

Line manager guide



Mental health at work

Sponsored by Environment Agency



This publication builds on Shift's Line Managers' Resource. Shift was the Department of Health-funded initiative that worked to reduce the stigma and discrimination surrounding people with mental health conditions in England which ran from 2004 to 2011.

We would like to thank our partners and members who as part of our external steering group provided us with such valuable advice during the writing of this guide.

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Introduction



This is a guide for line managers. That means it is for people who manage one person, a team or department or a whole organisation. This guide is about mental health and so it will challenge you first to look at your own attitudes and assumptions about people who have mental health issues. It will also help you to look after your own mental wellbeing.

Most of all, this guide will help you to become a better manager of people with mental health issues.

Attitudes,

assumptions and facts about mental health

- **More than 1 in 3 people will develop cancer in their lifetime in the UK.**
- **1 in 4 people will experience some kind of mental health problem in the course of a year.**

These numbers mean that it is very likely that you know someone with a diagnosis of cancer and that you know someone who has mental health problems. It might even be you.

Why then are our attitudes to these two illnesses or disabilities so different? Perhaps it's because of where we get most of our information about so many things – the media?

Take a look at these headlines from The Sun newspaper.

First from September 2003 about the boxer Frank Bruno:

“Bonkers Bruno locked up”

The story went on to call him a “nut”

The outcry from the public to the way in which The Sun reported Frank Bruno's stay in hospital led to The

Sun donating £10,000 to the Mental Health Charity SANE.

Later editions were changed to:

“Sad Bruno in Mental Home” and called him “a hero”

Frank Bruno wasn't in fact in a “mental home” but had been admitted to Goodmayes Psychiatric Hospital.

That was a while ago but in May 2009 The Sun was back with another headline this time about the singer Susan Boyle:

“SuBo goes loco” (i.e. crazy)

This was followed by a statement that the distressed singer was heard to say: “I just want to go home.”

Now contrast these with this headline in the same newspaper in July 2007

about the singer Kylie Minogue who was diagnosed with breast cancer:

“Get well soon Kylie – to show our support for the star who has had to cancel her Showgirl tour we will be sending Kylie all of your good will messages”

Have you ever asked yourself why The Sun, other newspapers and the television focus in so closely on people who are in crisis or distress? Perhaps it's because we as readers and viewers are fascinated by something that we know so little about but nevertheless fear. We may look on with sympathy but also be grateful that it is not us having such a public breakdown. We may nevertheless know or fear we are not immune from mental distress or developing mental health problems and we would be right – as the earlier statistic shows – one in four will develop a mental health problem this year.

Another reaction is to classify people with mental health issues as a whinging “band of miseries” as Janet Street Porter called them in the Daily Mail in 2010. She suggested that “along with the Sam Cam handbag, the latest must-have accessory is a big dose of depression” or as Grazia put it: “Depression is the new black.”

Such coverage in our media promotes the stigma associated with mental ill health which stops us talking openly.

Developing a physical illness like cancer or MS might be bad luck but many people fear that a mental illness will be viewed as weakness or that they will be feared and

avoided. They feel stigmatised. Media stories about how people with schizophrenia or bi polar disorders are dangerous don't help, even though it is a fact that most people with mental illnesses harm no one except in some cases, themselves. Leading mental health charity Mind reports that 95% of homicides and murders are committed by people who have not been diagnosed with a mental health problem but 90% of people who die through suicide were experiencing mental distress. According to the Samaritans, 1 million people across the globe die by suicide each year. That's one every 40 seconds.

This is why in a recent study* 47% of people with depression anticipated being discriminated against in finding or keeping a job and 79% said that they had been discriminated against. It should be no surprise then that 71% said that they actively hide their depression from other people.

One in four of us will have some kind of mental health problem this year but talking about it is still taboo.

Unless this stigma is removed a quarter of the population will feel isolated and alone while dealing with their mental health issues. You can help change that in your own organisation by the way you manage people with mental health issues.

As a first step take a look at Comic Relief's Time to Change campaign which has started to get people talking about mental health. Watch and listen to ordinary and famous people like Ruby Wax and Alastair Campbell talk about their experiences at: [Time to Change on YouTube](#).

What can you do

as a manager?



You will almost certainly manage someone during the course of your career that is experiencing mental health issues. How you behave and manage your team can make a real difference not only to the individuals you manage but to the culture of your organisation as a whole.

An organisation is made up of people and the way in which those people behave makes it either a good place to work or one where you dread coming into work and would rather stay in bed. How open people can be about their health, both physical and mental will depend a great deal on how they think you will react.

What is

mental ill health?

You may well have come across the following mental health conditions:

- Schizophrenia.
- Depression.
- Manic depression.
- Anxiety disorder.
- Post-traumatic stress disorder.
- Obsessive compulsive disorder.
- Self-harm.
- Personality disorders.
- Bi polar disorder.

You don't need a detailed medical understanding of what these terms mean any more than you need to understand the medical ins and outs of other illnesses or diseases. What you need to know as a manager is how to manage the effects of a mental illness – whatever it might be – just as you need to know how to manage the effect of diabetes or MS on someone at work.

