



Mental Well-being Policy

Overview

A 2017 Government commissioned review of mental health at work (Thriving at Work) found that 300,000 people with a long-term mental health condition leave or lose their jobs each year in the UK. The review set out a number of recommendations to help employers take appropriate steps in order to prevent mental ill health either caused by or made worse by work. The objectives of the review were to ensure that individuals with a mental health condition are supported to allow them to enter, remain and thrive at work and to ensure that individuals understand how to look after both their own mental health and the mental health of those around them.

The review recommended the implementation of six core standards:

- Produce, implement and communicate a mental health plan at work
- Develop mental health awareness amongst employees
- Encourage open conversation against mental health and the support available when employees are struggling
- Provide employees with good working conditions and ensure they have a healthy work life balance and opportunities for development
- Promote effective people management through line managers and supervisors
- Routinely monitor employee mental health and wellbeing

The purpose of this policy is to develop mental health awareness amongst employees, encourage open conversation and provide support options to employees.

What is Mental Health?

We are all aware of our physical health, whether we have an injury or an illness, and how we are physically feeling on a scale. Our mental health can also be measured on a scale, the only difference is a mental illness is a health problem that cannot be seen. One in four people will suffer from mental illness during their lifetime. Both physical and mental health can be affected by many things both in and out of work.

Mental illness is common, can affect everyone and is not a sign of weakness or failure. The World Health Organisation defines good mental health as 'A state of well-being in which every individual realizes his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make contribution to his or her community' (e.g. meeting deadlines, carrying out voluntary work etc).

Mental health problems can range from common illnesses such as depression and anxiety to more severe illnesses such as bipolar disorder and schizophrenia. Mental health illnesses can occur irrespective of age, personality or background and they can come about due to experiences in both personal and work life or as a result of other reasons that are not so easily identifiable.

Factors That can Impact on Mental Health

There may be one or a combination of factors that can have an impact on mental health, these can include:

- Physical health problems
- Other mental health problems
- Childhood experiences
- Life events – e.g. unemployment, bereavement
- Side effects of prescribed medication



- Genetic inheritance
- Drugs and alcohol
- Poor diet
- Lack of sleep
- Lack of exercise

What is Depression?

Every person goes through periods of feeling sad and low, normally these feelings pass. If these feelings last for a few weeks, are reoccurring or interfering with daily life, then they could be signs that the person is suffering from depression. Depression is a low mood feeling that lasts for a long time period and affects a persons every-day life. When in its mildest form, a person can just feel in low spirits, they are able to continue with every-day tasks, but the tasks may seem less worthwhile and become harder to complete. When these feelings go from mild to major, this can become a life- threatening mental health problem as a person may give up the will to live, feeling suicidal or self-harming.

Signs & Symptoms of Depression

Signs and symptoms of depression can be both physical and psychological including: difficulty sleeping or sleeping more than usual; feeling tired; loss of appetite or weight; overeating; aches and pains with no obvious cause; excessive use of tobacco, alcohol or drugs; having difficulty remembering things; memory loss; difficulty making decisions; loss of confidence or self-esteem; having lots of negative thoughts; suicidal feelings. A person may also become tearful; restless and agitated; unusually irritable or impatient; isolate themselves and avoid friends or social events.

Individuals with Bipolar Disorder may suffer from extreme mood swings from high elation to complete despair. A person suffering from Bipolar Disorder may not be able to make sense of their world and may do things that seem odd or illogical.

How to Cope with Depression

Coping strategies include: visiting a GP to discuss talking therapies such as counselling (talking to others); cognitive behavioural therapy (addresses the way you think); or psychotherapy (more intense). GPs may prescribe medication if they feel it is necessary, it is your responsibility to ensure you are aware of any side effects and notify your line manager or Director if the prescribed medication may have an impact on your ability to carry out your day to day activities e.g. causing drowsiness.

What is Anxiety?

Anxiety is a type of fear that is usually associated with the thought or threat of something going wrong in the future; but, can also arise from something currently happening in the present. Anxiety is one of the natural defence mechanisms of the human body and causes the mind and body to speed up in preparedness to deal with a situation.

Signs & Symptoms of Anxiety

As with depression, there are both physical and psychological signs and symptoms of anxiety that include: rapid and/or irregular heartbeat; fast breathing; weakened or tense muscles; sweating; churning stomach or loose bowels; dizziness; dry mouth; trouble sleeping; lack of concentration; feeling irritable; feeling depressed and loss of self-confidence.



How to cope with Anxiety

Talking to others – opening up and discussing anxiety with others that have similar experience. Counselling and Cognitive Behavioural Therapy are effective.

Facing the fear – Breaking the cycle of constantly avoiding situations that makes an individual feel anxious, will help prevent them from stopping doing the things they want or need to do in the future.

Know yourself – make a note of what has triggered the anxiety when feeling anxious.

Relax – learning relaxation techniques such as yoga, meditation and massage can help to calm.

Exercise – even small amounts trigger chemicals in the brain that improve mood, wellbeing and stress levels.

Healthy eating – eat plenty of fruit and vegetables; avoid too much sugar as this can cause highs and lows in sugar levels which can give you anxious feelings and caffeine in tea and coffee can also increase anxiety levels.

Alcohol – avoid or drink in moderation as although it numbs the anxiety in the short term, the effect is only temporary and when it wears off there may be the possibility of feeling more anxious.

Schizophrenia

About one in one hundred people will experience at least one episode of Schizophrenia. An episode can last for up to several weeks and usually starts in the late teens or early twenties but can affect older people for the first time. Causes are unknown, but episodes appear to be associated with chemical changes in the brain, stressful experiences and recreational drug use. People suffering with Schizophrenia will have severely disrupted beliefs and experiences that can cause them to lose touch with reality; see or hear things that are not actually there; hold irrational or dumbfounded beliefs or appear to act strangely because they are responding to the delusions and hallucinations.

Signs & Symptoms of Schizophrenia

Signs and symptoms of Schizophrenia are categorised into positive and negative groups. Positive signs and symptoms are feelings of being controlled by outside forces; hallucinations - hearing, seeing, smelling or feeling things which are not there and delusions - irrational and unfounded beliefs. The positive symptoms are the most dramatic and initially the most distressing. The negative symptoms include tiredness, loss of concentration, and lack of energy and motivation. These can be exacerbated by the side-effects of drugs used to treat the positive symptoms. The symptoms of Schizophrenia result in people being unable to cope with everyday tasks at home and at work. Suicide and self-harm are common in people with a diagnosis of schizophrenia: around one in ten take their own lives. People with schizophrenia are not usually dangerous to other people; they are more at risk of harm from others, or themselves.

How to cope with Schizophrenia

If you or someone you care for are displaying signs and symptoms of Schizophrenia, contact your GP. Most people with schizophrenia will be prescribed drugs for long periods of time to reduce the positive symptoms; however, these may have unpleasant side effects. Sometimes, under the Mental Health Act, people in an acute phase of the illness may need to be admitted to hospital for their own, or other people's, safety.

It is important to note that individuals with mental ill health are more likely to be the victim of an attack rather than the attacker - the majority of violent crimes are committed by individuals who do not suffer with mental health problems.



Support for Employees

As of December 2021, the company has committed to providing an Employee Assistance Programme via Health Assured UK, a specialist EAP provider who are BACP accredited for their counselling services in the UK. The programme is available to all employees and immediate family.

Talking about physical health with co-workers is common in the workplace; employees are encouraged to share and discuss their mental health with co-workers in the same way without feeling they will be treated differently.

Should an employee wish the Directors to share/disclose any personal information to help co-workers understand what is going on, the employee will be encouraged to write out or email exactly what information they wish to be shared.

Employees can develop and complete a Wellness Action Plan that will allow them to reflect on the causes of stress and poor mental health, allowing them to take ownership of practical steps that can help to address the triggers. The action plans will allow dialogue between the employee and their Line Manager. These action plans will remain confidential and will be reviewed at regular intervals as agreed by the Directors and the employee.

Should an employee be prescribed any medication, the employee must notify the Directors, in line with the Drugs and Alcohol Policy, to ensure that alternative work can be arranged where possible e.g. some medication may cause side effects such as drowsiness - driving and the use of plant or equipment may need to be restricted and flexible working may be required.

The following organisations also provide helplines that employees can contact should they feel that want to talk anonymously and do not wish to use the services of the Employee Assistance Programme.

Organisation	Telephone	Opening Hours
Anxiety UK	08444 775774	Mon – Fri, 9.30am – 5.30pm
The Samaritans (emotional support)	08457 909090	24 hours
Mind	0300 123 3393	Mon-Fri, 9am – 6pm
NHS 111 Service	111	24 hours

This policy will be reviewed on an annual basis, disseminated electronically to all employees and made available to all interested parties.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M Scott', is written over a light grey rectangular background.

Mark Scott, Managing Director

1st May 2024