

A young man with short brown hair, wearing a blue work shirt, is smiling and looking towards the camera. He is in a workshop or factory setting, with various tools and equipment visible in the background. The lighting is bright and even.

Skills
Development
Scotland

Mental wellbeing - support for apprentices

WELCOME

We all want to live happy lives with few worries and feeling calm and upbeat most of the time. But life is full of challenges and difficulties with mental health are common and affect many people at different stages of life. For some, these are brief episodes of difficulty while others can experience ongoing difficulties with their mental health for prolonged periods. Difficulties with our mental wellbeing can be caused by a wide variety of things such as:

- Difficult past events in our life, especially traumatic events.
- Difficult things going on in life in the present such as money worries, relationship problems or housing problems.
- Some people may be at more risk of difficulties with their mental health due to they way their brain, mind and body work, sometimes for genetic reasons.

Within your workplace or training/learning environment, it is likely that at any given time a significant number of people will be struggling with their mental wellbeing. As an employer or training provider, there is lots you can do both to create a culture of positive wellbeing and to support people who are experiencing difficulties with their mental wellbeing.

The most common difficulties with mental health are those which affect our emotions and are often referred to as emotional wellbeing. You are likely familiar with ideas such as depression, or anxiety where people can experience symptoms such as profound sadness, lack of energy or unsettling anxiety and agitation. Most of the guidance in this resource is aimed at these types of difficulties. Some people may also experience very significant difficulties with their mental wellbeing. This may include feelings of sadness or anxiety going on for a long time, or which are very overwhelming. Some people may experience thoughts of suicide. For other people, they may have experiences where their sense of reality may be affected. For example, they may hear voices or experience thoughts and beliefs which are not real. If you are concerned an employee/apprentice may be having these types of experiences, it is important to signpost them to help from a GP or reputable support organisations as soon as possible. Links to support are available at the end of this guide.

This resource aims to support you to:

- Create a positive culture where mental wellbeing is supported.
- Have clear plans and procedures to support people who are struggling with their mental wellbeing.
- Support staff who you are concerned may be experiencing suicidal or self-harming thoughts.

A companion resource is available for apprentices and will be a good first place to guide people to if you are worried about their mental health.

What do we mean by mental health?

Mental health and wellbeing, and poor mental wellbeing covers a wide range of areas and it is helpful to have clear definitions of these:

Mental Health

We all have mental health, just as we all have physical health.

Our mental health can span from positive wellbeing to periods where our life and emotions feel very challenging, and even through to experiences of very significant poor wellbeing.

Mental Wellbeing

Mental wellbeing is the ability to engage with day to day life to have a good life and cope with stresses without them becoming overwhelming. It means we can work productively and have positive relationships.

Poor Mental Health

Poor mental health exists when we experience times where we are unable to live life as we would wish, cope with day to day pressures of life, or work productively. We may feel our relationships and our contributions to our community are impaired.

Mental Health Problems

When the experiences of poor mental health goes on for some time, or are very severe, this is often considered to be a significant problem. Sometimes this may be diagnosed as formal condition such as depression or clinical anxiety. Some people find these medical diagnoses helpful while some others find them unhelpful and feel these experiences should be seen as part of the human experience.

Common Mental Health Problems

Many experiences of poor mental wellbeing are common such feelings of depression and anxiety. About one in four people will have these types of experiences every year. While they are common, it should not be assumed they are not serious. For some people these experiences may be extremely distressing and debilitating.

Severe Mental Health Problems

Some people have experiences that are very different to normal experience and which can be frightening and debilitating. Conditions such as schizophrenia and bipolar disorder are less common than areas like depression and anxiety but can cause people to have substantial difficulties in life. People with these conditions will often need extensive support in their recovery to good mental health.

Work-Related Stress

Work-related stress is caused by excessive pressure or other types of demand created by the work environment. It is a significant cause of poor mental health and wellbeing. Work related stress has a strong impact on sickness absence, staff turnover, quality of work and safety. Stress over time can contribute to the development of significant levels of anxiety, depression and sometimes other mental health problems.

