MANAGING MENTAL HEALTH IN THE WORKPLACE

MODULE 7

What is mental health and why does it matter?

Poor mental health is one of the biggest issues in the workplace today, causing over 70 million working days to be lost each year[1]. This includes everything from the most commonly experienced symptoms of stress and anxiety, right through to more complex mental health conditions, such as depression, bipolar disorder and obsessive compulsive disorder.

As well as having a huge impact on individual employees, poor mental health has severe repercussions for employers – including increased staff turnover, sickness absence due to debilitating depression, burnout and exhaustion, decreased motivation and lost productivity. But while companies of all shapes and sizes increasingly understand the importance of good mental health, many simply don't feel confident handling and communicating these issues in the workplace.

This module looks at how to encourage good mental health – by safeguarding staff wellbeing, addressing problems before they become severe, and supporting staff when issues do emerge. This is not about becoming an expert in mental health; it's about spotting the signs that something might be wrong. It will signpost the right support and resources, and offer suggestions for putting strategies in place to support good mental health. All this will help empower managers to do the same.

By the end of this module you will:

✓ Understand why good mental health matters in the workplace

✓ Know the role that you and your managers can play in spotting and handling mental health issues at work

✓ Be aware of medium to long-term actions for improving mental health in the workplace and how to build awareness of them.

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Fast facts

MENTAL HEALTH IN THE UK:
The big picture

TODAY

9 out of **10** people with mental health problems experience stigma and discrimination

At least 1 in 4 people will experience some kind of mental health problem each year

Anxiety and depression is the most common mental problem

THE COST TO UK BUSINESSES

1 in **5** people take a day off work due to stress

In the last 6 years the number of working days lost to stress, depression and anxiety has **increased by** ~ **24%**

70 million working days are lost each year due to mental ill health, costing Britain annually **£70-100bn**.
Presenteeism can **double the cost.**

Around £££££££££
£1 in every £8 spent on long-term physical conditions is linked to **poor mental health and wellbeing**

Less than half of employees said they would feel able to talk openly with their line manager if they were suffering from stress

A quarter of people consider resigning due to stress

In a survey of UK adults,
56% said they **would not hire someone with depression** even if they were the best candidate for the job

THE GENDER DIVIDE

37% of men are feeling worried or low. Yet their wives, partners, other relatives and friends may have no idea there's a problem

Women are between **20 and 40% more likely than men** to develop a mental health problem

Since 1981, the proportion of male to female suicides has increased steadily with
4 in **5** suicides being male

Half of women with perinatal mental health problems are not identified or treated
costing the UK an estimated **£8.1bn**

AROUND THE COUNTRY

The UK has the fourth highest rate of antidepressant prescriptions in Europe at
50 m per year

Prevalence of mental illness in Northern Ireland is **25%** higher than in England

Aberystwyth and Coventry were rated as having the least happy employees

In Scotland, nearly **1 in 10** adults had two or more symptoms of depression or anxiety in 2012/3

The North East has the highest suicide rate in England while London had the lowest

People in Liverpool were rated as the most anxious with an anxiety score of nearly **30%**

Wolverhampton were lowest at around **10%**

Sources: NHS Information Centre for Health and Social Care | NICE Common mental health disorders | Time to Change | Mind | The King's Fund & Centre for Mental Health | 2014 CMO annual report: public mental health | Business in the Community 2014 | Daniel Freeman – Oxford University | Office for National Statistics | NHS figures 2014 | Conference Genie | Health and Safety Executive | CentreForum Atlas of Variation | Scottish Health Survey 2013 | Centre for Mental Health 2014, London | Action Mental Health Northern Ireland | Mind & Chartered Institute of Personnel Development 2011 | London School of Economics & Political Sciences |

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HOW TO PUT MENTAL HEALTH ON THE AGENDA

Good mental health should be a priority for any business, and implementing it needs to involve more than just the HR department. It's vital to get buy-in from senior leadership and make sure conversations about mental health and wellbeing happen at board level.

