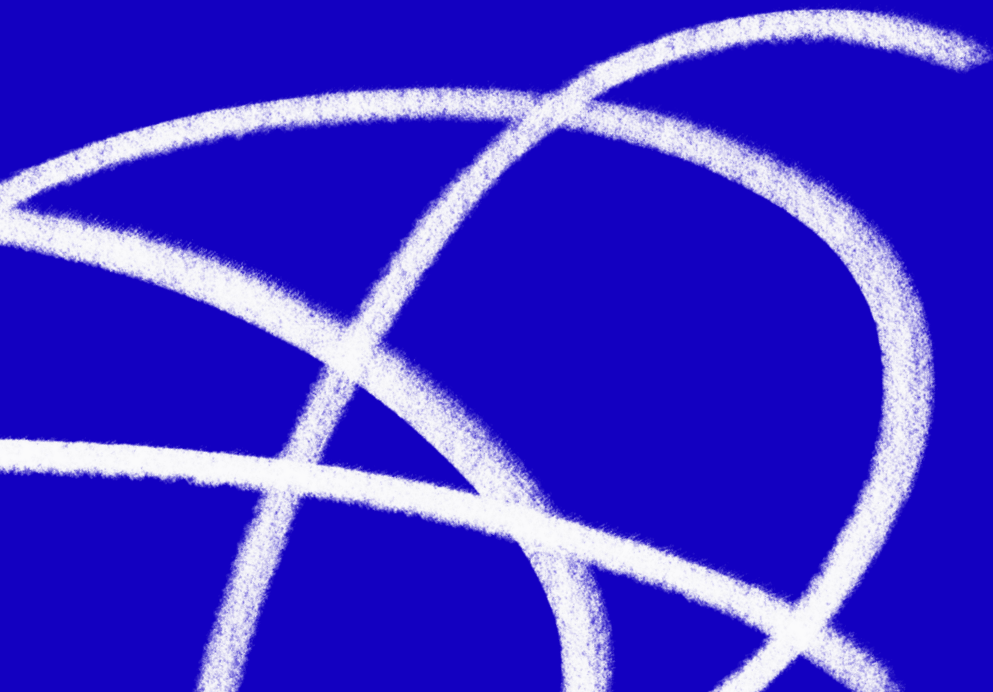




# Supporting your team's mental health



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The first and most important step in supporting your team's mental health is to listen to what your team needs and foster an atmosphere of openness and trust.

- You don't have to be an expert.
- You just need compassion, empathy and a listening ear.
- You can still meet the business needs and achieve the team's goals.
- Being compassionate and supportive of mental health creates a strong team.

## **It's an everyday part of the job**

Have you ever helped a stressed colleague manage their workload? Given your team opportunities to voice opinions and ask questions about a restructure? Supported a team member to leave work early to pick up a sick child? Helped someone work flexibly so they can fulfil caring responsibilities?

If the answer to any of these questions is yes, you have already begun to support your team's mental health.

It's easy to think about "mental health at work" as something that's dealt with by your Mental Health First Aiders, or your Employee Assistance Programme. In fact, most of the work you do to support your team's mental health is part of your everyday management role.

Talking about mental health at work can be as simple as giving someone the opportunity to say, “I’m stressed,” “I’m worried” or “I’m feeling really down today.” Opportunities will come up during team meetings, one-to-ones or general chats, to get to know your team and create an atmosphere of trust where they can share their feelings.

The more you normalise talking about mental health in the workplace, the safer your team will feel to share any issues they may be having before they become major problems.

## **Normalising conversations about mental health**

- Ask, “How are you?” and listen to the answer.
  - We often answer “ok” to this question because we think the person asking doesn’t really want to know our problems. When your team start to realise you want to know how they really are, you are establishing an atmosphere of support and trust.
- Put aside some time for regular wellbeing check-ins during one-to-ones and any other appropriate times.
- Be available to your team to allow them to talk to you about any concerns.
- Be aware of days such as World Mental Health Day or Time to Talk Day. These can be good opportunities to begin conversations about mental health or to help your team pause to focus on their own wellbeing. But remember, conversations about mental health should happen all year round!

## **If you are concerned about a team member's mental health**

If you are concerned about a team member and want to discuss their mental health with them, approaching the topic with empathy and compassion will help the team member feel supported.

It could be a great relief to them to be able to share their difficulties and to know they have your support.

- Make it an informal chat. If you are concerned about a team member you don't need to invite them in for a formal meeting. Find the right moment to have a quiet, private chat.
- When inviting someone to a meeting tell them what it is about – this can help to reduce anxiety if they know what to expect. Saying 'I just want to check in' can be too ambiguous and generate anxiety for people.
- Think about the time and location for the conversation. Make sure you are somewhere private and quiet where the person feels comfortable and equal, and that you have enough time to talk.
- To start the conversation, just ask them how they are doing.
- Listen to what the person is telling you and tailor your support to that individual.
- Don't make assumptions about how they are feeling or what their problems are. Every individual is different, and they are unlikely to feel the same way that you do about something.

