

# How are you?

**Mental health at work:**  
**A young workers' guide**





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# Introduction

This guide has been commissioned by the TUC Young Workers Forum in recognition of the increasing number of young workers who have reported experiencing mental health problems. It has been developed by the TUC in partnership with Gofal using information and research from numerous resources.

This guide provides information on supporting individuals with mental health issues in the workplace and the practical steps that can be taken by trade union reps and employers to promote a healthy workplace.

## About the TUC

The TUC is the voice of Britain at work. With 55 affiliated unions representing nearly 6 million working people from all walks of life, we campaign for a fair deal at work and for social justice at home and abroad. We negotiate in Europe, and at home build links with political parties, business, local communities and wider society.

Find out more at: [www.tuc.org.uk](http://www.tuc.org.uk)

## About Gofal

Gofal is a leading Welsh mental health and wellbeing charity. We provide a wide range of services to people with mental health problems, supporting their independence, recovery, health and wellbeing. We also lobby to improve mental health policy, practice and legislation, as well as campaigning to increase public understanding of mental health and wellbeing.

Find out more at: [www.gofal.org.uk](http://www.gofal.org.uk)

# What is mental health?

## What is mental health?

*“Mental health is not just the absence of mental disorder. It is defined as a state of well-being in which every individual realises his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to her or his community.”*

**World Health Organisation**

## We all have mental health

We all have mental health, just like we all have physical health. Sometimes we feel well and sometimes we feel unwell. It is important to recognise that mental health is just as important as physical health and can have a huge impact on our ability to participate in education, work and society. It can vary enormously as we go through life and can be affected by a huge range of factors such as:

- **Work and occupation**
- **Finance and money**
- **Accommodation**
- **Physical wellbeing**
- **Education and training**
- **Family, parenting and / or caring relationships**
- **Social, cultural or spiritual**
- **Medical and other forms of treatment**

As a result, it is helpful to take a whole-person approach to mental health - considering circumstances, environment and social issues alongside the presence or absence of a medical diagnosis.

## What are mental health problems?

'Mental health problems', 'mental illness' and 'mental ill health' are all common terms that are used to refer to the full spectrum of diagnosed clinical conditions such as depression, anxiety, psychosis, bipolar or schizophrenia. Symptoms of mental health problems have traditionally been divided into groups called either 'neurotic' or 'psychotic' symptoms.

'Neurotic' covers those symptoms which can be regarded as extreme forms of 'normal' emotional experiences such as depression, anxiety or panic. Conditions formerly referred to as 'neuroses' are now more frequently called 'common mental health problems,' although this does not always mean they are less severe than conditions with psychotic symptoms.

Less common are 'psychotic' symptoms which interfere with a person's perception of reality and may include hallucinations, delusions or paranoia, with the person seeing, hearing, smelling, feeling or believing things that no one else does. Psychotic symptoms or 'psychoses' are often associated with 'severe mental health problems.'

## Different mental health problems

Research shows us that **one in four** people will experience a mental health problem in any given year, making mental health problems some of the most common health conditions. Here are some of the most common mental health problems:

- Anxiety
- Bipolar disorder
- Depression
- Obsessive compulsive disorder
- Phobias
- Postnatal depression
- Post-traumatic stress disorder
- Psychosis
- Schizoaffective disorder
- Schizophrenia
- