# Absence & Wellbeing HR Guidance

## Mental Health Support

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**What you need to know about Mental Health**

Everyone has mental health, just as everyone has a level of physical health, although mental health and physical health are often viewed and treated differently. If you have a broken leg in plaster this is visible to others and they will support you. But if you are feeling depressed or have high levels of anxiety this is not visible and it can feel like no-one is taking you seriously.

Everyone will experience times of stress, anxiety and low mood and statistics show that one in four of us has experienced mental illness. While awareness of mental health is increasing, people with mental health problems still face discrimination and challenges getting the help that they need. Some will keep their feelings hidden because they are afraid of other people’s responses and it can feel that there is still a stigma attached to having a mental health problem. This stigma can prevent people from speaking out and asking for support. Most people can and do recover from mental health problems and having a fulfilling job can be good for your mental health and general wellbeing.

Sometimes it will seem obvious when someone is going through a hard time, but there is no simple way of knowing if they have a mental health problem. Sometimes you don’t need to know. It’s more important to respond sensitively to someone who seems troubled than to find out whether or not they have a diagnosis. Although certain symptoms are common with specific mental health problems, no two people behave in exactly the same way when they are unwell. If you know the person well, you may notice changes in their behaviour or mood.

Continuing to not acknowledge mental health can also cause physical health problems. Though they are usually thought of as separate entities, the two go hand in hand. Having poor mental health can cause someone to stop making healthy decisions which can result in heart disease, high blood pressure, obesity, and a weaker immune system. On average, people with severe mental health illnesses die ten years younger. Not taking mental health serious can also cause the person to become homeless, lead to job stability issues, drug addiction, self-harm, and suicide.

Suicide is the leading cause of death among young people aged 20-34 years in the UK and it is considerably higher in men, with around three times as many men dying as a result of suicide compared to women. It is the leading cause of death for men under 50 in the UK.

One reason that men are more likely to complete suicide may be because they are less likely than women to ask for help or talk about depressive or suicidal feelings. Recent statistics show that only 27% of people who died by suicide between 2005 and 2015 had been in contact with mental health services in the year before they died.

The statistics highlight that talking about suicide is still highly stigmatised. Talking about suicide and understanding it better is necessary to help prevent further suicides.

**Recognising the Signs**

The earlier a manager becomes aware that a team member or colleague is experiencing mental ill health, the sooner steps can be taken to prevent it becoming more serious and provide support to help them.

A manager should never make assumptions, but signs of mental ill health can include:

* Changes in usual behaviour, mood or how they interact with colleagues
* Changes in the standard of their work or focus on tasks
* Appearing tired, anxious or withdrawn and reduce interest in tasks they previously enjoyed
* Changes in appetite and/or increase in smoking and drinking
* Increase in sickness absence and/or turning up late for work

Of course, not everyone who experiences mental ill health will exhibit obvious signs. So it is important for a manager to regularly ask team members how they are doing and create an environment where staff feel able to be open and honest about how they are feeling.

**How you can support**

If you are worried about someone it can be difficult to know what to do, but it is important not to wait as this could delay them getting support.

Talking to someone is often the first step to take when you have concerns and the resources below may help you with this.

1. How to support staff who are experiencing mental health problems

We all have mental health – it moves up and down a spectrum from good to poor and it’s affected by a range of factors both in and outside of work. Starting a conversation about it doesn’t have to be difficult – we can show you how to effectively support your staff and increase employee engagement, motivation and productivity.

Please click on this link for guidance produced by MIND Link to: [How to support staff who are experiencing a mental health problem](https://www.cumbria.gov.uk/elibrary/Content/Internet/536/5901/6049/4374116113.pdf)

1. Finding the words – Support after suicide

It can be difficult to know what to say to someone who has been bereaved or affected by suicide.

