

MENTAL HEALTH & WELLBEING



Mental ill health and stress are associated with many of the leading causes of disease and disability in our society. Promoting and protecting the mental wellbeing of the workforce is important for individuals' physical health, social wellbeing and productivity.

Many factors in the workplace influence the mental wellbeing of individual employees, particular departments or organisations as a whole. Understanding and addressing the factors which affect people's mental wellbeing at work have a wide range of benefits, both for individuals and the organisation.

Mental wellbeing in the workplace is relevant to all employees and everyone can contribute to improved mental wellbeing at work. Addressing workplace mental wellbeing can help strengthen the positive, protective factors of employment, reduce risk factors for mental ill health and improve general health. It can also help promote the employment of people who have experienced mental health problems, and support them once they are at work

This workplace mental wellbeing policy covers the following aspects of mental health and wellbeing:

- Promotion of mental wellbeing
- Promoting the mental wellbeing of all staff through:
 - providing information and raising awareness about mental wellbeing
 - providing opportunities for employees to look after their mental wellbeing
 - promoting policies and practices that promote wellbeing.

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Management skills

Developing skills for managers and supervisors to:

- promote the mental wellbeing of employees
- deal with issues around mental health and stress effectively.

Support Providing support to employees through:

- providing a work environment that promotes and supports mental wellbeing for all employees
- offering assistance, advice and support to people who experience a mental health problem while in employment
- support for staff returning to work after a period of absence due to mental health problems.

Employment Helping people get back to work after a period of absence due to mental illness through:

- recruitment practices
- making reasonable adjustments
- retaining staff who develop a mental health problem

Mental health problems and stress can affect anyone, regardless of their position in the organisation. This policy applies equally to all employees.

The implementation of this policy will also be supported by other health and safety policies, eg, sickness absence, alcohol, drug and substance abuse, and bullying and harassment.

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The aim of the policy is to create a workplace environment that promotes the mental wellbeing of all employees.

Objectives

To tackle workplace factors that may negatively affect mental wellbeing, and to develop management skills to promote mental wellbeing and manage mental health problems effectively.

As an employer we aim to create and promote a workplace environment that supports and promotes the mental wellbeing of all employees. We acknowledge that certain working conditions and practices can negatively affect employees' mental wellbeing, including aspects of work organisation and management, and environmental and social conditions that have the potential for psychological as well as physical harm.

Policy actions:

- Give employees information on and increase their awareness of mental wellbeing.
- Provide opportunities for employees to look after their mental wellbeing, for example through physical activity, stress-buster activities and social events.
- Offer employees flexible working arrangements that promote their mental wellbeing.
- Give all staff the opportunity to influence how they do their jobs, scope for varying their working conditions as far as possible, and opportunities to develop and fully utilise their skills.
- Set employees realistic targets that do not require them to work unreasonable hours.
- Ensure all staff have clearly defined job descriptions, objectives and responsibilities and provide them with good management support, appropriate training and adequate resources to do their job.

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- Manage conflict effectively and ensure the workplace is free from bullying and harassment, discrimination and racism.
- Establish good two-way communication to ensure staff involvement, particularly during periods of organisational change.

To develop a culture based on trust, support and mutual respect within the workplace. As an employer we aim to create and promote a culture where employees are able to talk openly about their job and mental health problems and to report difficulties without fear of discrimination or reprisal.

Policy actions:

- Give non-judgemental and proactive support to individual staff who experience mental health problems.
- Deal sympathetically with staff suffering from mental health problems due to circumstances outside the workplace, and who consequently find it difficult to do their jobs properly.
- Give new employees a comprehensive induction programme providing an understanding of the organisation, the established policies and procedures, and the role they are expected to carry out.

To provide support and assistance for employees experiencing mental health difficulties.

Policy actions:

- Ensure individuals suffering from mental health problems are treated fairly and consistently and are not made to feel guilty about their problems.

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- Encourage staff to consult the occupational health department (if there is one), their own GP, or a counsellor of their choice.
- Investigate the contribution of working conditions and other organisational factors to mental ill health and remedy this where possible.
- In cases of long-term sickness absence, put in place, where possible, a graduated return to work.
- Make every effort to identify suitable alternative employment, in full discussion with the employee, where a return to the same job is not possible due to identified risks or other factors.
- Treat all matters relating to individual employees and their mental health problems in the strictest confidence and share on a 'need to know' basis only with consent from the individual concerned.