If you do want to know more about a mental health problem or illness the [SANE website](#) has factsheets you can download.

Who develops

mental health problems?

The short answer is that anyone can develop a mental health condition at almost anytime in their life. Mental health problems affect children and elderly people as well as people of working age. There is no reason why some people develop a mental illness and others don't. Just as some people develop illnesses like diabetes, MS or cancer others will acquire a mental health condition. Some people will have a condition that lasts all their lives and which they will have to manage as they would say, asthma. Many will have an episode from which they will fully recover. Having had a mental health problem in the past does not necessarily mean that the person will be ill again – some people recover fully. Others will have a fluctuating condition and so will have periods when they are well and periods when they are not.

Sometimes mental health problems are triggered by a life event. If you want to know more about reasonable adjustments please see our line manager's guides for 'Non visible disabilities' and 'Making reasonable adjustments'.

Think about the following situations:

- Starting at a new school.
- Puberty.
- Noticing how you look – body image.
- Studying and taking exams.
- Starting college or university.
- Getting a boyfriend or girlfriend.
- Your first job.
- Working with your manager or boss.
- Starting a new job and working with new colleagues.
- Getting married.
- Coping with an increased workload or promotion.
- Dealing with bereavement.
- Having children.
- Unemployment.
- A health scare or illness.
- Getting divorced or breaking up with a partner.
- Being made redundant.
- Retiring.

Some of these can be rich, rewarding and satisfying life events but all of them can also be the cause of stress or distress. They might be the trigger for depression, anxiety or some other mental illness even if they are seemingly “happy” events.

We’ve probably all heard about post natal depression or post traumatic stress disorder and it’s easy to understand someone feeling depressed after losing a loved one. Remember however that there isn’t always an easily recognisable trigger for a mental illness.

It’s all too easy to judge people and put them into categories. You may be tempted to feel that someone has “justifiable depression” because someone close to them has died for example. You may also however feel that someone else has “unjustifiable” mental health problems because they seem to have a good life and so really should just pull themselves together or “get a grip” as Janet Street Porter put it in The Daily Mail.

Mental illness doesn’t work like that. Anyone can develop mental health problems at any time. Unless you are that person’s therapist you won’t know why they are ill and you won’t know how long they will be ill. There are no set limits for “getting over” the death of a loved one or post natal depression and there is no “type” of person who develops a mental illness. Some people will recover from their mental health problems and others will not. Many have fluctuating conditions which mean that there will be times when they are well and times when they are not.

Your job as a manager is not to judge or diagnose mental health conditions. It is to manage the effects of a mental health condition that someone in your team might have at work.

How will you know

if you have someone in your team who has a mental health condition?

There are a number of ways that you might know:

- They might tell you.
- Their behaviour might alert you by being different.
- Their performance might give you cause for concern.
- Their appearance might change.

How do you think you'd feel if a member of your team told you that they had a mental illness? It will probably depend on your own experience of mental health. If your immediate reaction is alarm just remember that most people try to conceal their mental health issues if they can. If someone does tell you hopefully it is because they trust you and feel that they can be open with you. This is a good sign.

Managing people

who know they have mental health issues

People who know they have mental health issues and are willing to talk to you about their condition are possibly the easiest to manage. They might tell you the nature of their illness e.g. bi polar or simply that they have a condition that affects their work from time to time.

The good news for you is that people who know they have a mental illness often know how it affects them and how to manage their condition. If they tell you about their condition ask them what they need from you as a manager as they may well know how they work best and any changes or adjustments they need. As an employer you have a legal obligation to make what are known as "reasonable adjustments" for disabled people. These are changes to the way in which a disabled person works or their working environment that are needed because of their disability. This includes changes for people with mental impairments. If you want to know more about reasonable adjustments please see our line manager's guides for 'non visible disabilities' and 'making reasonable adjustments'.

Fluctuating conditions

in people who are well most of the time

Some people will know that they have a fluctuating condition which means that they will be well most of the time but will have episodes when they are not well.

Talk to them about how they are when they are well but just having a bad day and what their symptoms are when it is something more serious so that you know the difference and you know when you need to act. A tailored adjustment agreement can be a useful tool in these circumstances.

Tailored adjustment agreements

A tailored adjustment agreement is a document drawn up by the manager and the employee and can be used to:

- Record the effects of a disability such as mental health condition on the employee at work.
- Describe symptoms that might indicate that the employee is not well.
- Agree what the manager will do in these circumstances e.g. what to say to the employee and how and who to contact if the employee's behaviour is a cause for concern.
- Maintain up to date records of emergency contacts.
- Record any changes or reasonable adjustments that have been agreed with the employee to the way that

they work e.g. working from home one day a week.

- Agree what to say to colleagues.
- Agree how to handle periods of absence.

The tailored adjustment agreement is a living document and so should be reviewed regularly to ensure that everything is up to date and that the adjustments are working for you both.

