

# EQUIP YOUR TEAM TO ADDRESS MENTAL HEALTH AT WORK

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STRAIGHTFORWARD HR ADVICE AND SUPPORT



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## Introduction

Talking about mental health has never been more important, especially when it comes to the workplace. We spend the majority of our lives at work, so if mental health isn't taken seriously then it can have a serious impact on our health. These problems can manifest in many ways such as anxiety, depression or stress, and can stop people from performing their best.

What will your mental health strategy look like?

The aim of this resource is to give you the tools to equip your team, so you can address mental health at work, reduce stigma and open up channels of communication to encourage a healthy dialogue. Smart employers recognise employees who are experiencing mental health problems and support them to cope and recover. 9 out of 10 people with mental health problems experience stigma and discrimination and less than half of employees feel they're able to talk openly with their line manager if they were suffering from stress. By promoting well-being, you can help to break down these barriers to create a positive and healthy working culture. But how can you do that?

## Start from the Top

No matter the size of your business, support for mental well-being initiatives need to come from the top to be truly efficient.

Conversations about mental health should happen at board level, and not just within the HR department, as employees take cues from how leaders behave.

### Put together a proposal

We all know businesses need to run a tight ship, and often senior leaders are under pressure to cut costs where possible. With an airtight proposal for introducing mental health initiatives at work, backed up with figures on staff turnover, morale and even information from exit interviews, you can enter the meeting prepared and confident in the proposition. And, if you are in a senior role then put the time in to research the benefits of taking action to support mental well-being.

### Set targets

What do you want to achieve here? As with any aspect of business, goals are key to working effectively and mental health is no different. By working out why you're doing what you're doing, you can make a start on these targets. Make sure they're measurable and reflective of the effort your putting in. Don't forget to make these a key target for the whole company.

### Induct and train

With the support of the boardroom, you can start to include mental health from the beginning – staff inductions and training. Work with the HR team, or relevant members of your business, to work out how to ensure positive mental health is promoted. Inform new staff of the processes that are in place to show you're fully supporting well-being at work.

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## Promote Well-being

How can you take the stigma away from mental health? It's often the elephant in the room which can only escalate the problems.

Promote discussion and awareness in whatever way feels right for your company. If you can make it seem less daunting, then people will feel more comfortable talking about it

### Internal resources

Make the most of your internal communications. Do you have a noticeboard or intranet? These are really good places to start the conversations as often people don't want to speak face to face about difficult issues.

Start by building up a bank of resources, too. You may not have the time to write blogs or factsheets but there's a wealth of knowledge out there (including this guide!) that you can share for people to take advantage of. Be seen to be helpful.

### Mental health champion

Identify a member of your business to champion mental health at work. This can be someone with their own experience, or someone who's passionate about helping others.

If staff can see someone is happily, and actively, talking about mental health then they'll feel encouraged to do the same. They also might feel comfortable going to your champion to talk about their feelings, breaking down barriers along the way.

*When Deloitte partner John Binns went off sick with acute depression the company knew something had to be done to protect the workforce. It has now introduced Mental Health Champions throughout the business who are on hand for support with advice and informal chats.*

### **Peer support**

Mentoring and buddy schemes are another way for staff experiencing mental health issues to gain confidence in your company. Often, it's easier to speak to someone not in management, so this way your staff can support one another, form friendships and bring your team together as a whole

*Ernest & Young has introduced a similar mental health buddy system so that employees can discuss issues openly with a peer before approaching a line manager.*

### **Benefits package**

Does your employee benefits package provide support for mental health? This could include things such as income protection which provides replacement income for sick employees. If your staff know they'll be supported in the event of sick leave or the need for changes to their employment expectations, they'll be less likely to keep their mental health issues bottled up.

Not only this, but financial benefit schemes are increasingly important for employees. Receiving discounts on everything from weekly food shops, clothes, getaways, tech and much more, can make wages go further and take financial pressure off.

