

Supporting your Mental Health at Work



NHS Learners' guide to accessing support for mental health at work

What is mental health

Mental health relates to the way we think and feel and our ability to deal with life's ups and downs. Mental ill health is very common, and will affect one in four people at some point in their working lives. The term mental ill health covers common conditions such as depression, anxiety, eating disorders, psychosis, bipolar affective disorder, obsessive compulsive disorder, and substance misuse and addictions.

We all have times when we feel down, stressed or frightened. Most of the time those feelings pass, but sometimes they develop into a mental health problem like anxiety or depression, which can impact on our daily lives. For some people, mental health problems become complex, and require support and treatment for extended periods.

Why is mental health important?

When we enjoy good mental health, we have a sense of purpose and direction, the energy to do the things we want to do, and the ability to deal with the challenges life may throw at us.

If you enjoy good mental health, you can:

- Make the most of your potential
- Cope with stress and difficulties
- Play a full part in your relationships, workplace, and community

When we think about our physical health we know that there's a place for keeping ourselves fit, and a place for getting appropriate help as early as possible so we can get better. Mental health is just the same. When we feel distressed, we need a compassionate, human response. The earlier we are able to recognise when something isn't quite right, the earlier we can get support.

How do I recognise a mental health problem?

If we have significant challenges in our home or work life, the chances are that these may have an impact on our mental health.

Mental health problems can have a lot of different symptoms and signs. As a rule, you should seek help from your GP if you have difficult feelings that are:

- Stopping you from getting on with life
- Having a big impact on the people you live or work with
- Affecting your mood over several weeks
- Causing you to have thoughts of self-harm and/or suicide

At work, we might notice that we are more tired than usual. We might make uncharacteristic mistakes, find it hard to motivate ourselves, our timekeeping might slip, or we may be short tempered.

We might look or feel very tired or drained. We might find we isolate ourselves, avoid colleagues or appear distracted. We may find these early warning signs hard to notice in ourselves, and it can help to have colleagues who can alert us that we may need help or take some time out.

Telling your colleagues and/or employer

Once you recognise that you may be experiencing mental health problems and that you may need some help, you may well want to talk to family and friends as well as people at work. Talking to some trusted individuals may help you gain sympathy and support, allow you to get things off your chest and feel less alone with your difficulties, and help you secure adjustments at work.

It may be helpful to take some time to consider the pros and cons of talking to others, including exploring what you may want to say, how and to whom, and prepare for how others might respond.

There are helpful resources to guide you through this, including :

➤ **Conceal or Reveal: A guide to telling employers about a mental health condition (CORAL)**

<http://www.indigo-group.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/CORAL-Booklet.pdf>

This booklet is for anyone who has experienced a mental health problem and is unsure of issues related to telling a potential or current employer about this. The booklet provides helpful exercises to guide you through the process of considering all aspects of disclosure.

➤ **Heads Up**

<https://www.headsup.org.au/healthy-workplaces/for-employees>

This website has free tools to help you weigh up the potential benefits and costs of disclosing a mental health problem at work, and, also has helpful videos of people talking about their experiences of talking to supervisors and colleagues

<https://www.headsup.org.au/your-mental-health/deciding-to-tell-others>



Society is fast becoming much more open to discussing mental health problems on a par with physical health problems, helped in part by campaigns such as *Time to Change* and *Heads Together*. However, many staff and learners in the NHS still worry that they may be judged negatively by others if they talk about their mental health problems, or that this could have a negative impact on their future career.

While only you can decide what you feel comfortable to share and with whom, be assured that if you disclose to a supervisor you have a right to be treated compassionately, with respect, and to be offered the support and help you need to manage your difficulties. Whether this requires additional support being put in place, or modifications to your educational or placement requirements, you should expect others to support you with your onward journey in your career.



You do not have to disclose information to your employer. However, if your employer does know, they can take steps to help, and therefore hopefully prevent problems in the workplace developing or getting worse.

Most people with ongoing mental health problems meet the definition of disability in the Equality Act (2010) in England, Scotland and Wales and the Disability Discrimination Act (1995, as amended) in Northern Ireland. This means that **people with mental health problems are protected from discrimination and harassment and are entitled to reasonable adjustments to adapt their job or work.**

Resources and useful links



- **MIND** www.mind.org.uk
- **NHS Employers**
How are you feeling? NHS Employers toolkit.
<https://www.nhsemployers.org/howareyoufeelingnhs>
- **Time to Change**
<https://www.time-to-change.org.uk>
- **Heads Together**
<https://www.headstogether.org.uk/>
- **Mental Health Foundation resources**
How to... guides - Short, evidence based guides on Sleep, Exercise, Mindfulness, Exercise, Stress Management, Later Life, and Anxiety
www.mentalhealth.org.uk/howto
- **Be Mindful Online**
Online, evidence based Mindfulness Based Cognitive Therapy/Stress Reduction course available to individuals and businesses
www.bemindfulonline.com
- **Access to Work**
This is a government backed scheme that can provide practical support to help when starting new employment, to reduce absences, and support to stay at work.
www.accesstowork.co.uk
- **Doctors Support Network (DSN)**
PEER SUPPORT network for doctors and medical students with concerns about their mental health.
<https://www.dsn.org.uk/support-for-doctors>
- **Samaritans**
Call 116 123 email: Jo@samaritans.org