The agreement will also help the employee to talk to a new manager about the effects of their disability if you leave or they move departments.

If you are the new manager of someone with such an agreement you can be reassured that the adjustments set out in the agreement have already been agreed by the organisation as reasonable. Accept the adjustments outlined in the agreement as reasonable and ensure that they continue to be implemented. The agreement may need to be reviewed and amended at a later date but this should not happen until both parties have worked together for a reasonable period of time.

You can use the Business Disability Forum template ['tailored adjustment agreement'](#) in your own organisation.

You might be worried that a person who has a mental illness – particularly something that you might think of as “serious” - can't be relied upon to cope under pressure. Winston Churchill had a mental illness, probably bi polar disorder. He wrote about his “black dog” of depression which would return from time to time. No one could argue that he wasn't working under pressure during the Second World War.

Managing people

**who haven't told you
that they have a mental
health condition**



Some employees won't tell you that they have a mental health condition. This could be because:

- **They see no need because their condition has no effect on them at work.**
 - **They are worried about how you might react and fear discrimination.**
 - **They don't know themselves, possibly because it is a recently acquired condition.**
-

Encouraging people

to be open about their mental health

Whether or not someone chooses to tell their employer about a mental health condition will depend very much on how that employer is perceived. Do you work somewhere that feels “safe”?

Think about the organisation you work for and answer the following questions honestly.

Would you tell your manager or colleagues that:

- 1 You think you’ve got a cold coming on?
- 2 You’re going to see your GP to ask for tests?
- 3 You’re feeling a bit stressed?
- 4 You’ve been diagnosed with depression?

In some organisations employees fear that having even a cold will be career damaging if it means that they might need a day off sick or they aren’t on top form at work. If that is the culture of your organisation then people will not tell you that they have a mental health condition. This doesn’t mean you don’t have people working for you who have mental health problems – they will just try to hide them from you. You may feel that you would do the same – possibly about any sort of illness, disability or problem in your personal life.

You can help change this. As a manager you can show people who work for you that they can talk to you without fear. Employees need you to be:

- **Positive;**
- **Proactive; and**
- **Practical.**

Be positive

about mental health,
don't be afraid to talk

Be positive about mental health by talking about it regularly. Remind everyone who works for you about your organisation's policies on mental health and wellbeing and encourage active participation in any wellbeing or awareness sessions. Remember that mind and body are linked so tell your teams about any workplace initiatives such as:

- Free fruit.
- Healthy options in the cafeteria.
- Initiatives to exercise more such as taking the stairs for those who can.
- Lunchtime exercise sessions.
- Employee Assistance Programmes.
- Health checks from your health insurance provider.

At the very least you should ensure that you and the people who work for you take proper breaks and preferably have a walk outside for a minimum of fifteen minutes every day if possible. Staying physically healthy helps people to be mentally healthy.

If there isn't anything official where you work, take the initiative and ask if you can help your employer organise and run some wellbeing sessions where mental health is discussed. Many mental health charities have campaigns and material on their websites that you could use. (See page 33 for details.) If you have an occupational health provider or

"I assumed that my career would be over but in fact was told by my senior partners how much the firm valued me and although they wanted me back and firing on all cylinders, they were prepared to wait and give me time to recover. This inspiring message in itself massively speeded up my recovery as low self esteem and low confidence often goes hand in hand with depression. As a result of the positive messages I received from colleagues and my bosses, my engagement with the firm was boosted so that I felt probably more enthusiastic and aligned with the firm than I had ever been. This paid great dividends in the years that followed as I demonstrably brought in and delivered business for the firm and proved the business case that to support me when I needed it was the right commercial as well as human decision."

John Binns, Partner, Deloitte

Employee Assistance Programme they too may be willing to be involved. Get ideas for what to do from the [case studies from other organisations](#).

The purpose of these sessions is to help turn your workplace into somewhere that is positive about wellbeing and mental health. As a manager you want people working for you to feel that you will be supportive if they are open about their mental health issues and any problems they might be having.

You might be thinking that isn't down to you or even your job – after all you have your own targets and objectives to meet. Perhaps you think you're too junior to make a difference. It's probably true that unless you are the CEO you won't be able to change things all on your own. However as a manager, no matter how junior, you can take small steps towards making your workplace a better place for everyone – including those with mental health conditions. It is your job to ensure that people working for you are productive. If your team feels that you are a positive and supportive manager they will be happier and happier teams are more productive teams. It might even improve your own happiness levels!

Action for Happiness

www.actionforhappiness.org

has a series of posters that accompany their ten keys to happiness that you can download.

In 2005 the BBC showed documentary about a three month social experiment called "Making Slough Happy". The aim was to try to make a typical UK town happier. During the course of the experiment six experts from different fields came up with a ten step list to greater happiness.

