



Mental Health and Wellbeing

A guide for managers

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Introduction

This guide accompanies our Mental Health and Wellbeing policy and is designed to help you assist your team members who are experiencing difficulties with their mental health or wellbeing. It includes information about the internal and external support available and offers practical advice on what you can do to assist colleagues with their mental health and wellbeing.

What to expect from this guide.

This guide aims to help you to:

- Be confident about your role in managing and supporting people with mental health symptoms.
- Understand and reduce the barriers that could potentially prevent a team member experiencing difficulties with their mental health and wellbeing from performing and / or developing to their full potential.
- Identify appropriate workplace changes or adjustments to support team members and help them thrive at work.
- Foster an inclusive working environment in which everyone is treated fairly.

Every manager should know what mental health and wellbeing is, when it happens and how it can affect people.

You play a key role in supporting your team members through good times and bad. This will help ensure that good mental health and wellbeing remains at the very heart of the Council.

Mental health can affect our thinking, emotions and behaviour, which can impact our ability to work, carry out simple daily tasks and engage in relationships.

We recognise that just like physical health, there are different levels of mental health, which can vary from person to person and at different points in a person's life.

There are different types of mental health conditions, some of which are common such as depression, stress and anxiety and some which are not such as schizophrenia or borderline personality disorder.

If team members are experiencing mental health conditions, it is important to know that support is available for you and for them.

There is often still a stigma around mental health and stress and consequently people experiencing difficulties will often try to hide their symptoms or be uncomfortable talking about them. We want everyone to understand what mental health, stress and wellbeing is and to be able to talk about it openly, without fear or embarrassment and so it is an important issue for us all, not just those experiencing the symptoms of it.

Your role as a people manager

You have an important role to play in ensuring that anyone experiencing mental health symptoms gets the same support and understanding as if they had any other health condition.

The role of managers in supporting people experiencing mental health symptoms is crucial. Effective management of team members with symptoms that are impacting on their work will help you to retain valuable skills and talent and reduce sickness absence.

Good people management is fundamental to supporting employee mental health and wellbeing, spotting early signs of ill health and initiating early intervention.

As a people manager you are typically:

- The first point of contact if a team member needs to discuss their mental health, workplace stress or wellbeing concerns or needs a change or adjustment to their work or working hours, to enable them to perform to their full potential.
- Responsible for implementing the people management policies and practices that can help someone experiencing mental health or workplace stress symptoms to feel supported and to be effective in their role.
- Responsible for managing absence and keeping in touch if someone is off work ill or because of their mental health or workplace stress symptoms, as well as supporting an effective return to work.

The level of trust you build with team members will determine the extent to which they are able to discuss topics such as mental health and workplace stress symptoms and any support or adjustments they need at work.

If there are regular and informal one-to-ones between you and your team members, this can provide an opportunity for a conversation about any changes to their health situation, including their mental health, workplace stress and wellbeing.

It is important to understand that each person's situation is unique, and their experience and symptoms of mental health, workplace stress and wellbeing will differ. Asking team members how they are on a regular basis will help to create an open culture and encourage someone to raise any concerns.

As a manager you can start by making yourself familiar with the Mental Health and Wellbeing policy. Remember that many people experiencing mental health symptoms may choose not to tell their managers and may be reluctant to disclose the real reason for any sickness absence. Sometimes performance and behaviour may change without any clear explanation. If you have concerns about a team member's wellbeing or performance, ask general questions such as 'How are you?' or 'I have noticed that you have been late to work recently, and I wondered if you are ok?'.

Mental health and wellbeing is not a one-off event in someone's life and symptoms can vary from person to person and throughout a person's life. Symptoms can fluctuate and be felt to varying degrees. It is important to keep up regular conversations with your team members.

Approaching a sensitive conversation

Mental health symptoms can affect people's confidence and it can be really daunting talking to someone who has no knowledge of the mental health, so the more open, supportive and knowledgeable you are, the less embarrassed they are likely to be to talk about how their symptoms are affecting their health and work.