Make the business case

Senior leaders are understandably under increased pressure to cut costs and optimise return on investment, and may not immediately understand the business impact of poor mental health. Be prepared to make the business case and have figures to back this up – come prepared with figures on staff turnover and morale, and bring relevant feedback from exit interviews.

Set targets

We all work better if we have clear goals that we are working towards, and mental health in the workplace is no different. Identify the key drivers for mental health, and the key indicators; figure out how to measure these and what level the company should achieve; and ensure these are an integral part of your company's performance targets.

Choose your moment

Think about the best times to start a conversation with the board and get their buy-in. There are some important dates throughout the year which can help to get the conversation started, including the Mental Health Foundation's **Mental Health Awareness Week in May** and World Mental Health Day in October. However, don't feel you have to wait for one of these. There are also many internal milestones that can help to put mental health on the agenda like board meetings, staff surveys, staff absence reports. Think about the times in the year when your business is busiest and staff are under the most stress, so you can raise the issue ahead of time.

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Identify your board champion

It helps to enlist a board member as your mental health champion – someone who will raise the issue at the highest levels of the business. It may be they have experienced a mental health problem themselves, or they may simply be passionate about looking after staff. They can also help to lead by example, encouraging more junior employees to think about their mental wellbeing at work.

Break the taboo

Mental Health is still a taboo subject in the workplace. 67% of employees feel scared, embarrassed or unable to talk about mental health concerns with their employer[2]. To break this taboo and create an open and caring culture it's important to get your board on side and take a top down approach. If they are speaking out on the issue, perhaps even drawing on their own experience, then this attitude will trickle down to managers and then staff.

Expert view

Chris O'Sullivan, Mental Health Foundation

"Mental health is something we all have. Workplaces that challenge us, support and develop our sense of purpose, and support us when things are hard can play a massive role in protecting and building our mental health. A mentally healthy workplace can be built on the back of good basic line management relationships, clear HR policy and engagement of staff in decision making. Prevention is key - we need to enable everyone to flourish, those in distress to access help quickly, and those who have recovered from mental health problems to stay well and enjoy successful careers"

Take Five

When is your next opportunity to raise the issue of mental health with the board? Do you know when your next board meeting is? Is there a busy period at work coming up?

Did you know?

Good mental health is vital to business performance, because when staff feel happy and well cared for, they are more engaged, more motivated and more loyal. As many as a third of employees would consider leaving their job if they didn't feel looked after by their employer and a further 21% would be less motivated and productive[3].

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START WITH YOUR MANAGERS

Your line managers are absolutely pivotal. They are usually the ones responsible for dealing with mental health in the workforce day to day, but many can lack the confidence or experience to manage this alone.

Training and support - Help your managers to help your people. Consider investing in training to help them recognise the early signs of a mental health condition and put strategies in place to support staff that are affected. It's also important to follow up to make sure they have taken this training on board and understand how to apply this day-to-day. Make it clear that they are not expected to become experts in mental health or to handle problems alone – instead they are there to flag problems and signpost the support and resources available.

Many third parties offer training for managers to help them recognise, understand and deal with these issues. For example, Mental Health First Aid is a course developed by Mental Health First Aid England which teaches people how to identify, understand and help a person who may be developing a mental health problem. In the same way as we learn physical first aid, mental health first aid teaches you how to recognise those crucial warning signs of mental ill health.

For more information on Mental Health First Aid, **visit their website**.

Starting conversations - Many managers can find it difficult to talk about mental health issues with staff, often for fear of doing or saying the wrong thing. Talk to your managers about how to get the conversation started.

Every October for World Mental Health Day, Mental Health Foundation coordinates 'Tea and Talk', an initiative designed to create conversations on mental health in communities and workplaces. A Tea and Talk session is a great way to start a conversation on your workplace about what mental health means to the workforce, and what the organisation might do about it. **Find out more here.**

For more tips on communication, see module 3:
Communicating your wellbeing strategy.

