SUPPORTING GOOD MENTAL HEALTH IN THE WASTE MANAGEMENT INDUSTRY

INTRODUCTION

This guidance, produced by the Environmental Services Association (ESA) Health and Safety Strategy Group, aims to raise awareness of and improve mental health in the waste management industry. It forms part of a suite of resources produced by ESA to address the priority risk areas identified within our H&S Strategy. Collectively, this suite of guidance represents ESA's commitment to continued improvement in our sector's health and safety performance and to raise health and safety standards for all those who work in the industry or are associated with its activities.

The waste management industry received something of a wake-up call in the early 2000s when Health and Safety Executive (HSE) research revealed that the sector had one of the highest injury rates of all UK industries. Since then, a concerted effort to improve health and safety has seen ESA Members reduce RIDDOR reportable injuries by 85% since 2004 and, year on year, achieve an injury rate consistently below that reported by HSE for the waste sector as a whole. The industry's focus has, up to now, therefore largely been on safety, and on raising the safety standards needed to prevent injury.

In approving ESA's revised H&S Strategy in 2020, ESA's Board agreed to a more holistic approach to health and safety and agreed that the Strategy include a strong commitment to mental health, a matter of increased significance which has been brought to the fore since the onset of the coronavirus pandemic.

ESA recognises that by helping people with their mental health, and providing the tools, support and resources needed to positively manage mental health will allow them to perform at the best of their ability and reduce their risk of ill health. A fit and healthy workforce is also more likely to carry out work tasks more safely, thus reducing the incidence of injury. We must aim to create a culture where wellbeing is just as important as our drive towards improved safety performance, while recognising that much of the industry is just starting out on its journey towards improving mental health.

This guidance is primarily aimed at managers as they play a pivotal role in supporting the mental health and well-being of all personnel under their authority. The various tools, tips and suggestions included in the guidance, aimed at informing and better equipping managers on managing mental health, are applicable in helping all those within a manager's team, whether that be front-line operatives or office-based staff.

The guidance also aims to provide managers with advice and resources to help embed a positive mental health culture within their organisation. While decisions on planning for and integrating mental health into the organisation might not be in a manager's gift, this guidance aims to offer the tools and suggestions needed in starting a conversation (with senior management) in leveraging their support and buy-in.

This guidance is relevant for all organisations within the waste management industry and we would therefore actively encourage its dissemination and uptake beyond the ESA Membership.

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1.MENTAL HEALTH: BACKGROUND

Life is complicated and full of ups and downs, pain, joy, setbacks and triumphs and it is therefore normal to experience a range of thoughts and feelings in response to this. These include thoughts and feelings associated with being happy, sad, excited, worried, confused, angry or stressed.

Everyone responds to experiences differently – there is no single "right way" to react. Being aware of how challenges in life can affect our mental health may make it easier to understand when we, or someone we care about, are struggling. Those challenges that we may face throughout our lives often include:

personal life and relationships	money, work, and housing	life changes (including the impact of the pandemic)
health issues	traumatic life events	smoking, alcohol, gambling, and drug misuse

Some of us are more deeply affected by events than others. How we deal with things can also depend on how well other parts of our life are going or how well supported we feel.

What is poor mental health?

If negative thoughts and feeling start to become overwhelming and it starts to feel difficult to do everyday activities, then this could mean that your mental health needs some support. While there is no single trigger, when feelings become unmanageable they can give rise to new, or exacerbate existing, mental health issues. Workplace support and intervention can help people manage this (see page 11 for some practical examples).

Mental health problems

Mental health problems are many and varied and the more complex issues may be difficult to diagnose. Mental ill health may include:

Anxiety, stress, & mood disorders	Eating disorders (e.g. bulimia)	Addiction (including gambling) & substance misuse	Personality disorders	Psychotic disorders (e.g. schizophrenia)	Other issues (e.g. bereavement)

COVID-19 and the measures taken in response to the pandemic are also likely to have had a significant impact on mental health, and ESA published a separate guide with suggestions on support for employees.

Want to learn more?

Mind is one of the UK's leading mental health charities and provides a vast amount of information and learning. Its website is an excellent tool for signposting those in the workplace who would benefit from help. Further information on different types of mental health problems can be accessed from: **https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/types-of-mental-health-problems/**

The NHS not only provides a useful resource for information and support on mental health but offers a gateway to service provision: **https://www.nhs.uk/mental-health/**

HSE's *Working Minds* campaign is also a useful resource which brings together a range of tools and support to help businesses and workers understand the best ways to prevent work related stress and encourage good mental health https://workright.campaign.gov.uk/campaigns/working-minds/

1 in 4 people experience mental health issues every year

1 in 6 working age adults suffer with mental health issues

Total cost of mental ill health estimated at £105b per year in England

People with long term mental health issues lose their jobs at double the rate of those without

75% of mental illness begins before the age of 18

70-75% of people with a diagnosable mental illness receive no treatment at all

Mental illness is the second largest source of burden of disease in England

2.RECOGNISING THE SIGNS OF POOR MENTAL HEALTH

Some managers may find it difficult to manage someone suffering with poor mental health or to start a conversation about mental health. However, every business has a duty to make sure that people are kept safe and not made ill by work. Failing to assess risks from stress or mental health may result in prosecution or claims. As a manager, you therefore have a key role to play in preventing work from impacting upon the wellbeing of your team.

