Mental Health:

A Guide for Managers

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Foreword

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Mental health is something that affects us all. We know that 1 in 4 people in the UK will experience a mental health problem each year - and in the Civil Service, we also know that mental health is the largest cause of long-term sick absence. Despite this, many people find talking about mental health difficult and don't know how best to start a conversation if they are concerned about someone they work with.

As Civil Service Health and Wellbeing Champion, I firmly believe that the wellbeing of our workforce must be central to what we do and one of my strategic priorities is to encourage an open dialogue on mental health. We all have a role to play in creating a culture where people feel they can talk openly about mental health and have access to help and support at the earliest opportunity. To do this, we need to ensure managers are equipped with the skills they need to start a conversation and know how to signpost employees to help and support. That is why I am really pleased to endorse this informative guide and I recommend that everyone takes the time to read it. This guide is just one tool to support managers to talk with confidence to employees about mental health - local HR contacts will be able to provide details of additional resources available in your department.

I would like to thank the Cross Government Mental Health Network and CS Employee Policy who worked in partnership to produce this guide and who continue to work across departments to help share best practice in mental health.

Gordon Hodgson

Chair, Cross Government Mental Health Network.

The Cross Government Mental Health Network was formed in 2017, as a way for the leads of departmental Mental Health and Wellbeing Networks across the UK government to come together to seek advice and share best practice with each other. We are also working to collaborate on initiatives around mental health and to act as a collective voice, in conversation with Civil Service HR, to raise concerns and suggest solutions to issues in the workplace that may directly impact upon people across government affected by poor mental health.

It is exciting to have been involved in the creation of this guide, as improving line manager confidence around managing employees with mental health concerns is hugely important to giving all employees confidence that they will be supported to bring their whole selves to work.

By clearly describing the role and responsibilities of a manager in this area (as well as what is outside of their responsibility), managers should feel more confident that they are treating their employees fairly, and as a result employees should feel confident that they will be treated fairly.

It is my hope that this guide will be seen by colleagues at all levels, with management responsibilities or not, so that an understanding of how the Civil Service as an institution should support colleagues with mental health concerns, becomes part of the fabric of the workplace.

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Introduction

On a day-to-day basis, managers are the people most likely to have regular interactions with their team members. This also means that they are the people most likely to notice when someone is having a difficult time or is in need of support. They may also be someone a team member turns to, either for advice and support or just to tell them about an issue.

This guide will equip managers with the tools to recognise and support their employees struggling with their mental health and provide relevant information and learning. This includes advice about creating the right working environment so colleagues feel comfortable talking about mental health and what to do if someone reaches crisis point at work. Removing mental health stigma and creating a positive culture around mental health in the workplace is a priority for the Civil Service.

Mental health relates to an individual’s emotional, psychological and social wellbeing. When a person suffers from mental ill health this can be caused by stress or a diagnosed mental health condition such as depression. Some examples of mental health conditions are listed in Annex A. Mental health can be seen as being on a continuum ranging from good to poor and if an individual is suffering from poor mental health this can be short-term or longer-term.

Mental ill health is one of the main causes of sickness absence in the UK. The [Thriving at Work Review (October 2017)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/thriving-at-work-a-review-of-mental-health-and-employers) sets out that since 2009 the overall rate of sickness absence has fallen by 15-20%, but absence due to mental health reasons has risen by around 5%. Also, people with mental ill health are three times more likely to have a period of long-term sickness absence.

In the Civil Service, mental ill health is the leading cause of long-term sickness absence, accounting for 33% of all such absence. Mental ill health not only impacts on the individual but also the business and the rest of the workforce.

If managers are better informed about how to support the mental and emotional wellbeing of their employees they will better placed to help create an open and inclusive organisational culture.

The Civil Service is striving to be a leading employer in the mental health support it provides to employees.

Things to note

This guide is not intended to be prescriptive and should be used as advice that complements existing departmental policies and procedures. In complex situations it is always best to seek advice from a Human Resources (HR) expert or other sources of support, including taking occupational health advice, all of which are referenced throughout this guide.

