

Getting it Right



Promoting positive mental health at work

stress

counselling

depression

employee
confidence

support

inform

advise

train

work
with you

What is mental health?

Mental health is the mental and emotional state in which we feel able to deal well with the normal stresses of everyday life. If we are feeling good about ourselves we often:

- work productively
- interact well with colleagues and
- make a valuable contribution to our team or workplace.

Poor mental health can range from feeling 'a bit down' to common disorders such as anxiety and depression that may be diagnosed by a doctor. The Centre for Mental Health has estimated that one in four of us will suffer from a mental health problem at some point in our lives.

What if I get it wrong?

Failing to look after an employee's mental health can lead to:

- higher absence levels – according to the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development's 2011 Absence Survey stress is now the main cause of long-term absence in both manual and non-manual workers
- less productive employees. If your employee is not feeling well but turns up for work, they may still need help to resolve health problems so that they can work to their best ability
- continued stigma in the workplace about mental health issues.

What are the legal requirements?

- If the mental health condition is classed as a disability you have a legal duty to consider reasonable adjustments to help the employee stay in work or get back to work quickly.

How do I get it right?

✓ **Spot the signs.** Common symptoms of mental ill health might include an increase in unexplained absences or sick leave, poor performance or timekeeping, poor decision-making, lack of energy and uncommunicative or moody behaviour. Start by having a quiet word. You may discover that something at home is troubling them and you just need to show understanding and patience.

✓ **Keep talking.** If the employee is absent or returning from sickness absence try to:

- Keep in touch while they are away
- Hold a return to work interview on their first day back
- Check on how they are coping within themselves and monitor their behaviour and performance.

✓ **Focus on what you can control.** Mental health is complex and many of the factors causing mental health problems – such as crime, housing or bereavement – are out of your control. Things you can influence are:

- workload and work variety
- quality of working relationships
- employee confidence in being able to talk to you about their problems
- bullying
- employee involvement in decision-making.

✓ **Tackle the causes of stress.** The Health and Safety Executive have identified six common causes of stress at work. Employees may feel:

- overloaded by **demands** placed on them
- fed up by the lack of **control** they have over the work they do
- line managers fail to give them enough **support**

- they are not sure what their **role** is at work or what is expected of them
- very anxious and uncertain by the way **change** is being managed
- **relationships** at work are not based on trust and good behaviour.

✓ **Help employees to cope.** You do not necessarily need to be an expert or counsellor to manage mental health conditions. A good starting point is to manage physical and mental illness in a similar way. For example, helping an employee to manage their depression may include:

- specialist medical treatment following diagnosis of the illness
- self-help: eg therapeutic techniques to help manage anxiety
- managing interactions with colleagues
- avoiding stressors that may trigger symptoms of depression
- getting line management support/understanding
- working flexibly.

✓ **Keep informed about mental health:** Education around mental health issues will help to fight the misconceptions people have about mental illness. Try to keep up-to-date with the latest sources of help, such as:

- Occupational health. This is a specialist branch of medicine focusing on health in the workplace. Occupational health specialists can support organisations through advising on work-related illnesses and accidents, carrying out medicals for new starters and existing employees and monitoring the health of employees.
- Charities such as MIND, Shaw Trust, Rethink and Mindful Employer provide advice and support to help employers manage mental health at work and raise awareness of mental illnesses.

✓ **Make reasonable adjustments.** Under the Equality Act 2010 you may be expected to make reasonable adjustments to help an employee stay in work or get back to work. These might include:

- modifying their duties or the way their job is organised
- providing extra IT assistance – for example, providing a personal computer to enable an employee to work from home
- extra coaching or line management supervision.

Where can I get more information?

Acas Advisory Booklet Promoting mental health at work – to order call Acas Publications on 08702 429090 or order online at www.acas.org.uk/publications.

Acas runs charged training for small firms and has a national helpline – 08457 47 47 47 – which gives free advice on employment matters.

This information is intended to be a brief introduction to the subject. Legal information is provided for guidance only and should not be regarded as an authoritative statement of the law.