To positively encourage the employment of people who have experienced mental health problems by providing fair and non-discriminatory recruitment and selection procedures.

As an employer we recognise that people who have or have had mental health problems may have experienced discrimination in recruitment and selection procedures. This may discourage them from seeking employment. While some people will acknowledge their experience of mental health issues openly, others may fear that stigma will jeopardise their chances of getting a job. Given appropriate support, the vast majority of people who have experienced mental health problems continue to work successfully, as do many with ongoing issues

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Policy actions:

- Show a positive and enabling attitude to employees and job applicants with mental health issues. This includes having positive statements in recruitment literature.
- Ensure that all staff involved in recruitment and selection are briefed on mental health issues and the Disability Discrimination Act, and are trained in appropriate interview skills.
- Make it clear, in any recruitment or occupational health check undertaken, that people who have experienced mental health issues will not be discriminated against and that disclosure of a mental health problem will enable both employee and employer to assess and provide the right level of support or adjustment.
- Do not make assumptions that a person with a mental health problem will be more vulnerable to workplace stress or take more time off than any other employee or job applicant.
- Ensure all line managers have information and training about managing mental health in the workplace.

To recognise that workplace stress is a health and safety issue, and acknowledge the importance of identifying and reducing workplace stressors.

Policy actions:

- Identify all workplace stressors and conduct risk assessments to eliminate stress or control the risks from stress. These risk assessments will be regularly reviewed.
- Consult with trade union safety representatives on all proposed action relating to the prevention of workplace stress.
- Provide training in good management practices, including those related to health and safety and stress management.

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- Provide confidential counselling for staff affected by stress caused by either work or external factors.
- Provide adequate resources to enable managers to implement the organisation's agreed workplace mental wellbeing policy.

Responsibilities

Everyone has a responsibility to contribute to making the workplace mental wellbeing policy effective.

Managers have a responsibility to:

- Monitor the workplace, identify hazards and risks and take steps to eliminate or reduce these as far as is reasonably practicable.
- Ensure good communication between management and staff, particularly where there are organisational and procedural changes.
- Assist and support employees who are known to have mental health problems or are experiencing stress outside work – for example due to bereavement or separation.
- Ensure staff are provided with the resources and training required to carry out their job.
- Monitor workloads to ensure that people are not overloaded. • Monitor working hours and overtime to ensure that staff are not overworking, and monitor holidays to ensure that staff are taking their full entitlement.
- Ensure staff are provided with meaningful developmental opportunities.
- In addition, senior management will ensure that staff performing a management or supervisory function have sufficient competence to discharge that function in a manner consistent with the maintenance of mental health in the workplace.

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Human resources staff have a responsibility to:

- Organise training and awareness courses on workplace mental wellbeing in conjunction with suitable experts.
- Provide advice and support to employees and managers in relation to this policy.
- Monitor and report on levels of sickness absence which relate to mental health problems including stress-related illness (in conjunction with the occupational health service and departmental managers).

Employees have a responsibility to:

- Raise issues of concern and seek help from their safety representative, line manager, human resources or occupational health department, or use the Employee Assistance Programme if one is provided.
- Accept opportunities for counselling when recommended.

Occupational health and safety staff have a responsibility to:

- Provide specialist advice and awareness training on mental wellbeing.
- Train and support managers in implementing stress risk assessments.
- Support individuals who have been off sick with mental health and stress problems, and advise them and their management on a planned return to work.
- Refer individuals to workplace counsellors or specialist agencies as required.
- Monitor and review the effectiveness of measures to promote mental wellbeing.
- Inform the employer and the health and safety committee of any changes and developments in the field of stress at work.

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Safety representatives must be:

- meaningfully consulted on any changes to work practices or work design that could precipitate stress
- able to consult with members on the issue of stress, including conducting workplace surveys • involved in the risk assessment process
- allowed access to collective and anonymous data from human resources
- provided with paid time away from normal duties to attend trade union training relating to workplace stress
- able to conduct joint inspections of the workplace at least once every three months, to ensure that environmental stressors are properly controlled.

Review and monitoring

The human resources department (or an individual as appropriate) will be responsible for reviewing the workplace mental wellbeing policy at a regular interval, at minimum annually, and for monitoring how effectively the policy meets its aims and objectives.

Indicators to measure effectiveness could include:

- working hours and patterns
- accidents at work
- staff complaints
- staff sickness levels
- staff turnover
- use of occupational health or counselling services
- the employee survey
- early retirement through ill health
- exit interviews.

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