Legal obligations

Employers have a legal duty of care to all employees. They must assess the risk of ill health arising from work activities. Please refer to your departmental intranet for further information. You can also refer to the [Health and Safety Executive website](http://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/standards/) for access to the HSE Management Standards, stress risk assessment toolkit and other useful information.

Some mental health conditions may be protected as a disability under the [Equality Act 2010](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/equality-act-2010-guidance), making it unlawful for an employer to treat an affected employee less favourably for a reason relating to their disability, without a justifiable reason or to fail to make reasonable adjustments which would help the employee attend work. It can sometimes be unclear whether a long-term health condition constitutes a disability. Notwithstanding any differences in legal duties, it is best for managers to take the same approach in dealing with any long-term health condition as they would in dealing with any disability – i.e. discussing the situation with the employee, offering support, and ensuring any appropriate workplace adjustments/steps are put in place to help the employee attend work.

Manager’s roles and responsibilities

Fostering a positive mental health environment

Managers are key in creating positive team cultures that support mental health and wellbeing. Taking steps to try and eliminate the stigma surrounding mental health is important. If people feel comfortable talking about issues at an early stage, there is a greater chance they will be able to access the support they need and stay well and in work.

Managers play a crucial role in providing support to employees. They will often need to signpost individuals to additional support, e.g. Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) or equivalent, but they will continue to be a vital source of support for employees.

The aim is to promote a culture across the Civil Service where honest communication is encouraged, bullying and harassment is not tolerated and people are treated with dignity and respect.

Engaging, informing and supporting employees

**As a manager, you have an important role in engaging, informing and supporting employees who are experiencing mental ill health**. You should never do nothing, but it is also important that you take well-informed steps and when giving advice ensure that it is appropriate to an individual’s circumstances.

You can help to promote a positive and healthy culture by doing the following:

* Have regular one-to-ones with employees and ensure you ask how they are and how they are feeling. This will encourage employees to talk about mental health and help create a safe environment for employees to disclose their own mental health conditions.
* Engage with employees so they understand their own objectives, their team’s objectives and the organisations’ objectives. This includes giving employees the opportunity to ask questions and feed back their views.
* Avoid micromanaging and give employees as much control as possible over how they deliver their work while ensuring they have the right skills for the job.
* Monitor workloads to ensure what individuals are expected to deliver are realistic within the timescales and resources available.
* Lead by example - role model good behaviour and challenge negative attitudes towards mental health.
* Keep employees informed of organisation or team changes, providing a rationale for actions and decisions taken and seek employee views where possible.
* Encourage employees to have a good work-life balance including facilitating flexible working where possible and taking adequate breaks.
* Provide positive feedback on work where appropriate to build confidence and boost   
  self-esteem.
* If appropriate to the situation, encourage employees to be active and attend social and departmental health and wellbeing events. Physical activities are shown to boost people’s health, teamwork and mental health and wellbeing.
* Ensure individuals are aware of the internal resources that are available to them such as EAPs or equivalent, Occupational Health and Mental Health First Aiders (or equivalent), departmental Trade Union representative and your departmental Workplace Adjustments team.
* Follow your departmental attendance management policy if someone is absent with mental ill health, while also being sensitive to the circumstances of the individual absence. (Automatically-triggered attendance management warnings can be inappropriate and counterproductive in relation to mental ill health.) With employee consent seek appropriate Occupational Health advice as soon as possible. Once you have received the experts’ advice, for example from a General Practitioner’ or Occupational Health provider, you may need to implement workplace adjustments. You can contact your departmental or the Civil Service Workplace Adjustment Service (CSWAS) for advice.

What isn’t part of the manager’s role?

* You are not a medical expert and you shouldn’t try to be. If you have concerns about an individual’s mental health you should discuss the situation with them and seek appropriate expert advice to help manage the situation. Mental Health First Aiders can be called upon to assist as needed.
* Counselling: Whilst it is helpful to discuss issues with the employee it is not appropriate for you to try to act as a counsellor. Colleagues needing expert emotional support should be directed to an appropriate professional. What you can do is offer support in dealing workplace issues which may be contributing to the situation and signpost employees to internal resources that are available such as EAPs (or equivalent).
* Taking on too much: your duty of care to an employee is in the workplace. Be clear about boundaries and the remit of your role. If you overstep these boundaries or take responsibility for matters that are outside work and outside your control, it can have a detrimental impact on your health and your employee’s health.