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HAVE YOU SPOTTED THE SIGNS?

There are many reasons why mental health has become such a huge issue in the workplace today, but one factor is that many cases go unrecognised until they become severe. Whilst many employers are now primed to spot signs of physical illness, mental health problems can be more difficult to identify. Here are some common signs that someone may be struggling with their mental health at work.

Please tick

Emotional
Employees who are struggling with their mental health may seem irritable, sensitive to criticism, demonstrate an uncharacteristic loss of confidence or seem to lose their sense of humour.

Yes / No ☐ ☐

Cognitive
An employee may make more mistakes than usual, have problems making decisions, or not be able to concentrate. Look out for any sudden and unexplained drop in performance at work.

Yes / No ☐ ☐

Behavioural
This could include things like arriving late, not taking lunch breaks, taking unofficial time off, not joining in office banter, or not hitting deadlines, becoming more introvert or extroverted, generally acting out of character.

Yes / No ☐ ☐

Physical
Employees who are stressed sometimes exhibit physical symptoms such as a constant cold, being tired at work, looking like they haven't made an effort with their appearance, or rapid weight loss or gain.

Yes / No ☐ ☐

Business
At a business level, look out for increased absence or staff turnover. Have you noticed employees working longer hours or a general drop in motivation or productivity levels?

Yes / No ☐ ☐

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Yes

Spotting one or two of these symptoms does not always mean there is an underlying mental health issue, but you should consider checking on your employee's wellbeing or picking up with their manager - especially if you know they may be going through a difficult time inside or outside work.

No

If you haven't experienced any of these, you're doing a good job looking after the wellbeing of your staff at the moment. However, with mental health problems on the rise think about how to safeguard this for the future.

Expert view

Joy Reymond, Head of Vocational Rehabilitation Services, Unum

> Although understanding of mental health issues is growing, misconceptions still remain – especially in the workplace. Once thought of as something that happened to an unfortunate few, one in four people are now affected by mental health issues, and employers need to be able to spot the signs. If not, problems may only come to light later on when more serious interventions are necessary.

Addressing stigma and discrimination in the workplace is critical to ensuring that people can come forward and seek help. National anti-stigma programmes operate in England, Wales and Scotland. You can find resources and multimedia content from programmes local to you:

Time to Change Wales
Time to Change England
See Me Scotland

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WHAT NEXT?

Take Ten

An effective mental health and wellbeing strategy considers prevention, intervention and protection. You can find some ways businesses can tackle these three issues issues in the following pages, but before you read on, have a think about your own workplace. What do you already do to support good mental health, where can you improve this, and what else might you need to introduce?

Prevention

Safeguarding the mental health of your workforce

How do you already do this?

_____

_____

_____

How can this be improved?

_____

_____

_____

What else might you need to introduce?

_____

_____

_____

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Intervention
Stepping in before problems become more serious

How do you already do this?

_____

_____

_____

How can this be improved?

_____

_____

_____

What else might you need to introduce?

_____

_____

_____

Protection
Supporting staff if they need time off, or need help returning to the workplace

How do you already do this?

_____

_____

_____

How can this be improved?

_____

_____

_____

What else might you need to introduce?

_____

_____

_____

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Prevention

It's important to safeguard the mental health of your workforce by creating an open and caring culture that makes staff feel supported and looked after. Here are some practical ways to do this:

Culture

- Develop a Mental Health Policy – having a concrete policy reassures employees that their company cares about their wellbeing.
- Create a culture of openness and awareness by encouraging people to talk about mental health.

Working practices

- Encourage staff to take regular breaks away from their desks and get out of the office to reduce stress.
- Introduce a power-down hour, where everyone steps away from their email.
- Review job descriptions to make sure these set out clear and realistic expectations of staff. If not, this might be contributing to, or even causing, mental distress amongst your employees.
- Think about how success is measured and people are rewarded.

