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A guide for employers to promote mental health in the workplace



ENWHP

Mental Health Foundation



Healthy
Working
Lives

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Edinburgh office:
Woodburn House
Canaan Lane
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Glasgow office:
Elphinstone House
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Introduction

Mental health is important for business. The mental health and wellbeing of your employees is essential to the success of your organisation in the 21st century. But how should you as an employer start to address mental health issues in your workplace? And what activities and policies should you organise? The European Network of Workplace Health Promotion (ENWHP) has taken the initiative to promote mental health in workplaces through the European campaign **'Work. In tune with life.'**

This mental health promotion campaign raises awareness among both employers and employees. This guide explains why and how we can:

- » promote positive mental health in the workplace
- » understand and prevent issues that cause stress and mental health problems
- » support employees who develop mental health problems
- » develop effective policies to reintegrate and employ people who have experienced mental health problems.

The World Health Organization defines positive mental health as **'a state of wellbeing in which every individual realises his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to her or his community. Employees with good mental health will perform better in their work.'**

Equally, mental health problems can affect anyone, of any age and background, but with support most people can and do recover. By making changes to your workplace environment, and offering support to employees, you can reduce the duration and severity of mental health issues and enhance recovery.

In this resource and with the EU campaign **'Work. In tune with life.'** we are supporting you to promote mental health in your workplace. It includes an action plan, examples of good practice, a guide for employees, and key resources in your country. This brochure is designed to be used alongside the **'Work. In tune with life.'** promotional tools.

In Scotland there are specialist resources and organisations that can support you as an employer. The Scottish Centre for Healthy Working Lives supports a network of Advisers across Scotland who can help you to undertake mental health promotion, prevention, support and employability initiatives free of charge.

Comprehensive resource packs

- » **Scottish Centre for Healthy Working Lives,**
www.healthyworkinglives.com or call
0800 019 2211. They have an excellent
guide to develop a workplace policy
www.healthyworkinglives.com/uploads/
documents/8524-47679_MENTALHEALTH.pdf
and can guide you to relevant training courses
such as *Mentally Healthy Workplace* and
Scotland's Mental Health First Aid
- » **www.tacklementalhealth.org.uk**
Shaw Trust resource *Managing mental
health at work*
- » **www.mindfulemployer.net**
Resources by employers, for employers
- » **www.mentalhealth.org.uk**
The Mental Health Foundation have a wealth
of downloadable research, publications and
resources about workplace mental health
promotion, prevention and support
- » **www.shift.org.uk/employers**
Shift is a Department of Health initiative that
has a range of line manager tools and guides
- » **www.seemescotland.org**
'see me' is Scotland's national campaign to
end the stigma and discrimination of mental
ill health

Why is mental health important for a successful business?

There are many reasons why employers should prioritise mental health promotion in the workplace. The mental health of employees is an important health determinant. In today's global economy mental health is an important driver for successful business. More and more companies realise that commitment of employees is crucial for the success of the organisation.

The costs of work-related mental ill health

The economic business case for mental health is compelling. For example, UK studies show that common mental health problems such as stress, anxiety and depression account for 60 million sickness absence working days each year. For an employer, this loss of productivity is much greater than for most other health issues and much more significant than for industrial disputes, for example. Mental health promotion can reduce the costs of absenteeism and associated management time.

In recent decades, the increasingly global nature of our economies and the advances in workplace technology mean that the nature of work is changing rapidly. This affects the content, organisation and intensity of people's work, which increasingly requires more skills and competences in terms of innovation, communication and social intelligence. These rapid changes in the nature of work can be rewarding for employees. However, they can mean that employees may experience more pressure and demands upon their cognitive, social and psychological skills. Mental health is crucial, both for the formation of these skills and their effective use in the workplace.

However, across European countries and workplaces, poor mental health is significant and increasing. The workplace can provide a healthy culture and environment that is psychologically supportive to the workforce. It is a challenge to employers as well as to employees to make the workplace a healthy workplace; physically, mentally and socially!

Box 1. Facts and figures of the impact of mental health in workplaces

- » 1 in 4 European citizens will experience a mental health problem during their lifetime.
- » The World Health Organization estimates that by 2020 depression will become the second most important cause of disability in the world.
- » Total productivity costs of mental health disorders in EU-25 (including Norway, Iceland and Switzerland) are estimated to be €136.3 billion per year.
- » Across Europe the levels of absenteeism, unemployment and long-term disability claims due to work-related stress and mental health problems have been increasing. For example: 40% of all long-term disability benefit payments in England, Scotland and Wales are due to mental health problems.