- 1 Plant something and nurture it.
- 2 Count your blessings – at least five – at the end of each day.
- 3 Take time to talk – have an hour-long conversation with a loved one each week.
- 4 Phone a friend whom you have not spoken to for a while and arrange to meet up.
- 5 Give yourself a treat every day and take the time to really enjoy it.
- 6 Have a good laugh at least once a day.
- 7 Get physical – exercise for half an hour three times a week.
- 8 Smile at and / or say hello to a stranger at least once each day.
- 9 Cut your TV viewing by half.
- 10 Spread some kindness – do a good turn for someone every day.

Be proactive

as a manager it's for you to notice if behaviours change

You may think that people should keep their private and professional lives separate and that you don't need to know about your colleague's health or private lives. It isn't however, always possible to keep your life in separate boxes. A mental health problem, like any other illness might affect work. As a manager you have an obligation to be proactive and talk to people who work for you about their performance. As a human you will probably notice if someone's behaviour has changed or if they seem just not to be themselves. You need also to be proactive in talking to them about their behaviour if it has changed or is concerning, preferably before it becomes a problem such as extended sickness absence.

Spotting the signs

There are signs that you can look out for that might indicate that someone who works for you is not well. These can either be the way in which the person behaves or physical symptoms. None of these behaviours alone indicate that someone might have mental health issues. What should alert you that something might be wrong is if the behaviour is out of character or unusual for that individual or carries on for a long period of time.

Behaviours:

- Not getting things done e.g. missing deadlines or forgetting tasks.
 - Erratic or unpredictable behaviour.
 - Emotional responses such as irritability, aggression or being tearful.
 - Complaining of lack of management support.
 - Being fixated with fair treatment issues.
 - Complaining of not coping with workload.
 - Being withdrawn from colleagues and not participating in conversations or out of work activities.
 - Increased consumption of caffeine, alcohol, cigarettes and / or sedatives e.g. coming to work with frequent hangovers or seeming to drink a great deal at out of work events.
 - Inability to concentrate.
 - Being indecisive.
 - Having difficulty remembering things.
 - Displaying a loss of confidence.
 - Unplanned absences either as sickness or just during the working day.
 - Getting into arguments or conflicts with team members / manager.
 - Being quick to use grievance procedures.
 - Increased errors and / or accidents.
-

“For me personally, saying ‘You can always come and talk to me if things are bad’ is next to useless. I don’t want to sound ungrateful for the offer, and it comes from a good place, but a) I can’t judge when I need to say ‘stop’ and b) I can’t talk about it when I’m ill, only when I’m well. My manager needs to be brave enough to initiate the conversation……. It’s not fun, and it goes against our very British grain – culturally, it’s really alien and feels very pushy and invasive. But I believe it should be part of a manager’s responsibility.”

A Business Disability Forum member talking in confidence about their personal experience.

Or alternatively:

- **Taking on too much work and volunteering for every new project.**
- **Being adamant that they are right and know the right way to do things.**
- **Working too many hours e.g. being the first in and the last to leave and sending emails late at night and on days off.**
- **Being louder or more exuberant than usual.**

Also look out for physical / physiological signs such as:

- **Being tired all the time.**
- **Taking time off sick.**
- **Being run down and getting frequent minor illnesses.**
- **Having headaches.**
- **Reduced reaction times e.g. when driving or operating machinery or responding to questions.**
- **Complaining of difficulty sleeping.**
- **Weight loss or gain.**
- **Dishevelled appearance or not taking the same care over appearance as usual.**
- **Gastro-intestinal disorders.**
- **Rashes.**

You might be worried about making things worse by talking to the person. You won’t – as long as you prepare for the conversation. Think about:

- **When you are going to talk to them.**
 - **Where the conversation will take place.**
 - **What you are going to say.**
-

If you choose to talk to the person in the middle of a meeting in front of all their colleagues and say "what's wrong with you?", you probably will make things worse.

That's an extreme example but it does illustrate the importance of preparation.

Ask the person for a private meeting at a time that is convenient for you both when you will have enough time to talk. Don't choose a time when either of you have to rush off to another meeting or to collect the children.

Ensure that you won't be disturbed by colleagues or telephone calls. Turn your mobile 'phones off or onto silent.

Shop floor or coffee shop? Think about having the meeting outside the workplace, for example in a quiet coffee shop.

Do your homework. Think in advance about why you want to talk to the person. What aspects of their behaviour or performance have caused you concern? Make sure you have concrete examples with dates and times.

Ask the person how they are but be prepared for the answer "I'm fine". Don't take that at face value and move on. If you have prepared well you can respond by saying "I'm asking because I'm concerned that you're not fine" and then give examples of behaviour or performance that have caused you that concern e.g. "at the meeting on Wednesday you seemed to get very angry with x" or "you've been saying that you're tired a lot and went home

early twice last week because you had a headache."

The person may respond defensively and so you will need to reassure them that this is not a disciplinary meeting. Tell them that you want to help if you can.

Be practical

There are practical things that you can do to help someone who has mental health issues that are affecting them at work. The first thing though is talk to the person and listen to what they have to say.

Be clear about what you need as a manager and the needs of the business.