Some examples of when the boundaries have been crossed

* You have an employee who is in financial and emotional distress - you are lending them money to help them out.
* An employee has told you they have been feeling suicidal - you have given them your personal number and said you can be called upon 24/7 if the employee needs to talk.

Top Tip

You are not expected to have all the answers. If someone comes to you with something you are unsure about, say so – that is more helpful than offering advice which may be well meant but wrong. Then work together to find out who might help or what could work. Your EAP (or equivalent), Mental Health First Aider (or equivalent), Occupational Health Service,   
HR Business Partner or HR casework contact may all be able to assist.

Some symptoms of mental ill health

According to [Mind/CIPD guidance](https://www.cipd.co.uk/knowledge/culture/well-being/mental-health-support-report), employees experiencing mental ill health may demonstrate some (not necessarily all) of the following general symptoms:

* Changes in work performance, not getting things done/missing deadlines
* Working longer hours than normal
* Changes in social functioning, withdrawn and isolated from colleagues
* Changes in personality/mood swings/self-critical
* Physical signs; tiredness, difficulty sleeping, increased sickness absence
* Alcohol or drug misuse
* In extreme cases, suicidal comments such as talking about being a burden on others or feeling hopeless and having no reason to live.

Having a conversation

If you have concerns about an individual’s mental health, suggest having a conversation somewhere quiet and private. Explain what you have observed and why you have concerns and that the objective of the conversation is to support the employee.

Regular catch ups/one to ones with employees are an opportunity to start a conversation about mental health, making it part of the normal management process. If you have taken steps to create the right environment, employees will hopefully feel more comfortable discussing their health concerns with you.

When having a conversation you should actively listen without judging, encouraging the individual to talk freely and openly without interruption. It is good practice to follow up from the meeting in writing, especially any agreed actions or support.

You should also be clear about issues surrounding confidentiality. It is good practice to agree possible next steps with the individual. For example, following the discussion, you may wish to speak to your HR department or EAP (or equivalent) or Occupational Health provider. Managers need to ensure they have appropriate consent from the employee before sharing any information from the meeting.

Below are some questions that you can use to start a conversation and which may help to encourage discussion. These should assist you in shaping a conversation rather than being used as a checklist.

* How are you doing at the moment?
* You seem a bit down / upset / under pressure / frustrated / angry. Is everything OK?
* I’ve noticed you’ve been arriving late recently and I wondered if you’re OK?
* I’ve noticed the reports are late when they’re usually on time. Is everything OK?
* What would you like to happen? Are there any adjustments you think may help at work?
* What support do you think might help?
* Have you spoken to your GP or looked for help anywhere else?

Make sure you **keep the door open**: If an individual doesn’t want to talk or they do not recognise they are unwell, make it clear they can come to you at any time. Signpost them to other sources of support such as a Mental Health First Aider (or equivalent) and keep an eye out for any deterioration in their wellbeing. If their behaviour starts to be a real cause for concern you should seek advice from your EAP (or equivalent) or HR Casework team.

Top Tip

Silence can be really powerful in helping employees talk about their mental health. Simply explaining that you have noticed some potential distress and then letting silence fall to allow them space and time to talk can be really helpful.

Wellness Action Plan

The [Wellness Action Plan](https://www.mind.org.uk/media/4229239/mind-guide-for-line-managers-wellness-action-plans_final.pdf), developed by Mind is a helpful tool to assist in structuring conversations with an employee around mental health. Crucially, this tool enables both parties to be proactive about managing mental health and can help prevent colleagues reaching crisis point at work.

The Wellness Action Plan will capture information about how the employee stays well. For example: self-help and adjustments, early warning signs that their health is deteriorating and who to contact in a crisis. This can assist individuals in managing their mental ill health and by having regular conversations to review the action plan it can help them to identify when symptoms are changing so that they can take proactive and preventative action.