Productivity and performance

Mental health promotion can also boost productivity and performance. A mentally positive environment can help to increase morale, teamwork and communication. It can reduce staff turnover and the associated costs of recruitment and training. A healthy workplace can help people to cope with change and difficult circumstances, which is particularly important in challenging economic conditions.

Background and business case

- » www.who.int/mental_health/policy/services/essentialpackage1v13/en/index.html
for WHO resource with overview of mental health and workplaces.
- » www.workingforhealth.gov.uk
UK Government business case, health-check and evidence-based approaches.
- » www.scmh.org.uk/pdfs/mental_health_at_work.pdf
The business case developed by The Sainsbury Centre for Mental Health
- » www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2009/02/16100540/0
Scottish Government, *It Pays to Look After Your Workforce – Employers*

Reputation

By developing mental health promotion programmes and policies, you can enhance the public reputation of your organisation. This can improve your business reputation among potential future recruits, and it may increase your chances of gaining public contracts. It can also improve your reputation among the wider public and customers as an organisation that demonstrates corporate social responsibility. A good organisational reputation will be associated with a healthy and stimulating workplace where personal development is part of the organisation's learning culture.

No health without mental health

There is good evidence that poor mental health and stress can lead to increases in a range of physical illnesses. These include coronary heart disease, stroke, and diabetes. This can happen directly by mental distress affecting physiological vulnerability, but also indirectly by increasing the dependence upon negative lifestyle factors such as smoking and alcohol consumption. These are major social and workplace issues but also mean that there is a compelling business case to act now.

Legal requirements and insurance requirements

Laws governing workplace stress and mental health can vary among countries. Organisations must be aware of these and abide by them.

There is no single piece of legislation covering stress and mental health problems at work. However, organisations and managers must abide by the following:

- » Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 – there is a duty to make sure employees are not made ill by their work. This Act covers risks to physical and mental health.
- » Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 – requires employers to assess the nature and scale of risks to physical and mental health in the workplace and to put adequate control measures in place.
- » The common law duty of care – which is implied into every employee’s contract of employment. This means that a failure to take reasonable care of an employee’s health could potentially constitute a breach of contract.

- » The Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (DDA) – The definition of ‘disability’ under the Act is very wide in scope and can cover people with long-term mental health problems. This will be the case if the ill health has lasted or is likely to last 12 months or more and if it has a substantial and adverse effect on the person’s ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities. The Act prohibits discrimination for any reason related to a person’s disability during employment and would thus cover processes such as recruitment, promotion, transfers, training and general treatment at work. Employers also have a duty under the Act to make reasonable adjustments to their working arrangements, practices and premises in order to assist a person with a disability to do their job.

What employers can do to promote positive mental health

The workplace can provide a mentally healthy environment that is supportive to all workers. The promotion of good mental health of employees is the best prevention of mental health problems. The advantage of an organisational approach is that all employees can benefit. It is important to make information about mental health available to all employees. A wide range of factors can promote positive mental health and help to develop resilience among employees:

- » Emotional wellbeing is central to our self-esteem, ability to learn, our attainment and productivity. Employers should encourage the development of a culture of support, where colleagues and managers can talk to each other in ways that are safe and supportive. When managers talk to staff they become more aware of the issues that might have an impact on their wellbeing.
- » Social support and networks are also important and employers can support this process by having workplace mentors for new staff, and encouraging the development of social groups and activities.
- » Managers have a very important role in promoting the mental health of employees. Employers can train their managers in how to have a supportive leadership style. A manager should attend to employees' needs, act as a mentor or coach, encourage creativity, motivate employees and communicate about goals.
- » Opportunities for creativity, contribution and learning enhance mental wellbeing. Many employers offer formal training opportunities for staff, but there is often opportunity for more informal learning such as learning a new skill, or volunteering in the community and using existing skills in a different setting. This can have the additional benefit of improving your public image.
- » Roles and expectations: it is important to be clear about what employees can expect from the organisation and what duties and tasks are expected of the employee. If employees perceive that their employer has failed to deliver on what is promised, this can result in reduced motivation, commitment and performance.
- » There is also a strong correlation between income, inequality and mental health. Employers can take steps to minimise this, within reason, for example by paying a decent wage to the lowest-paid employees. You can also take positive steps by ensuring that your employees have access to debt management advice.
- » Healthy choices and lifestyle activities, like having sufficient physical exercise, can protect mental health in the same way as it improves physical health. Employers should support health promotion activities in the workplace that aim to increase exercise, encourage relaxation, stimulate healthy eating and sensible alcohol use, which link directly to mental wellbeing.