Talk to the person about what you need them to do and then any problems they might have in achieving those objectives. For example, it might be part of the person's job to answer queries from members of the public. When you talk to them you might find that they have been having anxiety attacks in crowded places. You could agree that they won't work on the shop floor for the time being but answer email and telephone queries from a back office. This is a "reasonable adjustment" and something that you might be obliged to do by law under the Equality Act 2010 for a disabled person. On a practical level it will enable the person to carry on working and doing a job that needs to be done rather than going off sick with anxiety.

In some cases there may be no problems at all with performance. The person's productivity might not have dropped or might even have increased because they spend so long at work. Nevertheless you may sense

that they are "not themselves". Again, talk to them in a safe and confidential space and ask if everything is okay. You might need to intervene to reduce their hours or workload.

Everyone is different so the following are only examples of adjustments or changes that you might make to help someone with mental health issues at work – either on a permanent or temporary basis. The most important thing is to talk to the person and try to find out what will work from them.

Possible adjustments for people with mental health issues;

- A quiet space to work or the ability to put up "do not disturb signs" or to wear headphones to limit interruptions.
 - Working from home from time to time or permanently to avoid crowded places.
 - Being able to make a private call to a friend or mental health professional from work from somewhere where they won't be overheard.
 - Talking to you by email or telephone if they don't want a face to face meeting.
 - Being allowed time off to see a therapist or counsellor.
 - Having a mentor or buddy at work.
 - Flexible start and finish times to accommodate side effects of medication or tiredness.
-

Alternatively depending on the needs of the individual because everyone is different:

- **Changing where they work so that they are more "in the heart of things" e.g. a more centrally located desk to avoid feelings of isolation.**
- **Regular face to face meetings with you to manage workload.**
- **Time to exercise e.g. a longer lunch break so they can go to the gym or for a run and make up the time later.**

Other members of your team might ask why you are making these changes.

Make sure your team knows that it is down to you as a manager to ensure that everyone works to the best of their ability. If anyone needs changes to the way they work for whatever reason tell them you will accommodate them if you can, to ensure everyone does their best for the team.

Don't get drawn into detailed discussions about adjustments you are making for any individual and in particular someone who is experiencing mental health issues. Bring conversations back to what the person talking to you needs to do their job rather than talking about someone else.

Most of all, never tell anyone else anything told to you in confidence or that someone is experiencing mental health issues. It is for the person themselves to choose who they tell and what they say.

If the adjustments you've made are causing problems or resentments within your team talk to the person for whom you've made the adjustments. Explain what other people are saying and try to agree what to say to the rest of the team and how to react to negative comments. Don't, however, put pressure on them to say anything that they don't want to say.

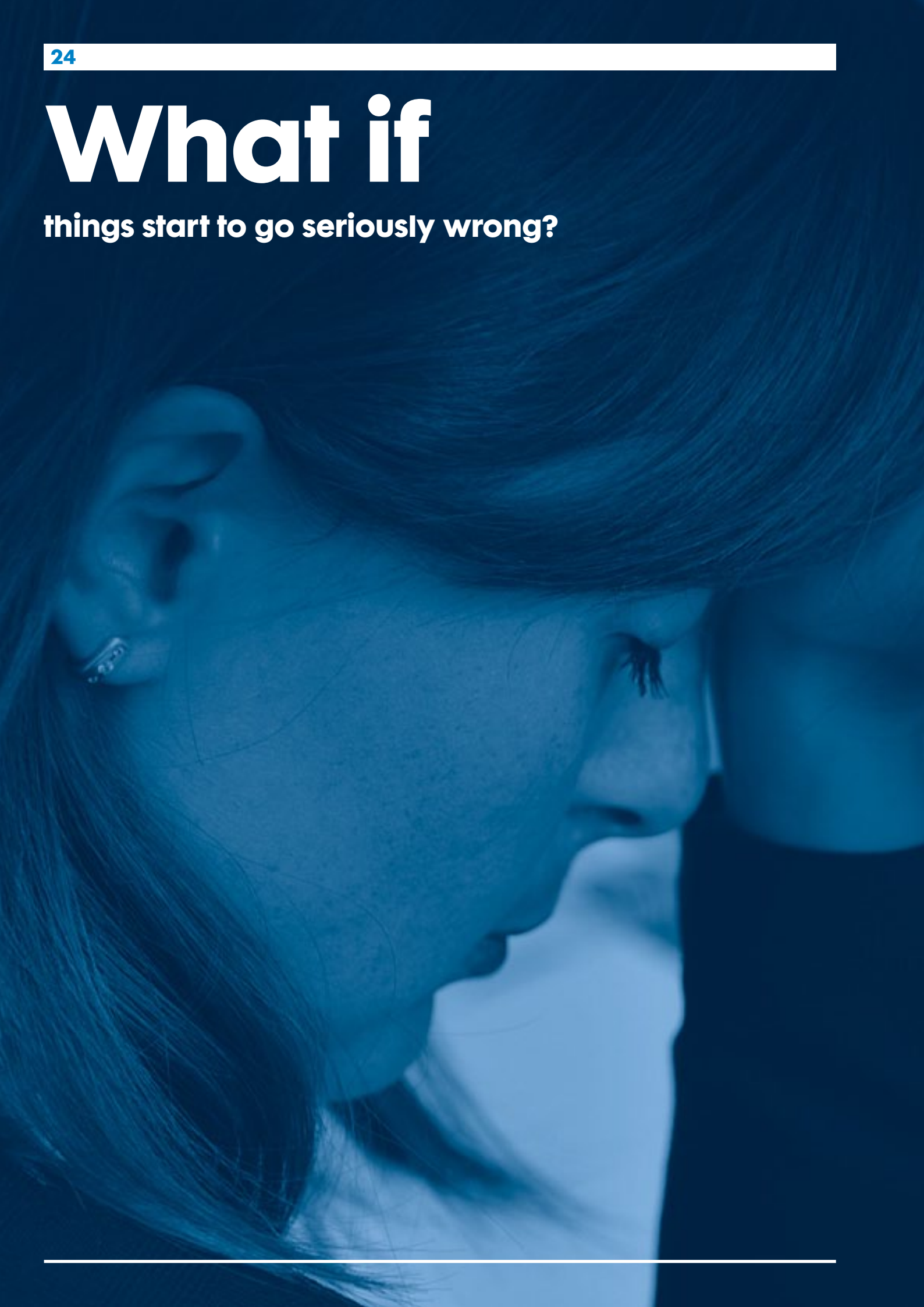
For some people work might have caused or contributed to their mental health problems because of for example, workload, hours or a relationship with a colleague. In these cases it is up to you to intervene and see how workload and hours can be better managed.