Please click this link for helpful guidance Link to: [Finding the words](https://www.cumbria.gov.uk/elibrary/Content/Internet/536/5901/6049/4374116230.pdf)

1. Do you Supervise or Manage People?

Are you a Line Manager / Supervisor of people? If you are then it’s worth knowing that people respond positively to managers who demonstrate value for their staff and appreciation for their contributions. Line Managers who are attentive to each individual’s achievements and challenges, encourage development, provide honest and useful feedback in a supportive manner whilst also demonstrating their respect for staff member are able to nurture their team into high productivity. Building a strong Manager/employee relationship opens the door to open conversations about mental health.

This guidance provides a list of simple suggestions that can demonstrate value to a staff member – especially if they are regular and consistent.

Please click this Link to: [Do you supervise or manage people](https://www.cumbria.gov.uk/elibrary/Content/Internet/536/5901/6049/4374116333.pdf) for further information.

1. Having a wellbeing conversation

Behavioural change takes time and is difficult, making new positive habits is challenging as we have to consciously choose to take the new actions rather than follow the paths that we have normally taken. We are making new connections within our brain that are fighting against the well-connected routes we have established over time. This guidance explores how you can start and support a conversation about wellbeing.

Please click this Link to: [How to Guide - Having a wellbeing conversation with a colleague](https://www.cumbria.gov.uk/elibrary/Content/Internet/536/5901/6049/4374116559.pdf).

1. Wellness Action Plans (WAP)

The WAPs are a personalised, practical tool we can all use – whether we have a mental health problem or not – to help us identify what keeps us well at work, what causes us to become unwell and the support we would like to receive from our manager to boost our wellbeing or support us through a recovery.

Please click this Link to: [Mind Guide for Managers - Wellness Action Plans](https://www.cumbria.gov.uk/elibrary/Content/Internet/536/5901/6049/4374116827.pdf) for more information.

**Contacts**

If you are experiencing mental health problems or need urgent support, you get help from many places. The links below signpost to useful internal and external support, charities and resources that provide mental health support.

1. In a crisis situation

If you, or someone you know/manage, needs urgent support in a crisis, please use this Link to: Who to contact if you need urgent support in a crisis

1. Helplines and Mental Health Resources

Other charities and support groups that offer support are listed here Link to: Mental Health Resource List

1. How to find Time to Change Champions

Did you know that the council has more than a hundred Workplace Wellbeing Champions dotted around the county, including your Health Advocates, Time to Change Champions and Mental Health First Aiders.

The champions have information on a wide range of health and wellbeing areas, including mental health, and are on hand to support colleagues and signpost to other help that is available.

You can now see Health Advocates, Time to Change Champions and Mental Health First Aiders wearing their new pin badges with pride.

Or you can find your nearest champion at www.cumbria.gov.uk/betterhealth

1. Self-Referral for Counselling

The Council Occupational Health Service operates an employee self-referral scheme for counselling.

Counselling can be provided to employees as an interim measure of support while the employees seeks longer-term treatment and support through their GP.

Your referral will be treated in confidence unless it is considered that you may be of risk of harm to yourself or others.

The Occupational Health Service operates during normal office hours. If you are completing this referral outside of this time and are in crisis, you should contact your GP’s surgery in the first instance, or refer to point 8.

To access the scheme please read the guidance and then log into the eOpas portal Link to: eOpas Portal

If you have any difficulties please call the Occupational Health Service on 01768 812556

Statistics

1. National Statistics provided by Time to Change

* One quarter of people in the UK experience a mental health problem every year.
* 45% of people with severe mental health problems have been victims of a crime the previous year.
* 90% of people with mental health problems experience stigma.
* 17% of people experience suicidal thoughts throughout their lifetime.
* 2/3 of people with mental health problems believe that workplace stress contributed to their illness.
* The majority of people with mental health problems wait over a year before telling their close friends and family about it.

Time to Change has also developed a Myth Busting Fact Sheet that you can use to test family, friends and colleagues. Link to: Myth-Busting fact sheet

Team Exercises

Please click the links below to take you to team exercises:

11. Link to: Team Exercise - What does stigma feel like?

12. Link to: Team Exercise – Mental Health vs. Physical Health