Communication

- Use staff newsletters, posters in communal areas, and other internal communications to raise awareness of mental health.
- Introduce discussion about mental health at staff meetings – use them as opportunities to check in with staff about how they are feeling or how they would rate their stress levels and why.
- Conduct regular staff surveys to take a temperature check on wellbeing and feedback results and progress to staff.

Managers

- Train up management – if employees know their boss is clued up in mental. health matters, they may feel more comfortable in coming forward to discuss any problems they may have at work, or even at home.
- Make sure line managers spend time with staff and get to know them – this makes it easier to spot when they're struggling or behaving uncharacteristically at work.

Mental Health Foundation worked with Royal Mail Group to develop a suite of five short training videos on mental health and wellbeing for staff. The company wanted a way to reach staff across the country with bite-sized, accessible but evidence based content that would support the wider 'Feeling First Class' work on mental wellbeing across the company. Working with staff and experts, the film series has been viewed by over 7,000 managers. The films are available to view on You Tube

For more tips on building trust, see module 4: **5 ways to improve motivation and trust**

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Intervention

When problems do occur, taking simple steps to improve mental health can prevent them from developing into something more serious. Here are some practical ways to do this:

Internal support

- Provide accessible guidance on how to manage stress. Understand that problems with stress arise when there is an imbalance between what is expected of someone and their beliefs about whether they can meet those demands
- Provide guidance and support to help employees to become more resilient and more able to positively adapt to change in the workplace
- Create a peer-to-peer support system so people can talk with colleagues of the same level about their concerns
- Consider holding regular informal 'drop-in' sessions with someone from HR, or even a third party, to encourage people to talk through any issues they may be experiencing
- Provide training and resources for line managers to empower them to spot the signs of mental health. Make sure you follow up with them to make sure they have taken this on board and understand how this applies to their own role .

Outside help

- Check that you have an Employee Assistance Programme in place to provide additional support for staff if they're having difficulties inside or outside the workplace – these can offer a range of services from counselling through to legal advice
- Seek the advice of your health partners. Your Employee Assistance Programme will have plenty of resources available to help your managers become more comfortable with the issues relating to mental health

Communication

- Make sure staff know what support is available through your intranet or employee handbook and find opportunities throughout the year to remind people what is available and how to access it
- Keep in touch with staff so they don't disengage from the workplace and they understand you are available to provide support

Working practices

- Allow flexible working and accommodations for all staff to work from home – during a period of stress or worry, coming in to the office could aggravate illness in certain cases. Give them the option to work from home if they need to be in more relaxed surroundings.

Many firms are creating peer-to-peer support networks to help staff talk through problems when they arise. When Deloitte partner John Binns went off sick with acute depression the company knew something had to be done to protect the workforce. It has now introduced Mental Health Champions throughout the business who are on hand for support with advice and informal chats. Ernest & Young has introduced a similar mental health buddy system so that employees can discuss issues openly with a peer before approaching a line manager.

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Protection

In the most serious cases, staff may need professional support or an extended period of time off work. Here are some ways you can support the recovery process:

Benefits package

- Make sure your employee benefits package provides support for mental health. Income Protection, for example, provides a regular replacement income if an employee is unable to work due to illness for more than six months. It may also come with vocational rehabilitation services to support them if they are able to return to work. Your Income Protection provider may also offer training and education programmes designed to help managers address mental health problems in the workplace.

Outside help

- Make use of Occupational Health services like the government's Fit To Work service and professional third parties and charities to address health problems and make any necessary adjustments in the workplace.

Return to work plan

- Develop a tailored and phased return to work plan to help employees ease back into the workplace when they are ready – this may mean starting them on a few hours a week and build their time up slowly, or making adjustments to their role to reduce the pressure they are under.