If it is relationships at work that are causing the problems first identify if there is any bullying and harassment. Your organisation should have bullying and harassment policies that you should check. Deal with any allegations of bullying or harassment as quickly as possible and in accordance with your policies.

In other cases arranging for mediation might help resolve workplace conflicts. Talk to your HR department about how to arrange mediation. Remember, however that both parties will have to agree to take part in the mediation for it to work.

What if

things start to go seriously wrong?



In some rare circumstances (and they are rare) a manager is faced with an employee whose behaviour is really unacceptable in the workplace or worse, someone who says they feel suicidal. What should you do if this happens to you?

Unacceptable behaviour

As an employer you do not have to tolerate certain behaviour within the workplace regardless of the cause. It is appropriate to insist that an employee leaves the workplace if they:

- Use or threaten physical violence.
- Are abusive to colleagues or customers / clients.
- Are intoxicated or appear to have been abusing other substances.

In these circumstances you will need to enlist the help of your HR department or more senior managers who will help you with the next steps.

Less extreme behaviour can also be unacceptable. For example if a person is:

- Liable to be “snappy” so that colleagues feel that are walking on egg shells around them; or
- Unpredictable so colleagues never know if they will be greeted with helpful smiles or sarcastic snarls; or
- Liable to “over share” personal details of their life.

All of these behaviours encourage colleagues to avoid contact with the person – which might well make matters worse.

As a manager you must talk to them about their behaviour. It is all too easy for the behaviour of one person to infect the whole team and soon

everyone may start to behave in a similar way.

Talk to the individual, but more importantly listen to what they have to say.

Ask them if they are aware of the effect of their behaviour. They may have no idea that people are avoiding them.

As before, do your homework. Give specific examples of their behaviour and what happened next.

Remind them that they do not work in isolation. They cannot help how they feel but if they are unable to behave in an acceptable manner then they may need some time out of the workplace. Everyone’s behaviour and actions in the workplace can have an effect on everyone else – and ultimately on the wellbeing and success of the organisation and everyone associated with it.

For example:

Chris snaps at Martha. Martha is too scared to talk to Chris again and so doesn’t ask her to call a client back. This means that the client doesn’t get called. The client feels cross and let down and doesn’t place an order. This affects the bottom line which in turn might lead to redundancies which will have a negative effect on the mental health of people who might lose their jobs and their families.

Now all of this isn’t going to stem just from one encounter between Chris and Martha but if the relationship between the two colleagues continues in such a negative way there will be consequences.

Suicidal feelings

Managing someone who says they feel suicidal

In rare cases someone might confide that they are feeling so low that they don't want to live anymore or that they have been thinking about suicide. It is very difficult to hear this from anyone – whether a colleague, friend or family member. It is not uncommon to feel helpless in these circumstances. There are, however, things you can do and it is always better to try to talk to the person and do something rather than nothing:

- Ask the person if they will contact the Samaritans or if you can help them make that call, text or email. The number is **08457 90 90 90** or they can SMS **07725 90 90 90** or email jo@samaritans.org
- Ask HR to check their personnel file and if you are genuinely concerned about their health and safety call the person listed as their emergency contact.
- Encourage the person to speak to your occupational health adviser or mental health first aiders if you have them.
- Contact one of the organisations listed at the back of this guide for advice on how to talk to the person and what to do next. This will be particularly helpful if the person doesn't seem to be having an immediate crisis but has been talking about having suicidal thoughts over the period of a few days.