Awareness about mental health and wellbeing and the range of support available in the organisation will increase your own confidence in discussing the issue.

Approach conversations with empathy and try not to be embarrassed. It is important to set the right tone when opening a conversation about any sensitive issues. Here are some tips to consider:

- Make sure you are in a private space and avoid interruptions.
- Allow enough time.
- Ask simple, open, non-judgemental questions.
- Maintain good eye contact.
- Actively listen and give team members space to open up.
- Be prepared for some silences and be patient.
- Focus on the person and not the issue.
- Ensure team members know they can trust you.

Confidentiality

There are occasions when information provided by a team member experiencing a mental health problem may have to be put to third parties. These include as a result of reported bullying or misconduct or where disciplinary proceedings are undertaken. It may also be necessary for you to gain advice and support from Human Resources. In exceptional circumstances, it may be necessary to involve others where it is clear that a person's state of mental health may be a danger to the safety of themselves or others, unless doing so would create a risk to the safety of the individual or others. You should inform your team member when you are sharing information relating to their mental health with a third party.

Practical things you can do to help

Often, a few changes to a team member's work environment can make a big difference and a discussion with them should be useful in identifying what would help.

You may find the [Wellness Action Plan](#) a useful tool to help you think about what kind of questions to ask team members when you are speaking to them about mental health.

In your discussion you should aim to cover:

- How their mental health problem affects them on a day-to-day basis.
- What, if anything, they would like explained to their colleagues. It must be up to them if they want anyone to know but it may help their colleagues to understand any behaviour changes, periods of absence or changes in work.
- Whether there is anything in work which may be contributing to their mental health problem.
- If there is anything which would help them in their day-to-day work. There may be some obvious changes such as changing a particular piece of work they are struggling with or enabling them to have time away to seek medical or counselling support. It may simply be enough that you are aware of their mental health problem and can support them whenever possible.
- That they are a valued employee and that you will support them wherever possible through the use of Council policies and procedures which are in place to support employees with a mental health problem.
- Where the further resources are available that might help them. These can be found on the Council's intranet [Health and Wellbeing \(sharepoint.com\)](#).

The following table is not an exhaustive list but aims to provide some examples of adjustments which may be helpful for varying symptoms of general mental health problems.

Symptom	Possible adjustments
Psychological symptoms: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Memory difficulties • Difficulty concentrating 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage team members to discuss concerns with you. • Carry out a wellness action plan. • Reduce demands if workload is identified as an issue. Provide additional time to complete tasks if needed or consider substituting with different tasks. • Offer alternative methods of communicating tasks and planning of work to assist memory. • Discuss whether an occupational health referral would be useful.
Psychological symptoms: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anxiety • Depression • Panic attacks • Loss of confidence • Mood changes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Carry out a wellness action plan. • Support flexible working where possible. • Raise general awareness of issues around mental health and wellbeing within the team so colleagues are more likely to be supportive (do not disclose confidential information unless you have explicit consent to do so). • Signpost internally to wellbeing resources.
Fatigue	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider temporary adjustments to shift patterns or hours when doing the rota, particularly if fatigue is related to sleep disturbance. • Reduce physical tasks if possible. • Ensure regular breaks.

In some instances, it can be useful to seek occupational health advice to consider what adjustments could support a team member.

Supporting employees following a traumatic event

We recognise that, as a local authority, employees may from time-to-time experience traumatic incidents. As a result, some team members may experience some very typical symptoms in relation to some extreme circumstances and these may affect their health and ability to cope with day-to-day life.

What is psychological trauma?

The term trauma can refer to a wide range of traumatic, abusive or neglectful events or series of events (including Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and trauma in adulthood) that are experienced as being emotionally or physically harmful or life threatening. Whether an event(s) is traumatic depends not only on our individual experience of the event, but also how it negatively impacts on our emotional, social, spiritual and physical wellbeing. We are all affected by traumatic events in different ways.