Some mental health conditions such as bipolar, depression, schizophrenia, obsessive compulsive disorder and some self-harming behaviour fall into the definition of disability and are therefore protected under the Equality Act 2010. In practice, this means that your organisation has a duty to consider and make reasonable adjustment(s) for any candidate or person who has a mental health condition which meets the definition of disability (or serious health condition) to ensure that they are not at a substantial disadvantage to others in the workplace.

Stress, however, is not within scope of the Act and is arguably best handled in the workplace when "normalised" as far as possible. This would allow stress to be considered as "situational stress", something that everyone regardless of their role or position in the organisation may experience at any time. Steps should therefore be taken to raise awareness of stress, identify the tell-tale signs of when someone has peaked beyond 'normal' levels of stress, and then manage it accordingly. As with all mental health issues, this will likely include a company's right, and expectation, to manage stress to a conclusion within a reasonable timescale.

CASE STUDY EXAMPLE: MANAGING STRESS IN A WASTE MANAGEMENT COMPANY

Having trained mental health first aiders can provide employees with an independent person to speak to when they need support. A waste management company that operates nationwide has trained a network of mental health first aiders who represent a wide range of its roles. This means, for example, that an individual working in a materials recycling facility can choose to speak to someone who also works in this type of facility. Speaking to someone in confidence, and someone who understands what a particular role entails, can sometimes be enough to help an individual reduce stress, regain perspective or work out how to navigate the issues they are experiencing.

Guidance on stress risk management

Stress at work should be managed in the same way as other health and safety risks, and the first step is a risk assessment which will identify the nature and extent of the risk. Employers are then required to put in place preventative strategies to address those risks in a reasonable, practicable way.

It could be that there is little or no risk of workplace stress, but you need to check regularly.

There is no single method of risk assessment. You may decide to issue members of your team or employee representatives with a questionnaire. The questions should relate to a person's role, their workload, resources, and how their work is arranged in terms of targets and deadlines. The questionnaire can also seek views on the working environment and facilities, relationships, support arrangements or gauge people's perception and attitude to health and safety matters.

Another method is to set up a focus group to discuss these issues confidentially. As with all risk assessments, the significant findings need to be recorded (in writing if there are more than five employees within the organisation) and monitored and reviewed as necessary.

Many organisations make the mistake of not following this process until someone has reported an issue resulting in poor performance or absence. It is advisable to use available tools more proactively by linking the assessment to the broad job (or task) categories within your organisation and to periodically assess these.

More information on the above can be found here https://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/index.htm

CASE STUDY EXAMPLE: SUPPORTING MENTAL HEALTH OF YOUR TEAM MEMBERS

Wellness Actions Plan templates, which are available free of charge from MIND, are an easy and practical way to support the mental health of your team members. They enable employees to articulate the types of situations that may trigger poor mental health, plus effective interventions to support them.

Wellness Action Plans can be particularly helpful when employees return to work after a mental health-related absence and they work in a similar way to a risk assessment, tailored to the specific needs of the individual.

Training and support

Encouraging team members to be their best at work by taking advantage of any wellbeing programmes and wellbeing activity available through the organisation will support them to have good physical and mental wellbeing. This will in turn help them to be able to cope better with all of life's experiences. As managers, you should be equipped to understand what mental ill health is by having the tools, knowledge, and training to recognise poor mental health and the skills to approach anyone in your team to discuss this. This

knowledge and expertise could be delivered as training or self-learning (e.g. mental health awareness training via face to face or e-learning).

Having a clear company policy and processes to guide and support managers when managing absence leads to better case management and confidence in managers.

Determining what mental health support is required in a business is the best route when starting a mental health and wellbeing programme and determining a budget for this activity is key to understanding how resources can best be utilised. There are many companies who provide tailored solutions to workplace mental health and wellbeing and will determine what is required in a business with a needs' assessment. However, these externally managed programmes may be expensive. There are also self-managed assessment tools such as the HSE stress indicator tool (see weblink above) and *the Business in the Community Mental Health for Employees* tool kit that workplace mental health and wellbeing programmes can be developed from https://www.bitc.org.uk/toolkit/mental-health-for-employers-toolkit/

Support for people with mental health issues in the workplace should be manager-led, who in turn will for the most part require some training and guidance in areas such as Mental Health Awareness and Resilience. This will not only provide you with the tools to support your own mental health but also that of your team. There are numerous training options available, and which can include face to face learning. This includes (but is not limited to) mental health providers, charities (and accredited training) such as:

Mental Health First Aid England https://mhfaengland.org/

Healthy Performance https://www.healthyperformance.co.uk/

MIND https://www.mind.org.uk/

Golden Tree CIC https://www.goldentreecic.co.uk/

Nuco https://www.nucotraining.com/

Other online companies such as IHASCO deliver certificated e-learning for managers and employees in a variety of packages https://www.ihasco.co.uk.

How can managers support people with mental health issues?

Managers perhaps have one of the most critical roles within the organisation in supporting the mental health of employees. Managers should try and set a personal example on health and safety matters while also being approachable and possessing the necessary 'soft skills' to effectively engage their team on mental health. At the same time, it is managers that set the workload for their team and set realistic goals and deadlines.

It is therefore important that you know your team members well as this will enable you to understand and see changes in their behaviour and to note if anyone is struggling, especially if it is a particularly busy time at work, or they have something going on outside of work. You may then be able to offer adjustments in work to support them so that things do not become too overwhelming.