- Reassure them that the conversation is confidential, unless you have concerns about the safety of the individual or someone else.
- Plan how you can support the individual – you could use Mind’s Wellness Action Plan or make a list of actions and dates so that they have some structured goals and targets.
- Book in a follow-up meeting to check on their progress so that they know you genuinely want to support them.
- Signpost the employee to other appropriate support – for example your company may have an Employee Assistance Programme, or you may know of local mental health charities offering support. Offer to make a referral to Occupational Health if it would be helpful to check whether any adjustments might be needed to help support them.
- Reassure the team member that you are there to support them, even if they don’t feel confident in talking about their mental health straight away.

## **You don’t have to be an expert**

If a team member tells you that they have a specific mental health condition it can be natural to feel concerned that you don’t understand the condition well enough to offer support.

The good news is, you don’t need to be an expert in mental health (though if you do want to learn about specific conditions, there is plenty of information available on the Mind website).

What you do need to do is learn what that condition means for the individual team member concerned. The same mental health condition can affect all of us differently, so the best way to find out what someone needs is to talk to them.

If you feel they need additional support, it is good practice to refer them to an Occupational Health service. You can use tools like Wellness Action Plans to work together with the team member to help keep them well at work. You can also signpost them to fill in a Health Adjustment Passport:

[Health Adjustment Passport - GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/health-adjustment-passport)

([www.gov.uk/government/publications/health-adjustment-passport](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/health-adjustment-passport)) to identify whether any adjustments are needed to support them at work.

### **Listen, and don't make assumptions**

If a staff member is struggling with their mental health the first thing you can do for them is listen. Give them time and space to explain what the problem is and to tell you what they need. As we are all different, two people going through the same circumstances might need to be supported in different ways. For example, if someone receives the news that a parent is seriously unwell, they may feel unable to concentrate on work and ask for time off or a reduction in hours. Someone else might cope best by having the opportunity to focus on work but might appreciate the chance to work more flexibly. Your good intentions can lead to you offering the wrong type of support if you make assumptions without listening to your team member.

## How team members can support each other

Encourage team members to:

- Ask how they can help each other
- Be open-minded
- Show trust and respect
- Look after themselves
- Get support if they need to
- Don't make mental health the only topic of conversation – talking about other topics can be helpful.
- Give them time during the working day to make a phone call/referral for support if they need to.

## Where employees can get support

At work:

- Employee Assistance Programme – ask HR for details of your provider
- Occupational Health – offer to make a referral
- Mental Health First Aiders
- Health Adjustment Passport - available on gov.uk website
- Staff Networks

Outside of work:

- GP
- Local Mental Health hubs
- NHS Talking Therapies (which also gives access to employment support)
- Samaritans: [www.samaritans.org](http://www.samaritans.org)
- Your local Mind: [www.mind.org.uk/about-us/local-minds](http://www.mind.org.uk/about-us/local-minds)

- Urgent help for mental health – NHS: [www.nhs.uk/nhs-services/mental-health-services/where-to-get-urgent-help-for-mental-health](https://www.nhs.uk/nhs-services/mental-health-services/where-to-get-urgent-help-for-mental-health)
- SHOUT: The UK’s free, confidential 24/7 text service: [giveusashout.org](https://giveusashout.org)
- Mind Mental Health helplines: [www.mind.org.uk/information-support/guides-to-support-and-services/seeking-help-for-a-mental-health-problem/mental-health-helplines](https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/guides-to-support-and-services/seeking-help-for-a-mental-health-problem/mental-health-helplines)
- Self-help through Every Mind Matters: [www.nhs.uk/every-mind-matters](https://www.nhs.uk/every-mind-matters)



## **Further resources:**

### **ACAS guidance on talking about Mental Health in the workplace**

[www.acas.org.uk/supporting-mental-health-workplace/managing-your-employees-mental-health-at-work](http://www.acas.org.uk/supporting-mental-health-workplace/managing-your-employees-mental-health-at-work)

### **Types of mental health problems**

[www.mind.org.uk/information-support/types-of-mental-health-problems](http://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/types-of-mental-health-problems)

### **How to support staff who are experiencing a mental health problem**

[www.mind.org.uk/media-a/4661/resource4.pdf](http://www.mind.org.uk/media-a/4661/resource4.pdf)

### **Taking care of your staff**

[www.mind.org.uk/workplace/mental-health-at-work/taking-care-of-your-staff](http://www.mind.org.uk/workplace/mental-health-at-work/taking-care-of-your-staff)

### **Mental Health at work**

[www.mind.org.uk/workplace/mental-health-at-work](http://www.mind.org.uk/workplace/mental-health-at-work)