Staff and employers will benefit from a greater awareness through information campaigns about positive mental health. One of the most important ways of developing positive mental health is through empowering staff. There is no simple formula for the right activities; it depends upon your staff, your resources and environment. However, if staff lead the consultation, selection and implementation of activities, this is the single most important step that you can take.

Practical resources

» www.who.int/mental_health/policy/services/essentialpackage1v13/en/index.html

for WHO resource with overview of mental health and workplaces

» www.bbc.co.uk/headroom

BBC campaign Headroom has multimedia resources to promote mental health and wellbeing

» www.mentalhealth.org.uk

Downloadable resources such as top 10 tips for wellbeing, and podcasts

» www.stuc.org.uk

Trades Union leaflets promoting positive mental health at work

» www.mhfestival.com

Mental health arts festival to promote mental health in Scotland

» www.stepsforstress.org

The Scottish Government's new positive mental health campaign

What employers can do to prevent stress and raise awareness of mental health problems

Many interventions that aim to prevent stress can also act to promote positive mental health. It is important to carry out regular organisational stress risk assessments. Preventive measures can focus upon adapting the workplace organisation, structure and environment to minimise the risk of undue levels of stress (see box 2).

Box 2 **Measures to prevent stress, and to promote mental health**

- » Flexible working arrangements
- » Promotion of work/life balance
- » Job and/or task design
- » Good dialogue and collaboration between managers and employees
- » Enhanced use of teamwork
- » Sufficient support to employees
- » Participation in decision-making by employees
- » Giving workers control over the nature of their work where possible
- » Appropriate levels of reward for efforts
- » Possibility of job/career progression
- » Prevention of bullying and discrimination

If someone does begin to develop a mental health problem, they may not recognise it as such or seek help at an early stage. It may not be recognised by colleagues or managers. People are often reluctant to seek help at an early stage which can result in mental health issues developing into more serious problems. Fortunately employers can take many positive steps:

- » Issues can often be identified and addressed through regular supervision, and through provision of workplace counselling and access to telephone support lines.
- » Training in mental health should be made available to staff and line managers. Training that covers positive mental health, mental health literacy and stress management are particularly valuable.

Practical resources

- » www.healthyworkinglives.com/advice/workplace-health-promotion/workplaceStress.aspx

Work Positive is a line management resource to support employers to tackle sources of stress in the workplace. This includes a range of downloadable tools for assessment and addressing stress

- » A number of leaflets can be downloaded from the UK Health and Safety Executive (HSE) website, including management standards to tackling stress including audio www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/stresspk.htm supported by a thorough stress management toolkit for managers www.hse.gov.uk/stress/mcit.htm

- » www.prima-ef.org
EU programme looking at workplace stress linked to violence including harassment, and bullying

What employers can do to support, retain and employ people with mental health problems

Just like physical illness, mental health problems can affect anyone, of any age and background. The most common forms of mental health problems are depression and anxiety. Many of the symptoms are similar to those that people experience when they are under considerable pressure; sleepless nights, loss or increased appetite, fatigue, irritability, worry, etc. When these symptoms have a longer duration with a severe and substantial impact on someone's everyday life functioning, they indicate a mental health problem. Most people recover from their mental health problems. A small proportion of people, 1% or 2% of the population, develop more severe and enduring mental health problems, such as schizophrenia, bipolar disorder or severe depression, which require more intensive, and often continuing, treatment and support during their lifetime. However, with support people can and do recover.

Offering early support can reduce the duration and severity of a mental health issue and enhance recovery. By addressing stigma through training and campaigns you increase the chances of people seeking help early. It also increases the chance of managers reacting well. In particularly stressful professions, routine counselling has proven to be effective in both identifying problems, and also in reducing the stigma around the issues.

If mental health problems persist you may need to assess risks for the person at work and any adjustments that may be needed. Remember that each person is different; see the person not the illness. Be positive and focus upon the person's contribution to the organisation and their recovery. It may be useful to draw upon the specialist support of services such as occupational health, and for a persistent mental health problem the person may want to involve an advocate or health supporter outside of the workplace. Employers should try and make reasonable adjustments where necessary. These will vary according to the needs of the person and the nature of the workplace but can include: changing or reducing workload, flexible working, phased return to work, flexibility to have breaks or to attend appointments.