There is a suggested template at [**Annex B**](#AnnexB) based on Mind guidelines and Rethink mental illness guidance.

Workplace adjustments

When considering an adjustment you will need to consider how much it will reduce or remove the barrier faced by the individual.

In deciding what adjustments may be appropriate for an employee there are some key things to consider:

* Treat each employee as an individual - an adjustment that is appropriate for one person may not be appropriate for someone else with the same condition
* Arrange a meeting or discussion with the individual as early as possible - let them know they can be accompanied by a union representative, disability network member or colleague if they wish
* The individual might have ideas about what adjustments they need and what has or hasn’t worked for them in the past, which you should listen to
* Consult with HR and experts such as Occupational Health - obtain medical advice where appropriate
* Consider what is reasonable for the individual, business, and the rest of the team
* Evaluate and review the effectiveness of adjustments regularly.

You may initially have good reason for considering you can’t support a request - but through discussion with the individual you may arrive at a solution that is mutually acceptable. Don’t forget your HR Casework or Workplace Adjustment team (or equivalent) are always happy to provide advice in these scenarios.

The manager should encourage the individual to record any agreed adjustments on a [Workplace Adjustment Passport](https://civilservicelearning.civilservice.gov.uk/learning-resources/workplace-adjustment-passport). This can complement the use of the Wellness Action Plan.

Whilst adjustments should always be considered on a case-by-case basis guidance from the [Department of Health and Social Care](http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20180201181243/https:/responsibilitydeal.dh.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/Advice-for-employers-on-workplace-adjustments-for-mental-health-conditions.pdf) suggests the following adjustments might be considered with the employee. This list is not exhaustive and adjustments will need to be tailored for the particular individual:

* Take a flexible approach to start/finish times and/or shift patterns
* Equal amount of break time, but in more frequent shorter breaks during the day
* Minimise noise where possible – e.g. providing private office/room dividers/partitions, reducing pitch or volume of telephone ring tones
* Provide a quiet space for breaks away from the main workspace
* Move the employee’s workstation – to ensure for example that someone does not have their back to the door
* Support employee with their workload by helping them prioritise their work, consider job sharing or allowing them to focus on a specific piece of work
* Organise support from others by discussing the provision of a coach, buddy or mentor.

Away from work

It is important to keep in touch during any absence and, if appropriate, consider adapting the method used, e.g. email/text as necessary to maintain contact.

If an employee has failed to turn up for work without notifying you refer to HR. You should advise them if you have concerns about the individual’s mental health and follow the appropriate policy.

A referral to Occupational Health can provide further advice about the employee’s current health, appropriate workplace adjustments and next steps.

If you are extremely concerned about an individual’s safety, call the emergency services.

Handling difficult workplace situations

Managing someone who is tearful or upset

People become emotional at work for different reasons and it is not always linked to mental ill health and it may not constitute a crisis. They may have simply received some bad news or have dealt with a difficult situation. Whatever the reason, here is some advice that may help you to support them:

* Find somewhere quiet and private
* Listen: often people just want to talk and don’t want advice. They want to feel someone is really listening
* Try not to judge or compare to your own experiences - everyone reacts differently to situations
* Provide reassurance that help is available and can be found, so they don’t feel embarrassed and let them know you will respect their confidentiality
* Allow some time out for them to recover. Consider whether being accompanied at a meeting by someone such as a colleague or Mental Health First Aider (or equivalent) would be helpful
* Give the individual the EAP (or equivalent) number and a quiet place to call them if they wish
* If the employee does not want to talk to you for whatever reason ask them if they would want to talk to another member of the management team or another colleague.

Managing an individual who is unfit for work but attending work

There will be occasions where an employee doesn't realise they are seriously unwell. Their behaviour may be causing concern or distress to others and could be posing a risk to themselves or their colleagues and/or the public.

Keep in mind that an employee may not be well enough to make the right decision for themselves when they are unwell. If a Workplace Adjustment Passport is in place, this should capture the employee’s Wellness Action Plan information. Using this you can remind them that they agreed to a particular course of action in this scenario if appropriate.