Having informal conversations with them over the course of the day or during regular one-to-one meetings and expressing an interest in them as an individual and not just as a work colleague will help them to have the confidence to come to you if they have an issue. Just saying, *'Hello, how are you?'* or asking how work is can be a good conversation starter. If you notice changes in a team member's behaviour ask open questions such as, *'What can we do to help you?'* or *'I've noticed you've been a bit quiet recently, what's happened?'* This can take place over a cup of tea in the welfare facilities rather than in the office.

How can I reduce the risk of stress in my team?

Here are some hints and tips to help you reduce the risk of stress in your team:

Ensure team members have clear objectives and responsibilities so they know what they are expected to deliver	Ensure all new team members have a thorough induction and are clear on what is expected of them in their role	Carry out regular one-to-one meetings and progress reviews	Hold regular team meetings (this is very important if some of your team works from home)
Involve your team in decision making	Be prepared to listen to suggestions from your team and act on what they say	Be open, honest and fair with your team	Ensure any issues, such as discrimination, bullying or harassment are dealt with immediately
Ensure any performance or disciplinary issues are dealt with fairly and quickly	Encourage your team to give you feedback on what is working well and what isn't	Act on feedback from workplace surveys and discuss the results with your team	

The tell-tale signs of poor mental health

There are a number of changes in typical behaviour that may indicate that someone is struggling with their mental health (this can also be driven by poor physical health). This list is not exhaustive but the following changes in behaviour may be an indicator:

appearing tired or anxious	increased lateness or absence	lack of concentration/ difficulty remembering things	poor performance or a drop in performance
lack of motivation or focus	loss of confidence	loss of humour	struggling to make decisions or find solutions

avoiding situations and/or people	withdrawing from social situations/events	erratic or socially unacceptable behaviour	tearfulness/withdrawn
being aggressive/mood swings	being louder and more exuberant than usual (or vice versa)	increased arguments or conflict with others	drinking more alcohol/caffeine or substance abuse
smoking more	increased appetite or loss of appetite		

Some signs of poor mental health can also be physical in nature:

frequent headaches or stomach upsets	frequent minor illnesses	difficulty sleeping or constant tiredness	lack of care over appearance	sudden weight loss or gain

Some signs in the workplace may indicate support and intervention is needed:

increased errors, missing deadlines or forgetting tasks	taking on too much work and volunteering for every new project	working too many hours – first in, last out, emailing out-of-hours or whilst on holiday
someone who is normally punctual frequently arriving late or vice versa	increased sickness absence	becoming fixated with fair treatment and quick to use grievance procedures

As above, as manager you have a duty of care to assist anyone in your team who displays any of the signs above and which may manifest as poor performance. However, it is worth noting that protracted poor performance or absence remains subject to your company's standard or employment contractual protocols. These apply equally to all cases of under-performance, whether that be physical or mental health related.

Mental health 'triggers'

Certain aspects or changes to personal life can negatively affect emotional wellbeing. Common issues to look out for include:

Bereavement	divorce or relationship breakdown	having children	health scares or physical illness

Working conditions, or changes at work, can also be triggers for poor mental health, such as:

starting a new job	coping with an increased workload or a promotion	poor relationships with colleagues or managers	redundancy, or fear of redundancy

There is currently insufficient data which points to mental health 'hotspots' within a particular part of a waste management organisation (though you wish to monitor such) and, in any event, it is unlikely that any one role presents an inherently higher risk of poor mental health over another. Everyone is different and therefore everyone reacts differently to the pressures and situations faced by the daily tasks of their role. What could be a mental health trigger for one person might not be for another.

However, this is not to suggest that working in the waste management industry does not present situations that could result in stress to members of your team or that aspects of a person's role could trigger mental health concerns. A person's work environment (noisy, dusty etc); the nature of the job in some front-line operative roles (physically demanding work, arduous or repetitive tasks); and a perceived lack of recognition for the jobs carried out in some front-line roles could all potentially impact on the mental health of your team. Conversely, and similar to any other sector, meeting deadlines and managing workload demands can affect those in office-based roles.

The following therefore offers some examples of circumstances relevant to the waste and recycling sector that might lead to stressful situations or result in "hidden stress" for members of your team, along with suggested techniques to address this.

Trigger: workplace violence and aggression

Examples of affected roles: any role in your team with a strong public interface, for example waste collection crews, drivers and operatives at Household Waste Recycling Centres.

Member companies of the Environmental Services Association (ESA) reported over 1800 incidents of third party acts of violence and aggression towards staff in 2021. Constant and sustained verbal abuse, which constitutes the majority of these incidents, can have a negative effect on the mental health of workers (known as the "drip effect").

Intervention techniques

Emotions can run high when members of the public experience missed waste collections or if a waste vehicle slows down their journey. It is good practice, therefore, for public-facing employees to be trained on how to handle difficult people and/or situations. This provides them with the skills to de-escalate a situation as well as coping mechanisms if they do receive abuse.

Having regular debrief meetings with your team, in which they are encouraged to talk about their experiences, is a good way to relieve the tension that can build up over time. The end of day driver debrief session, for example, provides an opportunity to do this.

It is, of course, unacceptable for workers to receive any form of abuse, therefore, where possible these should be reported to minimise the chance of them being repeated. It is important to have a clear reporting process in place so that team members have confidence that any incidents they raise will be dealt with formally.

Trigger: perceived lack of (time) control in the workplace

Examples of affected roles: drivers, collection crews, MRF operatives (pickers)

Some roles in the waste management industry have less scope for autonomy and a perceived lack of time control of a daily task could lead to stress. Examples include the speed at which recyclable materials on a MRF conveyor pass through a picking station, or the pre-defined number of collections points on a driver's collection round.