This then can help staff to relax more and worry less. [Benefits Cloud](#) works with over 500 partners to bring the best discounts to your staff.

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### **Don't forget physical well-being**

Physical and mental well-being are connected, with the former having a positive effect on the latter. Try to introduce physical activities as part of your company's work life such as a cycle to work scheme, running club or meditation hour. Or, make sure staff have the time away from their desks to have lunch to take a break.

## Training for Line Managers

Whatever your company structure, line managers are essential to help support positive mental health. Yet, only 24% of line managers have received mental health training. They usually know their teams well and can recognise daily changes in mood or behaviour due to working with them closely and often. They will also be the ones dealing with mental health in the workforce. That said, many lack the confidence or experience to manage this alone.

### Training

You may be in a position where you can bring a third party in to help train managers in recognising, understanding and dealing with mental health issues. [Mental Health First Aid](#) teaches how to recognise the crucial warning signs of mental ill health, in the same way we learn physical first aid. However, if you don't have the resources available for this, there are online training portals available. Let them know where to go for further support too: [Access to work](#), [Business in the Community](#), [Mind](#), [Mindful Employer](#), [NHS Choices](#), [Rethink Mental Illness](#)

### Lead by example

Managers and employees shouldn't be expected to be experts in mental health. On a basic human to human level, there are many things managers can do.

These include:

- Leading by example
- Taking stock
- Encouraging engagement
- Treating people as individuals
- Being available for staff
- Being nice!

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## **Get feedback**

Your managers aren't mind readers so encourage them to get feedback from their teams. Surveys are a great idea because they can be anonymous, appealing to those too shy to speak up and take little time to set up. By collecting information regularly, your managers can assess where your wellbeing strategy is working, or where needs work. By including your teams in this process, you're giving them a sense of importance which is helpful to creating a positive culture.

## Supporting a Member of Staff

If it becomes apparent one of your staff members is struggling with their mental health, now is the time all the management training, planning and cultivation of well-being at work steps in. The first thing to remember is to be positive and supportive.

- Ask open questions to allow the other person to lead the conversation
- Consider all aspects of their life, both inside and outside of work and what could be influencing this. This could be family, relationships, living situation, physical health, finance, addiction, bereavement etc.
- Between you, work out how small changes at work can have a big difference. These are often attitude, expectation or communication, and a tailored work plan for them could be beneficial where they do or don't do things that their colleagues do/don't. This could also include flexible working/working from home.
- Try to plan regular sessions where they can drop in to have a chat. By doing it this way, rather than scheduling email invites to meetings, it is more informal and relaxed and will help the person to feel more at ease.
- Consider external support such as counselling or legal advice. If you have health partners, seek their advice or consult your Employee Assistance Programme (EAP). If you don't have an EAP, now is the time to think about it. [EAPA UK](https://www.eapa.org.uk) provide support for both organisations and employees.

There are many ways in which you can equip your team to address mental health at work. Whatever you decide to do to suit your workplace the best, make sure it is honest, well-meant and is followed up. Empty promises on mental health initiatives can have a negative effect so be sure from the start what you want to do, how you're going to do it and if you can see it through with the resources you have.

These types of ideas aren't limited to larger companies; SMEs make up the majority of the nation's businesses and employ [60% of the private sector workforce](#). With 70 million working days lost each year due to mental ill health, having mental well-being at the forefront of your business plan is not only a nice idea, but a critical one, too.

## What will your mental health strategy look like?

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## For more information, contact us

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*This information is intended as a general overview and discussion of the subjects dealt with. The information provided here was accurate as of the day it was posted; however, the law may have changed since that date. This information is not intended to be, and should not be used as, a substitute for taking legal, HR or benefits advice in any specific situation. Petaurum Solutions is not responsible for any actions taken or not taken on the basis of this information. Please refer to the full terms and conditions on our website. All rights reserved.*

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