* Consider instructing them to go home and strongly encourage them to seek an urgent appointment with their GP.
* Consider seeking their consent for you to call their next of kin/nominated contact.
* Make arrangements to follow up with them later to ensure they are safe.
* **Seek HR advice.**

Managing an individual who is attending work, but is unfit for work and/or is a risk to themselves or others

* Ensure your own personal safety.
* **Call the emergency services, explain the situation, follow their advice and do not leave the employee alone.** They will send appropriate support and decide on the best course of action.
* You should try to get the employee’s consent to notify the next of kin/nominated contact of the situation.
* **Seek HR advice**.

Managing an individual who is talking about or attempting suicide

**If you consider that an individual is very distressed and is in immediate danger contact the emergency services immediately. Alert senior management, HR and security as soon as possible.**

You do **not** need consent to contact the emergency services in these circumstances - but you should tell the individual what is happening and why.

If they are not with you tell the emergency services the individual’s location – along with any other relevant details you have. Give the emergency services your contact number in case they need further information to locate the individual.

Seek support from a colleague who could call the emergency services while you keep the employee talking.

Do not leave the individual alone.

If an individual is distressed

**If the situation is non-urgent**, and there is no indication the individual will immediately attempt suicide or self harm but they are in a state of general distress you should support the employee by suggesting that they seek professional help.

Provide them with the contact details for appropriate support organisations such as:

* Samaritans – **116 123** (free from any phone)
* Mind - **0300 1233393**
* NHS – **111** (free NHS helpline 24/7 for urgent medical concerns)
* Departmental EAP (or equivalent) – look on your intranet.

Once the crisis situation is resolved, also consider the impact of a distressing situation on you and your colleagues. EAP services (or equivalent) offer individual or group de-briefing sessions to provide crisis support after an incident.

Further information

* Departmental EAP (or equivalent): see your departmental intranet for further information.
* [Mind](https://www.mind.org.uk/): Mental Health charity with advice and support online.
* [MHFA England Manager's Resource](https://mhfaengland.org/): A guide for line managers.
* [Mental Health Foundation](https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/publications/gp-visit-guide): Information and support about mental health and national campaigns.
* [BITC Mental Health toolkit for Employers](https://wellbeing.bitc.org.uk/all-resources/toolkits/mental-health-employers): Additional information for managers.
* [Local mental health support services](http://www.nhs.uk/Service-Search/Mental-health-information-and-support/LocationSearch/330): A resource that enables you to search for local NHS mental health support services.
* [Mental health return to work online toolkit](https://returntoworkmh.co.uk/): A resource that helps navigate the return to work process following mental health sickness absence.

Support for managers

Available support

There are plenty of people both within and outside the Civil Service who are able to provide you with advice and support.

Internal support

* If you are a **senior manager**, think about the time out and support that managers in your area may need if they are managing complex situations. Giving them time out to seek advice, complete a training course or online learning will assist in making them more effective, engaged and confident in knowing how to ensure their teams are being treated appropriately and fairly.
* **Employee Assistance Programme (or equivalent)**: Externally provided EAP services are available 24/7, 365 days a year. They provide immediate telephone access to trained and qualified counsellors for individuals who are considered to be ‘red flag’ cases, for example threats of suicide or individuals in crisis. Otherwise, they will triage individuals and source the appropriate level of support, which may include counselling, information, or sign-posting to other sources of support. Confidentiality is guaranteed. An EAP service will not inform line managers that employees are seeking help unless they give them permission to do so. Don’t forget that EAP/Wellbeing services are also there to support managers. They can, for example, coach you on how best to approach sensitive situations or subjects with employees, provide information on mental health conditions and help if the situation is impacting on your health.
* **Managers**: Often, just talking a situation through with your manager can really help and they will hold this information in confidence. They may have experienced a similar case and have some good advice.
* **Mental Health First Aiders (or equivalent)**: Colleagues who are trained to listen, reassure and respond, help in a crisis, and will be able to signpost someone to the help they require.
* **Occupational Health**: They will provide medical advice and advise you about assessments and workplace adjustment requirements.
* **Human Resources**: This could be the HR Casework team, HR Business Partner or  
  HR team.
* **Departmental Workplace Adjustment Team or Civil Service Workplace Adjustment Service**: These teams have experience of providing adjustments and may be able to offer solutions or draw on experience.
* **Charity for Civil Servants**: This charity offers a range of support products for civil servants in need of mental health support.
* **Cross Government Mental Health Network**: A cross government employee network for departmental leads, which focuses on mental health support.
* **Departmental support groups**