Intervention techniques

It is important that employee concerns are not left to fester as they are unlikely to go away on their own. If team members feel out of control or feel that they are not being listened to, then this can have a negative impact on their mental health. Taking time out of the working day to discuss and understand their concerns, therefore, is an important way that managers/supervisors can help to resolve them.

There may be practical interventions that help, such as re-routing a collection round, reducing the speed of a picking belt, leaner ways of working, or additional equipment that may help.

The important thing is never to dismiss issues that are raised, even if you may initially doubt their validity. Spend time making sure you fully understand what members of your team are telling you and then work collaboratively on potential solutions.

Trigger: difficult work relationships

Examples of affected roles: supervisors, team leaders and first line management

Additional stress can result from having to deal with, on the one hand, the workload and deadlines set by more senior managers and, on the other hand, managing the needs and expectations of a team of front line operatives. This may leave individuals feeling "stuck in the middle" in managing conflicting pressures and expectations from both up and down the management chain.

Intervention techniques

Resilience training may be offered to supervisors so they have coping mechanisms to deal with the demands that they receive. Getting to the root cause of the problem is always the best approach, therefore, encouraging senior managers to go 'back to the floor' can be an effective way for them to understand the pressures that supervisors are under. Taking part in a collection round, for example, or

working in a waste processing facility can be useful practical steps. If they experience the realities of life on the 'shop floor', they are likely to have a better understanding of the pressures that supervisors are under and therefore more willing to support them.

Frontline operatives may become frustrated if they perceive that their supervisor is not reacting to their demands, therefore, maintaining open communications and providing regular feedback is vital.

Another good coping mechanism is for supervisors to have a network of support from people in similar roles. This can be a great way to share experiences and learn how they have tackled challenges. It also helps to reduce the feeling of loneliness that can compound this type of situation.

Trigger: lone working

Examples of affected roles: "driver only" collections, street cleansing operatives, home workers

Feeling lonely and isolated at work or disconnected from peers and supervision can contribute to feelings of anxiety, stress or depression. Lone workers are also more likely to be detached from efforts to integrate company culture, including any mental health initiatives implemented in the business.

Intervention techniques

For those team members working alone, such as street cleansing operatives or drivers, a brief meeting (or huddle) at the start and end of the day can be an effective way to engage them. They can use these meetings to raise concerns, receive updates and get the feeling of team spirit that they may miss during the rest of the day. Occasional and impromptu calls and/or visits to check they are OK can also be effective in demonstrating that you care about their wellbeing. Also, remembering to ask team members how they are, not just how is work going, is important to open-up conversations so that they can share how they are feeling.

The examples above cannot possibly cover all potential circumstances and job descriptions, and instead a key part of your role as manager is to get to know your team and understand where a trigger might have had adversely affected someone in your team and where they are showing signs of struggling.

How can managers support team members with poor mental health?

The first step you can take is to talk to the individual concerned to try and understand what is causing their mental health concerns. Identifying what has triggered their feelings may mean that you are better able to tackle the root cause if it is work-related. It may be that it is a combination of things including factors outside of work and whilst you may not always be able to assist with these, you can direct them to any support available in-house (e.g. Employee Assistance Programme or Mental Health First Aiders) or point them to external sources (signposting to an external body such as MIND or Access to Work).

Your team should feel that they can talk to you as their manager about their issues without the fear of any repercussions. You are not expected to diagnose their condition, just listen, and try to understand how they are feeling, even if it feels uncomfortable or alien to you. Remember, what they are experiencing is real and important to them.

Tips for an initial conversation

Do	Do not
keep the conversation positive and supportive	make assumptions about how someone is or is not feeling or about what they need
talk about the issues, how you can help them and consider adjustments at work where you can and/or if you need to	use comparison examples of other's mental health issues. Everyone's experience is different
understand the applicable services available within/outside of your organisation	tell them what to do
utilise the expertise of HR, peers or support services in advance of the meeting if you feel unsure about the conversation	try to resolve their mental health issue (instead signpost them to appropriate help using the tools available)
	force the conversation, unless you have concerns about their ability to perform their role or the state of their mental health (i.e. you feel that they are a danger to themselves or others)

Below is a list of suggestions that may help to reduce the feelings of stress or enable people to feel more in control of their mental wellbeing when they may not be coping. Remember though, when people are not coping, they sometimes find it hard to take appropriate action as everything can seem overwhelming to them:

Create a 'to do' list – sometimes having things written down can make things seem less daunting (there is also the satisfaction of crossing them off when they're done)	Prioritise: what is urgent, what is not? Create a realistic plan of what can be achieved and by when	Work through the things that need to be done one task at a time	Close down e-mails whilst focusing on other tasks, or only look at e-mails at certain times of the day to avoid being distracted or overwhelmed
Set realistic goals	Help identify when they are at their best and at what time of the day they have most	Vary tasks if possible so they are not doing the same things all day	Take breaks – physical health and diet are closely linked to mental health so improving

	energy/concentration levels, and build a work plan around this		these can also benefit wellbeing. If someone is desk-based for long periods of the day going for a walk during a break can help. Conversely, a period of rest will likely be of benefit to someone who is on their feet all day. Eating a healthy lunch or snack to refuel the body can also help.
Reflect on what has been achieved during the day, rather than worrying about what still needs to be done	Talk about how they are feeling: do not sit in silence worrying about things	Try something new – this can help with feelings of confidence and self-esteem	Keep a diary of what's happening and how they are feeling. This may help to identify stress factors
Relax – be calm, breathe correctly and try to clear the mind. It is recommended that we all have a relaxation period every day, preferably at the same time, using the same techniques	Have fun – laughing has a huge number of benefits for our body and mental health		

How should a manager support those who are absent with mental health conditions?