Creating a positive mental wellbeing culture

The World Health Organisation define a healthy working environment as:

“one in which workers and managers collaborate to use a continual improvement process to protect and promote the health, safety and well-being of all workers and the sustainability of the workplace by considering the following, based on identified needs:

- health and safety concerns in the physical work environment
- health, safety and well-being concerns in the psychosocial work environment, including organisation of work and workplace culture
- personal health resources in the workplace
- ways of participating in the community to improve the health of workers, their families and other members of the community”.

Supporting good mental health at work is now seen as a key aspect of an employer’s health and safety duties, and of course most employers genuinely care about their staff wellbeing and want them to flourish as people and be able to come to work at their best. There are many areas of mental wellbeing that are not in the direct control of employers or training providers. There is however a huge amount that can be done to ensure that the workplace does not create or worsen someone’s mental health difficulties, and that can support a culture of positive mental wellbeing amongst all employees. So, what can you do proactively as an employer or training provider?



Conditions

- Promote healthy working conditions and work life balance.
- A culture should be established where it is expected that people will find balance between work and non-work time. There should be explicit messages about the importance of downtime and rest away from work. Other wellbeing measures are unlikely to have an impact if people are feeling overwhelmed by work or feeling they have no choice but to work very long hours.
- Ensure all staff are clear on roles and responsibilities.
- Ensure all staff have clear priorities and can speak up freely if they are concerned about their workload.
- This may be particularly important for apprentices who are having to balance both work and studying for a qualification. Creating explicit plans for priorities that allow them to complete this in manageable ways will make a big difference to wellbeing.
- Encourage a culture where there are regular discussions about work-life balance and how people are experiencing stress at work.

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Culture

- Create a culture where discussing mental wellbeing is normal and open.
- While much progress has been made in society about being open regarding mental health difficulties, many people still find it very hard to acknowledge that they may be struggling with their mental health. You can create a culture where senior and front-line managers regularly discuss mental health and demonstrate values and actions that mental health will be supported openly and compassionately.
- Discuss the importance of mental wellbeing regularly in in-house communications. Discuss practical strategies in the organisation for supporting wellbeing.
- Encourage managers to incorporate discussions about workload and stress into meetings with clear actions flowing from these to improve arising issues.
- Communicate that mental health difficulties will be treated with the same support and kindness as difficulties with physical health.
- Educate managers about mental health conditions and signs to look out for.
- Support managers to have simple, caring conversations where they are concerned about someone's wellbeing.

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Assistance

- Provide an Employee Assistance Programme (EAP)
- EAPs can be a great way to add a layer of quick and quality support to employees. Most EAPs allow employees to access support such as counselling quickly and confidentially and it can be a great way to communicate your willingness to support staff and both provide practical support and contribute to the overall message of wellbeing.