If a person's mental health problem requires them to be absent from work, as an employer you should ask the person what they would like their colleagues to be told. This remains a sensitive area and many people worry about discussing this with colleagues when they return to work. To overcome some of this difficulty, keep in contact with the person in their absence as you would for someone with physical illness; whether short or long term, isolation can make it harder and more stressful to return to work. Have a policy where people can informally visit before returning to work.

Good employers need to consider not just current employees, but also those people applying to join your organisation who have experience of mental health problems. Employment for someone who has experienced mental health problems can be beneficial for the person and for the company. It is illegal to discriminate against applicants based upon previous or current mental health problems. Good employers can be proactive. There are a number of steps that you can take:

- » Education campaigns that protest against stigma have been developed across many European countries, and workplaces are an important setting. Employers can often access a wide range of resources to address stigma.
- » Be clear in job adverts that you are receptive to applicants that have experienced health or disability issues. Many people fear disclosure, so in application packs and interviews assure them that you will be confidential and supportive.
- » If an applicant has had a mental health problem that has resulted in sustained absence from employment, then consider accepting a personal or health reference instead of an employer reference.
- » You can also make links with your local employment centre, or supported employment agency. In many cases a wide range of assistance is available to employers to support the employment of people who have experienced mental health problems.

Practical resources

Stigma, discrimination and recovery

- » A range of multimedia materials to address mental health stigma can be obtained for the UK from www.time-to-change.org.uk and in Scotland from www.seemescotland.org.uk
- » Challenge discrimination with The UK Equality and Human Rights Commission www.equalityhumanrights.com or The Scottish Human Rights Commission www.scottishhumanrights.com
- » A deeper understanding of the relationship between work and recovery can be obtained through Scottish Recovery Network www.scottishrecovery.net or Voices of Experience, the Scottish national mental health service user-led organisation www.voxscotland.org.uk

Practical resources (cont.)

Supporting, retaining and employing people with mental health problems

- » <http://guidance.nice.org.uk/PH22>
NICE guidance 22: *Promoting mental wellbeing through productive and healthy working conditions: guidance for employers*
- » www.euse.org
European Union of supported employment, which has national members in most EU countries
- » www.tuc.org.uk/extras/mentalhealth.pdf
Employment advice for unions and workplaces
- » www.mentalhealth.org.uk/publications
What works for you? booklet about supporting colleagues which has been developed in collaboration with workplaces.
- » www.samh.org.uk/assets/files/273.pdf
Working it out – a guide to managing mental health in the workplace by SAMH

How to create a mentally healthy workplace – a plan of action in 7 steps

Step 1: Getting started; communication and consultation

It is important to have clear leadership and meaningful involvement in the development of a mental health programme. Organisational commitment to promoting the mental health of all employees, regardless of their role within the organisation, is crucial. Any programme should try to address the range of mental health issues and provide clear definitions, including:

- » promoting positive mental health in the workplace
- » understanding and preventing issues that cause stress and mental health problems
- » supporting employees who develop mental health problems
- » developing effective policies to reintegrate and employ people who have experienced mental health problems.

Mental health and wellbeing needs to be addressed at an organisational level. All elements of the organisation have a role to play in designing, implementing, monitoring and reviewing policies and practice. Ideally you should form a mental health and wellbeing working group with representation from senior management, employees, trades unions, human resources and occupational health.

When the mental health topic is placed on the agenda of the organisation, it is particularly important to be clear about what employees can expect. Be aware that all employees need to be informed about all the steps you take in the action plan. Employees should be involved in the decision-making process when dealing with stress and mental health problems. Employee involvement will lead to a sense of ownership of the programme, greater employee flexibility and commitment to measures and changes. The organisation can inform staff through a range of communication methods such as intranet, newsletters, team meetings and training sessions.

Step 2: Gathering evidence

It is important to consult with employees and managers to identify strengths and weaknesses in your organisation's approach to mental health and wellbeing. This is needed to inform your interventions. Stress risk assessments can help to inform these surveys but need to be supplemented by wider information on mental health promotion, retention and employment. Ideally you should undertake a survey with employees to understand their needs and ideas for a mental health programme. You should also carry out an organisational workplace assessment of policies, practices and structures that affect mental health and wellbeing:

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- » Employee survey: A survey or consultation with employees about opportunities for improving mental wellbeing, workplace factors that affect stress, and employee perceptions of retention and employment opportunities for people who have experienced mental health problems. This can be designed with employees and try to get a high response rate by promoting widely. This will give the findings more strength. If the feedback is not clear then discussions groups with staff can be used.
 - » Organisational assessment: A workplace assessment should be undertaken by senior management or authorised staff within the organisation. This should capture relevant organisational policies on health promotion, employment and discrimination. This can be done by using a questionnaire in the resource packs we have indicated. You can also organise meetings with middle managers and/or employees to discuss the current situation at work and the factors which lead to stress and potential mental health problems.