The process for managing mental ill health should be very similar to managing any other type of sickness absence and keeping in regular contact with the individual is vital, even if they are admitted to hospital.

Managers are often nervous about contacting someone who is off with mental ill health particularly if it is due to stress or anxiety or related to a disciplinary or conduct issues. It is natural that you might be concerned about making the situation worse and cause the person to feel more stressed. However, not keeping in contact can often make your team member feel more isolated or undervalued and it can prolong the absence as avoiding the situation (which at times the person may feel is their only option) can delay recovery and resolution, especially if the issues are related to work.

When the person (or a friend/family member on their behalf) first rings in sick, talk to them about what the contact arrangements should be. If you don't speak to them directly, ring them back to see how they are and whether there is any support you can offer. This would also be a good opportunity to agree regular contact and once agreed it is important that this is maintained. Ask them who they would like as their main point of contact going forward at work (they may prefer another member of the team). Arrange regular contact even if it is by text or e-mail to begin with.

If you have an Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) give them the number, and if there is any link between their condition and work, offer to meet them (or another manager if they prefer) to discuss the issues and complete a stress risk assessment to see if there are any actions that would help them to return to work.

If they are signed off sick by their doctor, and if they agree, keep in contact to check in and try to arrange a date and time for the next contact at the end of each call. Take the lead from them but be firm about maintaining some form of contact. Where they refuse contact speak to your employee relations /HR team for advice.

Keep notes of the date and time of your calls and any actions agreed with them and if you agree to do something (e.g. find out how much sick pay they have) then be sure to do it.

When they are ready to return to work you should consider if reasonable adjustments are required to support them and what these may look like. An adjustment can be absolutely anything which supports an individual to return to work. It is important that you ask them what they feel they need and take additional advice from your HR team or occupational health provider where necessary. It may be that you need to try several adjustments until you find what is right for them or a combination of adjustments. These should be recorded, reviewed, and agreed by all.

Research shows that the longer someone is off work with mental health issues the harder it is to come back. Only 50% of those off sick after 6 months make it back to work, so it is important to keep the lines of communication open to support a return to work.

Reasonable adjustments during an absence and on return to work

A reasonable adjustment simply means a change or adjustment - unique to someone's needs - that will enable them to do their job. The term 'reasonable' means effective for the individual concerned without being too disruptive, costly, or impractical for the employer.

Examples of reasonable adjustments include:

Changing break times or introducing more frequent breaks. This could be for additional time out or to take medication	Transferring duties to someone else, either on a temporary or permanent basis, particularly if they are working reduced hours. They should not be	Allowing flexible working arrangements. This could be to support periods of extreme tiredness or when medication causes drowsiness (e.g.	Changing shifts (medication can be difficult to manage with rotating day and night shifts)

	expected to continue with their normal workload	late shift or early starts)	
Providing time off for medical appointments or counselling sessions etc	Offering redeployment to another role, where the current role and/or team are a cause of the issue	Removing some or all managerial responsibility on a temporary basis	Organising additional training or coaching / mentoring
Having more frequent one-to-ones to discuss how they are coping. This provides the opportunity to discuss what has gone well and not so well and will enable you to plan ahead with them.	Encouraging the individual to access online tools for self-help	Giving permission to take time out if they are becoming distressed (normally just a few minutes is all that's needed).	Gaining co-operation from other members of your team. In some cases, an adjustment will not work without their help. Therefore, you may have to explain the nature of adjustments to others in the team (without breaking any confidence and having agreed with the person concerned what information you can share) to ensure that they understand what the adjustment is and how they can help.

You should always work with HR when implementing reasonable adjustments as these have to be reasonable for both parties.

Planning for someone's return to work

Returning to work after an episode of mental ill health can be difficult even with adjustments in place and therefore you should do everything you can to make this less daunting for all concerned. Some things to consider include:

Arranging any meetings at a neutral venue, such as another site or a coffee shop. Gradually you should encourage the person to come into their workplace.	Arranging for them to come in for lunch or a team meeting to help them connect with the rest of the team	Where relevant, ensuring any complex mental health issues are declared to the DVLA for their fitness to drive to be assessed (e.g LGV drivers)	Discussing anything that potentially affects their condition that could be changed. Some things may be beyond your control, so you will need to realistic
Creating a return-to-work plan that has a defined start and end so that the person moves from point A (e.g. reduced hours/tasks) to point B (e.g. the end of the plan and back to full hours/ activity). This must be discussed and agreed before they return to work and reviewed regularly.	Agreeing how their progress will be monitored	Updating them on what has been happening at work	Discussing if they need further or additional training on any aspect of their work
Reassuring them that if they need anything that you are there to help and support them	Agreeing whether they want other people at work to be aware of why they were off	Offering a non-compulsory 1-2-1 orientation at the workplace, prior to the actual return. For some colleagues this can be a useful option which acts as an ice breaker and enables them to re-familiarise themselves with the workplace and speak to their workmates	

Where the case is complex (e.g. a long-term diagnosed mental health condition) and is leading to frequent absence affecting their capability and impacting the workplace and the wider team, and after all other avenues have been explored as a means of support, then you might wish to consider (with the individual's consent) seeking support from the *Access to Work Mental Health Support Service* https://www.remploy.co.uk/about-us/current-programmes/access-work-mental-health-support-service/

If someone is prescribed medication for a mental health condition

Mental health conditions can sometimes take a long time to diagnose and/or treat and you should be aware that they may be prescribed with a variety of treatments (this can include counselling, cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT), medication etc.) until the right one is found to help to manage their condition. If medication is changed this can lead to episodes of mental instability.