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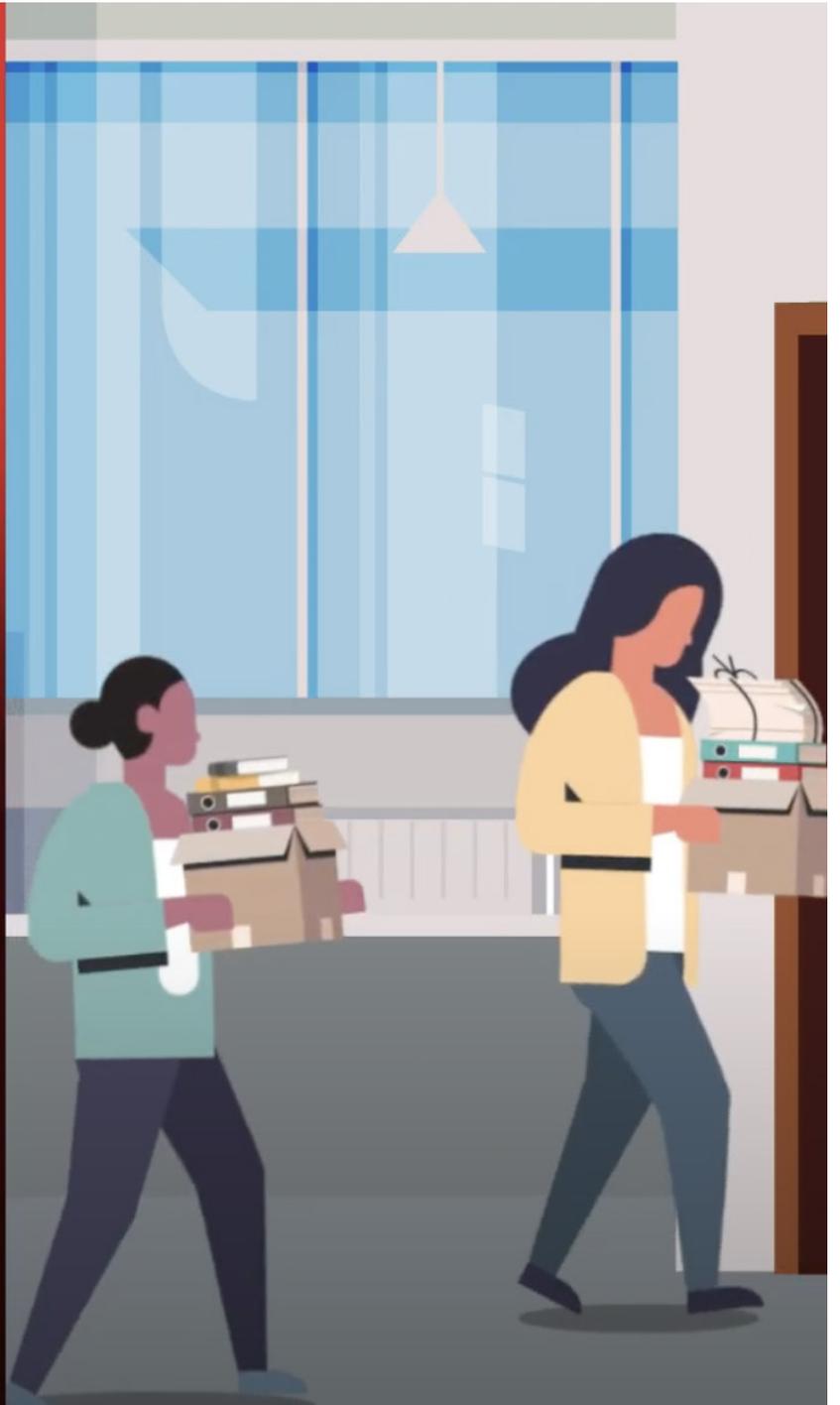
Support people to access external wellbeing support

- As an employer you can help, but you can't do everything if someone is struggling with their mental health.
- It is important to have a culture and processes where people can access other support easily without feeling it is going to cause problems at work.
- This could mean things like ensuring work or study is arranged so that people can attend GP or counselling appointments easily.

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Challenging stigma

- Attitudes to mental health have improved dramatically in recent years, but there remain some attitudes that can be judgemental, or even deliberately unkind about mental health difficulties. Some workplace cultures can develop where mental health issues are mocked or judged. This can sometimes be viewed as harmless jokes or banter. The reality is that this can strongly contribute to people not feeling able to ask for help and to feel worse about their experiences.
- Senior leaders should communicate a strong message that you are an organisation where mental health difficulties are treated with kindness and compassion.
- Ensure leaders are clear that judgemental and derogatory language or behaviours about mental health must not be tolerated.
- You can see a short video about the impact of stigma in the workplace on the next page:



Providing support with mental wellbeing

When you become aware that someone in your organisation has a difficulty with their mental wellbeing, it is important that you provide support. The areas outlined above will go a long way to supporting people who experience mental health difficulties in your organisation. Creating a culture where people feel confident that they can have compassionate, supportive conversations is key to this. There will be times however where you will also need to be more structured in your approach in order to ensure that your organisation is fulfilling its role, and its legal duties.