What is 'Trauma Informed' Practice?

Being 'Trauma Informed' means being able to recognise when someone may be affected by trauma, collaboratively adjusting how we work to take this into account and responding in a way that supports recovery, does no harm and recognises and supports people's resilience.

Being Trauma Informed is underpinned by the 5 R's:

1. Realising how common the experience of trauma and adversity is.
2. Recognising the different ways that trauma can affect people.
3. Responding by taking account of the ways that people can be affected by trauma to support recovery.
4. Opportunities to Resist re-traumatisation and offer a greater sense of choice and control, empowerment, collaboration and safety with everyone that you have contact with.
5. Recognising the central importance of Relationships.

For further information on trauma and trauma informed practice, please contact the Human Resources and Organisational Development Team.

Legal considerations

Treating team members experiencing mental health symptoms in the wrong way can increase the risk of claims of victimisation, harassment, direct discrimination and indirect discrimination on the grounds of disability.

Where a team member is experiencing symptoms of a mental health condition, such that their ability to perform day-to-day activities is substantially impacted, this may amount to a disability for the purposes of the Equality Act. This means that we have a legal duty to make all reasonable adjustments for the team member.

It is really important for us to treat mental health symptoms sensitively and take it seriously.

Things to avoid:

- Issuing a performance warning to a team member where the reason for the performance issues is connected to experiencing mental health symptoms could be disability discrimination.
- Issuing an absence warning to a colleague whose absence is connected to mental health symptoms could be disability discrimination.
- Failing to make reasonable adjustments for a team member experiencing mental health symptoms could be disability discrimination.

Implementation of existing Policies

The Council has a policy on Sickness Absence management which includes absence triggers based on duration or frequency of sickness absences.

Our Sickness Absence Policy sets out further details on reasonable adjustments which must be considered for employees experiencing a mental health problem which would be considered to be substantial, adverse and long-term.

What adjustments are reasonable is determined on a case-by-case basis. Reasonable adjustments can include making changes to premises, hours, duties and procedures, arranging training, acquiring or modifying equipment, and redeployment. Whether an adjustment is reasonable in a given situation will depend on issues such as its effectiveness in resolving the disadvantage to a team member with a disability, practicability, costs, associated disruption to business, and the resources available. Adjustments should be discussed with Human Resources.

You should treat any team member experiencing a mental health problem fairly, consistently and should not make them feel guilty about their condition. You should make reasonable adjustments to enable them to remain at or return to work and to perform to their full potential.

It is acknowledged that mental health symptoms may in some circumstances impact a person's performance at work, and therefore this should be taken into account when applying the Council's Disciplinary or Capability Policy.

Useful resources

As well as a variety of internal resources referred to in this guide and the associated policy, there are a number of links below that may be useful to consider and to signpost colleagues to.

Wellbeing Resources

Resources to support employees and further information can be found within the Wellbeing section of the [Council's Intranet](#).

Mental Health Awareness for Managers – Virtual

The aim of the course is to understand common mental health problems and how to cope with and deal with these in a positive way in your role as a manager.

Occupational Stress will be covered along with your responsibilities as a manager in dealing with this in terms of both organisational policy and under legislation.

Scottish Mental Health First Aid – Face to Face

This is a two-day course and is designed for everyone. It covers how to recognise someone in a mental health crisis, how to approach and support them and covers basic suicide intervention skills.

[Mentally Healthy Workplace Training](#) – iLearn

Available to all employees to raise awareness of mental health conditions in a workplace setting.

Trauma Informed Training – Virtual

Training sessions are available on [TURAS](#), the NHS Learning Management Centre. Contact Learning and Development for further details.

Trade Unions can be contacted for further advice and support.

<https://www.mind.org.uk/> – A starting point for anyone with a mental health condition.

[Remploy Disability Guide for Employers](#) - Remploy Disability Guide for employers contains practical advice for employers supporting disabled people and those with long-term health conditions in the workplace.