Where medication is prescribed it can take a while to get the right type and dosage and often the person will experience some side effects. It is important to separate out any side effects the medication may have from the effects of the condition. Depending on how long the medication will be taken for, it may take time for them to know whether this will have any impact on their ability to do their job.

If you undertake random drug and alcohol testing in the workplace you should be aware that some medication prescribed for mental health problems may show as a non-negative result on a drug test. You should make the person aware of this and discuss what the process would be.

3.RAISING AWARENESS OF MENTAL HEALTH IN THE WORKPLACE

Before you begin raising awareness of mental health in your workplace it is important to have the support and buy-in of the senior management team in your organisation.

You might consider sourcing credible mental health awareness training tailored to the level of need within the business. Such training can vary from helping raise general awareness to accredited skills based training on ways of responding to people with mental health issues. Or you might wish to provide senior management with information about the impact that poor mental health can have on the business.

If a leader in your organisation is willing to talk about their own mental health issues, then this can send a clear message that it is OK for people to talk about it and can ask for support when they need it. It is very positive, therefore, if one of your senior leaders is willing to share their own experience or sponsor any communications or events that you do on the subject.

It is also important to ensure that your team can be signposted for more support. So when you begin communicating, make sure this is in place. Once you are ready to communicate, there are a range of ways you can do this:

Use your social networking channels

You can follow and share content on your social networking channels from trusted organisations, such as *MIND* and *Heads Together*. This is a free and straightforward way for communicating to your team (and other stakeholders) your support for raising awareness about mental health.

Link to themed days and weeks in the calendar

There are a huge number of celebratory days that link to wellbeing such as *Mental Health Awareness Week* (in May), *World Suicide Prevention Day* (10 September) and *World Mental Health Day* (10 October). You can either organise activities to coincide with these, or simply share content about them through your communication channels. By promoting or acknowledging these you send the message that your organisation supports their aims.

Webinars – these can be easy to put together and are a good way to introduce and explore a topic, particularly if you would like the information tailored to your organisation. You can also record the webinars and provide a link for members of your team to watch in their own time.

Posters / booklets – despite the preference for electronic communications there is still a place for posters and leaflets in workplaces. The charity, *MIND*, for example, has a variety of booklets on mental health that can be purchased from their web site.

Testimonial videos – people can share their experiences of mental health issues via short videos produced via Zoom or Teams that can be shared via your internal communications and produced at very little cost. This can be a powerful way to help other people in your organisation gain more understanding.

Advertise the support that is available at your company

If you have trained Wellbeing Champions or Mental Health First Aiders, then make sure you advertise how they can be contacted. If your organisation has access to an Employee Assistance Programme (EAP), then remember to advertise this on a regular basis.

If you do not have either of these in place then make sure your team knows who they can go to for support, whether that's HR or occupational health. For smaller organisations, have someone who is trained who people can go to.

Include messages about wellbeing in the communications from the leader of your organisation

Talking about mental health can be normalised in your workplace if the leader of your organisation regularly acknowledges that employees may need additional support. This can be included in messages that are sent out in the workplace, such as emails and letters.

Top tips:

Reach out on LinkedIn if you need support to communicate about mental health

LinkedIn is a useful forum to network and seek support. If you are looking for an expert speaker, for example, you can search or ask your network of contacts for suggestions. The same applies if you are looking for ideas or inspiration. People like to help and share their knowledge.

Organise events that promote wellbeing

You can organise challenges or events for charity that also benefit the wellbeing of your team, for example, walking or cycling challenges. These events have the dual benefit of improving teamwork and mental health.

Use content that is freely available from trusted sources

There is a great deal of content and guidance available about mental health online. In Section 7, we have included links to some of this content, which you can use free of charge in your organisation. So, rather than recreate this content, use what is already available.

4.MENTAL HEALTH FIRST AIDERS IN THE WORKPLACE

The appointment and training of Mental Health First Aiders (MHFAs) has been successfully deployed by some organisations to support mental health in the workplace. However, reaction across different organisations has been mixed and careful consideration is needed if you choose to introduce this role into the workplace.

Some people might not feel comfortable talking to another employee within their own business for fear that what is discussed will not remain confidential, or they might prefer to speak to a professional such as their own GP, occupational health professional or Employee Assistance Programme (EAP). However, in some organisations MHFAs work well and can be very effective in supporting employees and also monitoring mental health in the workplace.

Therefore, when appointing a MHFA in the workplace careful consideration must be given to ensuring the right person is selected. The MHFA will need to be an approachable, likeable person to ensure others feel safe and comfortable coming forward to seek their assistance. MHFAs in the workplace often volunteer themselves for the role if they feel they are a suitable fit.

Care is also required when assigning a title to the mental health support in the workplace as "Mental Health First Aider" can give the impression that the elected person is a clinician, able to provide treatment for mental health issues brought to them. This is not the case and must be clearly communicated. Other titles such as "Mental Health Ambassador" or "Well Being Champion" may be more appropriate to the support being provided. However, for the purposes of this guidance and for ease of understanding, we use the more familiar Mental Health First Aider (MHFA).