It's always better to talk to the person and do something than to do nothing.

Unforeseen absences

What to do if someone fails to turn up for work

Your organisation will have guidelines for what to do if you can't come into work if, for example, you are sick. Most ask employees to call or contact their manager by a certain time after they were supposed to be at work.

What if someone in your team doesn't come into work and doesn't contact you?

First check if they have been in contact with anyone else such as colleagues they get on well with, HR or another manager and check with reception that they haven't left a message.

Try their mobile (both work and personal if they have them) and any landline number recorded in their personnel file. You will need to talk to the HR department before doing this.

If you can't get hold of them on these numbers find the person listed as their emergency contact and explain the situation. They might be able to go to where the person lives to see if they are alright.

In some cases you might not have an emergency contact. This might be because the person doesn't have anyone or anyone in this country to contact or the numbers given may no longer work. In this situation you can contact the police but they are unlikely to take any action over a missing adult for 48 hours.

Do what you can to try to contact the person or someone close to them but remember that they might not be able to contact you. Do not assume that they have resigned.

You should, however, tell the police if you have reason to be seriously concerned about the person's safety, for example if they have talked recently about suicide. They may take action sooner in such cases.

It is more likely that the person has been admitted to hospital either because of a physical illness or to a psychiatric hospital. The hospital will notify the person's GP about their admission but the GP will not pass this information onto an employer and neither will the hospital. The only way you will find out is if the person asks someone to tell their employer – which they might not be in a position to do for a while.

Do what you can to try to contact the person or someone close to them but remember that they might not be able to contact you. Do not assume that they have resigned. They will hopefully recover after receiving treatment and like John quoted above be ready to return to work with the support of their colleagues and of course you – their manager.

If you do find that they have been in hospital or if they call in sick don't be afraid to contact them. The worst thing you can do is to ignore and avoid them altogether. They might not want to see you in person or to speak to you but they will appreciate a card or flowers just as if they would if they had been in hospital after a car accident. Do let them know that they are missed and that you look forward to seeing them back at work when they are ready.

Rights and responsibilities

Your responsibilities as a manager are clear. You have to meet your targets and objectives, manage your team and meet your legal obligations. This includes making reasonable adjustments under the Equality Act for people with physical and mental impairments.



Maintaining boundaries

You also have a responsibility to yourself to stay well and professional in the workplace. It is your job to talk to people who work for you about how they are feeling but it isn't your role to become their best friend and you are certainly not their therapist. It is important to maintain boundaries at work. This is true even if you socialise with colleagues you manage outside work. You are still their manager.

It isn't always easy to maintain those boundaries. If you ask someone how they are they might tell you about problems they are having at home which are causing or contributing to their mental health issues. Do listen - but not for too long. Always bring the conversation back to work by saying something like "I'm sorry to hear that. Is that why you were late for that meeting? What can we do to make sure that doesn't happen next week?"

If you get too drawn into someone's personal life it can be difficult to make the decisions you need to make as a manager. It can also start to impact on your own mental wellbeing. The one thing you really must not become is a pseudo psychologist or therapist. You are not a mental health expert. If you have an occupational health department suggest that they talk to an occupational health adviser. They can also see their GP who should be able to refer them to a therapist

although there is often a waiting list. There is also a list of organisations at the back of this guide that can provide further help and advice both to an individual with mental health issues and to you as a manager of someone with mental health issues. If you need someone to talk to or call or contact one of these organisations or contact the advice service at Business Disability Forum.

Remember that all of the advice in this guide also applies to your manager. You need to be able to talk to your own manager and feel that you will be supported. If they haven't read it perhaps you could give them a copy.

Talking to someone who is depressed isn't always easy but it is part of your job as a manager to do so. It's true too that when you're not well it can be hard sometimes to hear the positive. You might therefore say to someone:

"The presentation you did on Thursday was really good. Can we talk about what we can do to make it even better next time?"

But they might hear:

"I knew it. He hates me. He thinks I'm a useless and incompetent fool"

All you can do is to reinforce the positive and ask the person if they heard the first part of the sentence – the presentation was really good.

Further sources

of help and advice

Organisations with services for employers

Time to Change

Time to Change works specifically to end discrimination against those with mental health conditions. The Time to Change pledge allows you to publicly demonstrate your organisation's commitment to tackling stigma and discrimination around mental ill-health.

020 8215 2356

info@time-to-change.org.uk
www.time-to-change.org.uk

Mind

Mind is a large national mental health charity that primarily offers advice and support to anyone experiencing mental ill-health. Their national infoline (operated within normal office hours) offers general information on mental health conditions, diagnoses, treatments and available support.

Due to the federal structure of the charity, the services Mind offer to those with mental health conditions vary significantly from region to region. These could include local support and wellbeing groups, drop-in centres, trained counsellors and helplines.

Mind infoline: 0300 123 3393

info@mind.org.uk
www.mind.org.uk

Rethink

Rethink are a large, national voluntary sector provider of mental health services, offering advice and helplines that vary from region to region. The Rethink website is the best source of information for services and groups in your area.