Communication

- Hold consistent return to work interviews – these ensure the employee hasn't come back too early and can help you get to the root of a problem, as well as being an effective tool of absence management.
- Continue to check-in with employees regularly – often support can drop off once they are settled back in the workplace, but it is important to have an ongoing, and meaningful dialogue to prevent problems from recurring.

Helen was a senior medical underwriter with a small consultancy firm when depression made it difficult to cope at work and left her no option but to take time off. Her employer had previously taken out Group Income Protection and when their claim for Helen was accepted her case was referred to Unum's rehabilitation services to see how they could support her. A vocational rehabilitation consultant discussed a manageable return to work plan with Helen and her employer. She was also referred for some sessions of Cognitive Behavioural Therapy to help build up her resilience and develop coping strategies. With this support Helen gradually took control and increased her working hours. She is now back working normally, socialising with friends, and has regained her confidence.

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FUTUREPROOFING YOUR BUSINESS

It's important to take action on mental health now. The World Health Organisation predicts that depression will be the world's most common illness by 2030 and suggests the global burden of the condition will be greater than for illnesses such as diabetes, heart disease and cancer.

To tackle this and avoid the detrimental impact poor mental has on both employees and businesses, employers must take action to prevent mental health issues occurring, as well as providing support when they do. The reward for getting this right is a happier, healthier workforce, and a more successful, high-performing business.

Expert view

Jane Cattermole, Minding Your Business

" We can't ignore the fact that unreported, unmanaged stress increases the prevalence of mental health issues at all levels. UK workers are struggling with increased workloads, relationships with managers and changes they have little or no control over. Stigma and lack of awareness prevent staff from speaking out and asking for help, or from receiving it in a timely fashion. It is now imperative that all organisations, across all sectors take a pro-active approach to managing this. "

IN SUMMARY

Think about

Once you've decided what medium to long-term actions you should introduce in your workplace, you need to think about how you can implement them.

Consider what you could do:

- **Today** (e.g. Look for signs of poor mental health in your workplace and think about any gaps in the support on offer).
- **Tomorrow** (e.g. schedule meetings with managers to discuss what training or support they need in handling mental health issues).
- **Next week** (e.g. compile your insights to inform future decisions, identify new policies/policy changes that could have an impact on mental health in your organisation, and put this on the agenda for your next board meeting).

If you don't remember anything else, remember:

✓ Good mental health is vital to business performance, because when staff feel happy and well cared for, they are more engaged, more motivated and more loyal.

✓ Line managers need ongoing training and support to help handle mental health issues day to day.

✓ An effective mental health strategy considers prevention, intervention and protection.

✓ Employee benefits are a good way to provide tangible support for staff struggling with their mental health.

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Don't forget to update your CPD record after completing this module!

You can use all of the learning from this module to contribute to your CPD. Just download and complete our **easy-to-use template** and keep it with your CPD records.

Other modules in this series include:

- 5 ways to improve workplace wellbeing
- Top tips to attract and retain the best people
- Communicating your wellbeing strategy
- 5 ways to improve motivation and trust
- 10 ways to win over your Finance Director
- Developing an effective wellbeing strategy

Read more

All references and sources included in this module can be found here and are available in **Your Ultimate Wellbeing Toolkit.**

References

1 UK Chief Medical Officer, 2013

2 Time to Change, 2011

3 Time to Change, 2011

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Think about

Use this page to reflect on the following:
- Immediate actions you could take.
- Things you could do as an ongoing commitment to workplace good mental health.
- Conversations you might have with a colleague about workplace good mental health.
- The kind of things you would like to see in the workplace to support good mental health.