Box 3

Early signs of mental health distress at an organisational and individual level

Organisational level:

- » work not finished; less productivity; more overtime
- » lower quality of work (more errors)
- » less customer friendliness and poor services
- » increased sickness absence
- » poor teamwork and collaboration between departments

Individual level:

- » changes in a person's usual behaviour
- » poor performance
- » changes in emotional mood (tearfulness)
- » problems with colleagues
- » increased sickness absence including frequent short spells

The earlier you notice that an employee is experiencing mental health problems, the better for all concerned. Your early actions can help to prevent the employee becoming more unwell. Managers particularly should play a key role in identifying and addressing the barriers to normal working life which the employee might experience.

Step 3: Setting targets

To be able to assess the effect of your activities, the objectives and targets should be established. For example, targets could be:

- » to reduce levels of stress at work on specific topics by 10% in one year
- » to decrease the sickness absence percentage due to psychosocial reasons by 5% within two years
- » to reintegrate/employ an agreed number of employees with long-term absences or mental health problems within two years

You should discuss as a group what you see as valuable targets for a programme that are wider than this, such as awareness of programme, uptake of initiatives, sense of wellbeing.

Step 4: Developing concrete plans and measures

Formulate plans to meet the targets that have been set. Try to have a blend of long-term plans for the organisation, with achievable solutions that achieve quick wins, high impact and balance cost and benefits. It is important to involve the employees in these processes to ensure that measures fit with their needs.

Measures should be clearly formulated and targeted. You can target specific groups of employees (a department) or the whole organisation. For each activity consider who is taking responsibility, what is to be completed, where, when and how.

A wide range of initiatives have been outlined in this brochure to help to inform your plans. It is not desirable to be too specific but we would suggest that plans should involve the following components:

Suggested components for your mental health and wellbeing work plan

- » Information and awareness campaigns
- » Employee and manager training
- » Anti-bullying and discrimination actions
- » Tackling identified sources of workplace stress
- » Policies to support people if they develop mental health problems
- » Recruitment practices that do not discriminate against people with mental health problems

Step 5: Implementation of actions and measures

Commitment of both employees and management is important for effective implementation of mental health promotion programmes. All organisational levels should be involved and communication should be clear at all levels. When developing your plans you may find that other existing policies may cover some of your planned actions, for example bullying, stress management or recruitment policies. This is valuable since mental health programmes will have a greater chance of success if they are embedded within wider policies of the organisation.

However, it is essential to have a clear written mental health action plan and policy for your organisation. This allows you to see the whole range of issues in a single document and to plan for a coordinated response. It allows you to assess progress over time and across the range of mental health issues.

Step 6: Evaluating measures

Assess the effects of your actions and compare them with the target that has been set in the beginning. If there are differences between the results and the targets, determine where to apply changes that will lead to improvement. Evaluation measures should relate to the clear measurable targets that you set such as staff absence, but you may also want to evaluate other things. For example, employee awareness of the initiatives, people's involvement in activities, employee sense of wellbeing.

Step 7: Consolidating mental health activities in policy of the company

This action planning process should be mainstreamed and become part of the daily routine of the company. To ensure it is consistently part of the organisation agenda, the following things can be done:

- » Keep on giving attention to signals of stress
- » Have regular meetings with employees to discuss stress and mental health problems at work and have a clear timetable for improvements
- » Discuss workload and mental health in annual performance interviews
- » Involve mental health improvement plans in planning and control cycles
- » Incorporate mental health in the quality standards policy of the organisation
- » Encourage management to undertake relevant training and to show their interest in the mental health of the workers

The ProMenPol database and toolkit

www.mentalhealthpromotion.net – ProMenPol, a European Commission funded project, identified and gathered useful and practical approaches to the promotion and protection of mental health. The database and toolkit offer a structured selection of mental health promotion tools in three settings: schools, workplaces and older people's residences. At present it consists of a method of accessing the tools database, using a four-stage process as a basis for implementing mental health promotion in each of the three settings.

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Talk to the Healthy Working Lives experts **FREE** on:

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www.healthyworkinglives.com