A MHFA in the workplace should therefore not be tasked with diagnosing the mental health issues of those who may approach them, but rather offer peer support, to be there to listen and act as the first step towards directing someone to professional help. In certain instances, just having someone to speak and listen to may be enough to resolve the issues that a person might be facing. Other instances may require professional help and the MHFA should provide information and guidance on where to find this.

All MHFAs in the workplace should be provided with the appropriate tools to ensure they can provide the required level of support, and this may require providing the MHFA with a designated mobile phone, a separate email address and private rooms for meetings.

If you have a MHFA in the workplace this should be widely communicated to ensure everyone is aware they are there to support them. You might wish to consider using multiple channels of communication to ensure you reach everyone within the company. For example, for those without access to emails you could make

use of posters on notice boards, adverts through company websites or intranets, or announcements at health and safety meetings.

One of the most important things to consider when providing a MHFA in the workplace is to ensure there is support for the First Aiders themselves. Helping and supporting others struggling with mental health can affect all involved, so it is vital to ensure the appropriate support is available for the MHFA and paramount their mental health is not affected by this task. Having someone to oversee them and meet them regularly to discuss the support they are giving to the business, plus upskilling them with additional training are all things you can consider doing.

Mental health training

There are a range of mental health training providers and it is advisable that you firstly research what is available and who is providing the training. Options includes (but are not limited to): Mental Health First Aid England; Nuco Training; First Aid Awards; and OFQUAL.

By way of example, the syllabus set by Mental Health First Aid England includes:

An in-depth understanding of mental health and the factors that can affect wellbeing	Practical skills to spot the triggers and signs of mental health issues	Confidence to step in, reassure and support a person in distress	Enhanced interpersonal skills such as non-judgemental listening	Knowledge to help someone recover their health by guiding them to further support whether that be self-help resources, through their employer, the NHS, or a blend of each

Everyone who completes the course gets:

A certificate of attendance to say they are a Mental Health First Aider	A manual to refer to whenever they need it	A quick reference card for the Mental Health First Aid action plan	A workbook including a helpful toolkit to support their own mental health

There is also a four-hour Mental Health First Aider refresher course that is recommended every three years to help empower mental health first aiders to:

Keep their awareness of mental health support current	Update their knowledge of mental health and what influences it	Practice applying the Mental Health First Aid action plan

5.EMBEDDING MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT IN THE WORKPLACE

Investing in a wellbeing strategy can help to promote a culture of mutual support and an environment in which people can thrive. To get the best from your team it is important to shift the emphasis from getting more out of them, to investing more in their wellbeing so that they can bring more of themselves to work every day. Organisations that have a strong focus on wellbeing have improved engagement levels, retain talent, increased productivity and enhanced business performance.

While most organisations invest in developing their people's skills, knowledge, and competence very few help their employees to build and sustain their capacity to work effectively. Improving or maintaining the mental health of your team can make it possible to get more done in less time with higher levels of engagement and sustainability.

Engage your leaders and gain their endorsement

A strong commitment to wellbeing from leaders within your organisation can change the perception that mental wellbeing is a taboo or difficult matter to address. Also helpful is a clear statement of intent from your business and its leaders, which sets out a sincere commitment to a happy and healthy workplace and workforce, and can set the tone for how work is carried out in your organisation.

To get started, you could consider the following three steps:

1. Implement a wellbeing audit on a voluntary basis. Ask your team questions related to their wellbeing (such as physical, emotional, mind and spirit). These questionnaires should help promote awareness and, at the same time, enable you to understand the issues they are facing to inform an overall wellbeing strategy.
2. Publish the results so that everyone can understand the issues that need to be addressed and their effect on individuals.
3. Launch a longer-term wellbeing strategy to support your team members in the areas that have been highlighted by your survey.

A wellbeing strategy need not be expensive to implement, and the following offers some examples of what it could include:

Encourage individuals to leave their desk and move to a quieter area, away from phones and e-mail, whenever a task that requires real concentration arises	Check e-mail at certain times in the day (e.g. 10:00 am and 2:30 pm) rather than checking constantly and breaking your working pattern	Collectively agree to stop checking e-mail or phones during meetings to make these more focused and efficient	Identify the most important challenge for the next day and make that the first priority when arriving in the morning
Ensure there is time for exercise and life outside of work. Lead by example to create a culture of good work/life balance	Take regular short breaks and explain why rest is key to improved performance	Encourage sleep improvements by running sleep improvement classes and developing sleep plans	Encourage weight loss, which is linked to improved physical and mental health and in turn drives performance
Leave desks or vehicles to eat lunch. Taking a short walk can also have a positive effect on overall wellbeing	Encourage people to think more positively	Make the most of the new ways of working which have emerged since the pandemic	Create guidelines to encourage a good work/life balance – e.g. no meetings that require over three hours of travel to start on or before 10am or finish after 4pm (unless exceptional)
Avoid off-site meetings on a Friday			

These are simple measures that can be implemented at little or no cost but could profoundly benefit your organisation and change your culture for the better.

6.MONITORING

When considering "best practice" for monitoring mental health it would be helpful to establish where your organisation currently is in this regard, and answering some of the following questions might help to do this:

1. Do you have a way of assessing mental health (i.e. do you have a mental health risk assessment or specific absence return to work questionnaire for those who have been off with mental health?)
2. Do you have any stress hot spots – is one area of the business more susceptible to stress than others? If so, can any triggers be identified, i.e. workings hours, patterns, line management, job roles, tight deadlines etc? The case study examples on page 11 could serve as a useful starting point.
3. Do you provide a mental health and wellbeing data report to your Board?
4. Do you monitor and measure mental health related sickness absence?
5. Do you know what data you are able to collect, now and in the future?
6. Do you have a referral system for managing long-term absence related to mental health, including Occupational Health Referrals, Employee Assistance Programmes (EAP) etc.?
7. Do you have Mental Health First Aiders?
8. Do you have an employee opinion survey, and if so, how regularly do you do your surveys? Does this include questions that can identify if additional support around mental health is required?