External Support

* [Samaritans](http://www.samaritans.org/): Experts in supporting a range of mental health issues including suicidal callers and can also provide support to those who are worried about someone.
* [Maytree](http://www.maytree.org.uk/about-us.php): Maytree aims to alleviate suffering and help people in suicidal crisis to re-engage with life and to restore hope.
* [GP](https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/publications/gp-visit-guide): General Practitioners will usually be the first port of call for someone who is experiencing mental ill health.
* [Local Mental Health Crisis Teams](https://www.rethink.org/diagnosis-treatment/treatment-and-support/crisis-teams): Crisis teams can give urgent help to people who have a mental health condition.
* [NHS 111](https://www.nhs.uk/NHSEngland/AboutNHSservices/Emergencyandurgentcareservices/Pages/NHS-111.aspx): NHS Helpline is a useful service that can signpost people to correct avenues of further help.
* [NHS Live Well Hub](https://www.nhs.uk/livewell/Pages/Livewellhub.aspx): The Live Well Hub has information on over 100 healthy lifestyle topics including mental health.

Learning solutions

* [CSL Mental health at work- online-learning](https://civilservicelearning.civilservice.gov.uk/learning-opportunities/mental-health-work)
* [CSL Wellbeing, resilience and stress](https://civilservicelearning.civilservice.gov.uk/learning-opportunities/wellbeing-resilience-and-stress)
* [CSL Mental Health awareness online learning](https://civilservicelearning.civilservice.gov.uk/learning-opportunities/mental-health-awareness-e-learning)
* [Mindfulness](https://civilservicelearning.civilservice.gov.uk/learning-resources/mindfulness)

Annex A: Mental health conditions

[Mind](https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/types-of-mental-health-problems/) have an extensive list of mental health conditions including symptoms and behaviours. Conditions covered include:

* [Anxiety and panic attacks](https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/types-of-mental-health-problems/anxiety-and-panic-attacks/about-anxiety/?o=6272#.WgmMdlu0Opo)
* [Bipolar disorder](https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/types-of-mental-health-problems/bipolar-disorder/#.WgmMaFu0Opo)
* [Depression](https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/types-of-mental-health-problems/depression/about-depression/?o=9109#.WgmMeVu0Opo)
* [Eating problems](https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/types-of-mental-health-problems/eating-problems/about-eating-problems/?o=6260#.Wq_HjRKLTMI)
* [Obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD)](https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/types-of-mental-health-problems/obsessive-compulsive-disorder-ocd/about-ocd/?o=6290#.WgmMgVu0Opo)
* [Postnatal depression and perinatal mental health](https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/types-of-mental-health-problems/postnatal-depression-and-perinatal-mental-health/about-maternal-mental-health-problems/?o=9113#.Wq_H4xKLTMI)
* [Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)](https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/types-of-mental-health-problems/post-traumatic-stress-disorder-ptsd/about-ptsd/?o=14567#.WgmMhVu0Opo)
* [Schizophrenia](https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/types-of-mental-health-problems/schizophrenia/about-schizophrenia/?o=6266#.WgmMiFu0Opo)
* [Self harm](https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/types-of-mental-health-problems/self-harm/#.WsSJ0hIrJ-1)

Annex B: Suggested Wellness Action Plan

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| What I need to stay well | Including any self-help, support or workplace adjustments |
| Early Warning Signs | What you may notice if I start to become unwell |
| When I am unwell | What I’d like my manager/colleagues to do to  support me |
| Crisis | What I’d like you to do if my health breaks down and I am no longer safe in work.  (This should include contacts details of the next of kin, the GP and any mental health support teams) |
| Recovery Plan | How best to keep in touch during an absence (within policy guidelines), what to tell colleagues while I’m away, what may help on my return |

**To be completed by the employee and manager**