communicate these to our manager.

The information in this form will be held confidentially and regularly reviewed by you and your manager together. You only need to provide information that you are comfortable sharing and that relates to your role and workplace. This form is not a legal document but it can help you and your manager to agree, together, how to practically support you in your role and address any health needs.

It is the responsibility of the employer to ensure that data gathered in this form will be kept confidential and will not be shared with anyone without the permission of the member of staff. Certain circumstances may require confidentiality to be broken i.e. when the employe is at serious risk of harm, whether this is the employee or someone else, you should call the emergency services on 999.

1. What helps you stay mentally healthy at work?
(For example taking an adequate lunch break away from your desk, getting some exercise before or after work or in your lunchbreak, light and space in the office, opportunities to get to know colleagues)

2. What can your manager do to proactively support you to stay mentally healthy at work?
(For example regular feedback and catch-ups, flexible working patterns, explaining wider organisational developments)

3. Are there any situations at work that can trigger poor mental health for you?
(For example conflict at work, organisational change, tight deadlines, something not going to plan)

4. How might experiencing poor mental health impact on your work?
(For example you may find it difficult to make decisions, struggle to prioritise work tasks, difficulty with concentration, drowsiness, confusion, headaches)

5. Are there any early warning signs that we might notice when you are starting to experience poor mental health?
(For example changes in normal working patterns, withdrawing from colleagues)

6. What support could be put in place to minimise triggers or help you to manage the impact?
(For example extra catch-up time with your manager, guidance on prioritising workload, flexible working patterns, consider reasonable adjustments)

7. Are there elements of your individual working style or temperament that it is worth your manager being aware of?
(For example a preference for more face to face or more email contact, a need for quiet reflection time prior to meetings or creative tasks, negotiation on deadlines before they are set, having access to a mentor for questions you might not want to bother your manager about, having a written plan of work in place which can be reviewed and amended regularly, clear deadlines if you have a tendency to over-work a task, tendency to have particularly high or low energy in the morning or in the afternoon)

8. If we notice early warning signs that you are experiencing poor mental health – what should we do?
(For example talk to you discreetly about it, contact someone that you have asked to be contacted)

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?
(For example you might like to take a break from your desk and go for a short walk, or ask your line manager for support)

10. Is there anything else that you would like to share?

Employee Signature_____

Date Employee Signed_____

Line Manager Signature_____

Date Line Manager Signed_____

Agreed date for a review_____

SUPPORT

Support Available to the University Staff

- [Employee Assistance Programme](#) (phone or face to face counselling or Psychological First Aid)
- [Occupational Health via HR Team](#)
- Mental Health First Aiders (coming in late AY 2018/19)
- [Staff Wellbeing Offer](#)

Support Available to People Managers

- [Manager Support Helpline via Validium](#)
- [Human Resources Partner team](#)
- [Organisational Development team](#)

External support for Staff

- Employee's own GP
- [Richmond Borough Mind](#)
- [Richmond Wellbeing Service](#)

Additional Resources for People Managers

- [MHFA Line Managers' Resource](#)

- [CIPD Guidance for managers on supporting mental health at work](#)

- [HSE's Guidance on how to Manager Mental Health](#)

- [ACAS Guidance on Managing Staff Experiencing Mental Ill Health](#)

When the employee is at serious risk of harm, whether this is the employee or someone else, you should call the emergency services immediately on 999 or 112.

Please also inform your Human Resources Partner at the earliest convenience.