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Further reading

Professional Services
Be Mindful Online
http://bemindful.co.uk/ UK's only evidence based online mindfulness course, supported by Mental Health Foundation

How To Guides on Mental Health
http://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/howto

Fundamental Facts on Mental Health
http://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/facts

Blog: Benefits of Good Line Management
https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/blog/benefits-great-line-management-and-good-mental-health-workplace

Blog: First Class Mental Health – Royal Mail Group Case Study
https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/blog/first-class-mental-health

Scottish Centre for Healthy Working Lives
http://www.healthyworkinglives.com/advice/workplace-health-promotion/mental-health

Resources for HR
http://www.hrzone.com/perform/people/support-not-stigma-managing-mental-health-issues-in-the-workplace
For tips on how to manage mental health issues at work

http://blog.unum.co.uk/news-and-views/top-10-tips-embracing-mindful-workplace/
Ideas for how to bring mindfulness into the workplace

http://blog.unum.co.uk/news-and-views/3-reasons-why-mental-health-should-be-on-an-employers-radar/
Understanding why it's important for employers to understand mental health

http://www.unum.co.uk/stress-work
A simple guide to stress at work

http://blog.unum.co.uk/news-and-views/employers-dare-to-take-the-stress-test-infographic/
Take the stress test to get an idea of how this might be impacting your organisation

Resources to share with your managers
http://blog.unum.co.uk/news-and-views/stress-awareness-top-tips-for-line-managers-part-1/
Tips for stress awareness and management

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http://realbusiness.co.uk/article/25609-how-to-manage-mental-health-issues-in-the-workplace
How to manage mental health issues in the workplace

http://www.retailgazette.co.uk/blog/2014/01/23122-how-to-beat-blue-monday
Guidance on using Blue Monday in January for initiating conversations around mental health

Third party support
Health and Safety Executive management standards for stress are highly regarded - **http://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/standards/**

Health and Safety Executive also provides tools and support for managers - **http://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/mcit.htm**

NICE are the gold standard for evidence in health and have produced guidance for employers on how to promote mental wellbeing at work.
https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ph22

Public Health England and the NHS promote the Workplace Wellbeing Charter **http://www.wellbeingcharter.org.uk/index.php**

Time to Change, companies can sign up for more help and guidance
http://www.time-to-change.org.uk

Business in the Community's workplace guide **http://www.bitc.org.uk/sites/default/files/booklet_mh_09-14_final_version.pdf**

MIND, the mental health charity, have mental health at work resources
http://www.mind.org.uk/for-business/mental-health-at-work/

As Fit for Work rolls out this will be especially helpful for smaller employers who don't have occupational health support - **http://fitforwork.org**

Chapter ten of the 2013 Chief Medical Officer report has loads of statistics on mental health and work that can be helpful for building the business case with the board **https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/413196/CMO_web_doc.pdf**

Minding Your Business specialises in delivering services to those businesses who want to take a preventative, rather than reactive, approach to mental health issues in the workplace **www.esrasurrey.co.uk/busines/**

Mental Health First Aid is an educational course which teaches people how to identify, understand and help a person who may be developing a mental health issue **http://mhfaengland.org/**

Affinity Health at Work specialises in improving organisational performance through enhancing workplace health, wellbeing, engagement and leadership **http://www.affinityhealthatwork.co.uk/**

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Unum is an employee benefits provider with more than 40 years' experience in the UK.

Unum helps employers protect their workers by providing employee benefits. These help to prevent their workforce becoming ill, allow them to step in at the first sign of illness and provide financial protection if they need it. As part of this, Unum now also offers workplace dental cover.

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The Mental Health Foundation is the UK's charity for everyone's mental health. Focused on getting evidence based answers out to the public, employers and decision makers – our mission is to help people understand, protect and sustain their mental health. We have been at the forefront of workplace mental health for over a decade, and offer a range of products, services and partnership opportunities to employers.

@mentalhealth   **mentalhealth.org.uk**

Unum are partnering with the Mental Health Foundation to tackle the stigma of mental health in the workplace and call on business leaders to safeguard the mental health of their employees at every stage - from prevention, through to early intervention and supporting a positive return to work.