General enquiries and information:
 0300 5000 927

info@rethink.org
www.rethink.org

Mental Health Foundation

Mental Health Foundation provides practical information and advice on a wide range of mental health issues, both for those experiencing mental ill-health and those working or living with people who are.

Mental Health Foundation:
 020 7803 1101

Mental Health Foundation Scotland:
 0141 572 0125

www.mentalhealth.org.uk

Mindful Employer

Developed, led and supported by employers, the MINDFUL EMPLOYER[®] initiative is aimed at increasing awareness of mental health at work and providing support for businesses in recruiting and retaining staff.

MINDFUL EMPLOYER[®] is open to any employer in the UK, whether small, medium or large, private, public or voluntary sector.

01392 677064

info@mindfulemployer.net
www.mindfulemployer.net

General information for those experiencing mental ill-health

Sane

Sane are a UK-wide charity working to improve quality of life for people affected by mental illness. Their national helpline offers emotional support and information. Sane primarily works with those with mental health conditions and mental health professionals rather than their employers.

Helpline: 0845 767 8000

Email: info@sane.org.uk

www.sane.org.uk

Anxiety

Anxiety UK

Anxiety UK provides relief and support for people with all forms of anxiety disorders. Their website and supported publications are also a useful source of information on the many forms of anxiety disorder. They also offer training services primarily for mental health professionals, service users and carers.

Helpline: 08444 775 774

www.anxietyuk.org.uk

Bereavement

Cruse

Cruse offers help and support to anyone experiencing bereavement, including free counselling, advice and publications. Services can vary from region to region. Cruse also offers regular workshops for managers

and employees working with those experiencing bereavement.

Daytime helpline: 0844 477 9400

Email: helpline@cruse.org.uk

www.crusebereavementcare.org.uk

Bipolar disorder

Bipolar UK

Bipolar UK supports those affected by bipolar disorder through self-help groups and mentoring. Although they can provide general information that may be useful, Bipolar UK does not offer services specifically for employers.

202 7931 6480

info@bipolaruk.org.uk

www.bipolaruk.org.uk

Depression

Journeys

Journeys offer information, practical resources and services for those living with depression. Their services are largely based around self-help resources.

029 2069 2891

info@journeysonline.org.uk

www.journeysonline.org.uk

Eating disorders

Beat

Beat provide a range of services to support people with eating disorders, including helplines, online support and local self-help groups. While

they do not offer services specifically for employers, they may be a useful organisation to refer a colleague to.

Helpline:

0845 634 1414, help@b-eat.co.uk

General enquiries:

0300 123 335, info@b-eat.co.uk

www.b-eat.co.uk

Obsessive Compulsive Disorder

OCD Action

OCD Action provides support and information for those with OCD and related disorders. While they do not offer services specifically for employers, their website is a good source of information and resources.

Helpline: 0845 390 6232

support@ocdaction.org.uk

General enquiries:

020 7253 5272

www.ocdaction.org.uk

Counselling

The organisations below provide useful information for those considering counselling, with online directories that can be used to locate a professional counsellor, who will usually charge for their services.

BACP (British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy)

BACP is a membership organisation that sets standards and provides information about therapeutic practice.

www.itsgoodtotalk.org.uk

Counselling Directory

Database of UK counselling services, searchable by different forms of mental ill-health.

www.counselling-directory.org.uk

Immediate crisis and suicidal feelings

Samaritans

Samaritans offers a confidential listening service for those in distress, despair, or experiencing suicidal feelings. The following 'helpline' contact details are operated 24 hours a day, including public holidays. Many of the organisations above recommend Samaritans to support those in crisis, particularly outside of ordinary office hours.

Samaritans are also able to initiate contact with someone you are concerned about at your request. However, please bear in mind that they will not be able to discuss this contact with you, or even tell you whether they were able to make contact.

If you believe that someone is at immediate risk of harming themselves or others, and would like to take practical action to prevent them from doing so, you should phone the emergency services. Samaritans will never do so on your behalf under their confidentiality policy.

UK: 08457 90 90 90

ROI: 1850 60 90 90

SMS: 07725 90 90 90

jo@samaritans.org

www.samaritans.org

Contact us

Business Disability Forum
Nutmeg House
60 Gainsford Street
London
SE1 2NY

Tel: 020 7403 3020

Textphone: 020 7403 0040

Fax: 020 7403 0404

Email: enquiries@businessdisabilityforum.org.uk

Web: businessdisabilityforum.org.uk

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Deloitte
Department for Transport
Department for Work and Pensions
Environment Agency
Ernst & Young
Fujitsu
GlaxoSmithKline
HM Revenue and Customs
Home Office
InterContinental Hotels Group plc
Kingfisher plc
KPMG
L&T Infotech
Lloyds Banking Group
Lorien Resourcing
Mahindra Satyam
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Serco Group plc
Serious Organised Crime Agency
Shell International Ltd
Standard Chartered Bank Plc

***correct at the time of publication, visit our website for the current list.**