Fulfilling duties to your organisation and under the Equality Act 2010

As well as a desire to support wellbeing, you also of course will have responsibility to ensure that people are attending work or training, that the required work is completed to an acceptable standard and that people are working safely. You will also have responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010 to ensure that people who are experiencing mental health difficulties are not discriminated against at work. The core responsibilities associated with this are:

- Employers must ensure they do not discriminate against people due to mental health difficulties.
- If someone has a mental health difficulty and it may affect their work, employers must attempt to see if they can reduce the impact of a person's health condition on their ability to work, and to ensure they are getting the right support at work. Often, simple workplace changes can allow people with mental health conditions to continue working productively.
- These are known as “reasonable adjustments” and an employer has a duty to consider them if they know a person is experiencing a mental health difficulty.
- ‘Reasonable’ means an adjustment that is effective for the employee without being too disruptive, costly, or impractical for the employer to provide.
- Whilst many people with mental health conditions might not consider themselves to be disabled, their condition might be considered a disability under the Equality Act 2010 if it has a substantial impact on their day-to-day life over a long period.
- Whether the Equality Act applies or not, it is still good practice for employers to make reasonable adjustments to support staff who need it.

Creating a Wellbeing Action Plan

If an apprentice is experiencing difficulties with their mental health, it can be very helpful to create a detailed plan about what they need from you, and what you are reasonably able to provide in support. A Wellbeing Action Plan (WAP) helps to set out clearly how any difficulties with mental health are affecting work and what the person and you as their employer and/or training provider can do to help with this. This both provides support and helps to be clear in writing that you are doing everything possible to support the person under your duties arising from the Equality Act. A WAP should cover areas including:

- approaches the person will take and behaviours they can adopt to support their mental wellbeing
- early warning signs of poor mental health that their manager or supervisor can look out for
- any workplace triggers for poor mental health or stress
- potential impact of poor mental health on performance, if any
- what support the person needs from their line manager
- actions and positive steps the person and the manager will take if they are experiencing stress or poor mental health
- an agreed time to review the WAP and any support measures that have been put in place to see if they are working.

You can download a manager's guide and template for creating a [Wellness Action Plan](#) from the MIND website.

What apprentices had to say

Providing support doesn't need to be expensive or complicated. We spoke to some apprentices about how their employer has supported them at work and here are a few of the things they found useful:

A friendly ear to listen to your problem

Weekly catch ups with manager

Wellbeing section in company app/online resources about wellbeing

Designated mental health officers/champions

Encouraged to take regular breaks

Getting support

If you are struggling with your mental wellbeing, the key thing is to ask for help. As well as your employer, learning provider and GP, there are many organisations who provide support for emotional and mental wellbeing. Some of these organisations are listed below.

Penumbra

Penumbra provide a wide range of mental health support services across Scotland.

0131 475 2380

Breathing Space

Breathing Space is a national telephone support service run by the NHS.

It provides emotional support 24 hours a day and can be called by anyone needing someone to talk to.

0800 83 85 87

Mental Health Support Service (Access to Work)

This confidential service is available at no charge to any employees with depression, anxiety, stress or other mental health issues affecting their work.

0300 456 8114

Samaritans

Samaritans provide a non-judgemental listening space for any kind of emotional distress, including, but not only feelings about suicide.

You can call Samaritans free at any time of the day on **116 123**.

SAMH (Scottish Association for Mental Health)

SAMH also provide a wide range of mental health support services.

0344 800 0550

Skills Development Scotland

1st Floor, Monteith House
11 George Square
Glasgow G2 1DY

www.sds.co.uk