Once you are aware of where your organisation is now in monitoring employee health this will then allow you to begin setting monitoring goals against your workplace mental health strategy. It is also important to regularly check on wellbeing, some measures could include:

Number of mental health related sickness days	Number of people notified of your EAP scheme	Number of calls made to Mental Health First Aiders	Number of calls your insurer or EAP receives about mental health/work related stress (this may not always be possible due to the confidentiality of calls made to EAP, you may only know how many calls were made but not for what reason)
Number of mental health and wellbeing employee surveys, such as Mind's Workplace Wellbeing Index	Employee attraction and retention rates		

Mental health awareness has accelerated over the years with more and more organisations supporting wellbeing in their workplace and understanding the importance of this support for their people. Most businesses could benefit from regularly reviewing data from other companies as this will help them to ensure their strategies and monitoring measures are as fit for purpose as possible. It is never a case of one system working well for every individual or every organisation, but more about making sure you have a level of support and monitoring available within your own specific organisation that works for you and your employees.

As noted in section 4, a number of organisations have taken steps to train first aiders to specifically support mental health in the workplace. In cases where this has been deployed to good effect, Mental Health First Aiders have also had the added benefit of monitoring mental health in the workplace.

Employee Opinion Surveys are a good way of maintaining contact with members of your team and also for checking on how they are doing. However, it is worth noting that direct questioning around mental health tends not to provide meaningful results as people are often reluctant to answer these types of questions honestly. Therefore, it may be worth looking at how your organisation words mental health-related questions in your opinion surveys, so that questioning can help check on team members' mental health but are not worded to discourage honest answers.

7.FURTHER READING

A selection of resources relating to managing mental health, which are free and available online:

Web sites

- **Mental Health at Work**

https://www.mentalhealthatwork.org.uk/

- **MIND**

https://www.mind.org.uk/

- **Heads Together**

https://www.headstogether.org.uk/

- **Every Mind Matters**

https://www.nhs.uk/oneyou/every-mind-matters/

Videos

- ***I had a Black Dog – His Name was Depression***: **Building Resilience (Black Dog Foundation)**

Short animation that is free to view: **https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XiCrniLQGYc**

- ***60 second ad:* Time to Change**

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hdPZ7rw0wMc

- ***Talking about Mental Health***: **MIND video series on You Tube. First edition available at:**

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9YaS_4tXBNU

Activities that may support mental health

- **Yoga**

30 days of Yoga with *Adriene* – 30 free yoga sessions for beginners

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TXU591OYOHA

- **Mindfulness**

https://www.oxfordmindfulness.org/learn-mindfulness/online-sessions-podcasts/

- **Exercise**

https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/nhs-fitness-studio/?tabname=strength-and-resistance

Useful articles

https://www.nuffieldhealth.com/article/10-tell-tale-signs-that-youre-stressed

https://www.nuffieldhealth.com/article/resilience-dealing-with-emotional-stress

https://www.nuffieldhealth.com/article/resilience-how-stress-affects-your-body-and-brain

https://www.nuffieldhealth.com/article/5-ways-to-tackle-emotional-eating

https://www.nuffieldhealth.com/article/8-easy-ways-to-combat-stress

https://www.mind.org.uk/get-involved/world-mental-health-day

Workplace Wellbeing Awards

- **Workplace Wellbeing Index**

https://www.mind.org.uk/workplace/workplace-wellbeing-index/?_ga=2.242324359.48352794.1584614609-389908514.1584614609

Free apps that are available to support mental health

Encourage, or signpost your team to search in the app or play stores for:

Elefriends		Elefriends is a supportive online community from the mental health charity Mind. We all know what it is like to struggle sometimes, but now there is a safe place to listen, share and be heard. Whether you are feeling good right now, or really low, it's a place to share experiences and listen to others
Silvercloud		Silvercloud provides a wide range of supportive and interactive programmes, tools, and tactics for mental and behavioural health issues. These programmes address wellbeing, life balance, time management, communication skills, goal setting, communication and relationship management, anger management, stress management, relaxation, and sleep management, among many others.
Happier (only available for iOS devices)		Happier helps you stay more present and positive throughout the day. Its Apple Watch app is like your personal mindfulness coach -- use it to lift your mood, take a quick meditation pause, or capture and savour the small happy moments that you find in your day.
Catch It		Catch It is a joint project between the Universities of Liverpool and Manchester, to help users better understand their moods through use of an ongoing diary. The app was designed to illustrate some of the key principles of psychological approaches to mental health and well-being, and specifically Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT).
SAM: Self-help for Anxiety Management		SAM will help you to understand what causes your anxiety, monitor your anxious thoughts and behaviour over time and manage your anxiety through self-help exercises and private reflection. The "Social cloud" feature will enable you to share your experiences with the SAM community while protecting your identity.
Couch to 5k		Walk and run your way to 5k with this Couch to 5k app designed to take total beginners from walking to running for 30 minutes in just 9 weeks. Millions of people have already started running with our simple Couch to 5k plan - so download it now, grab your trainers and get ready to become a runner.

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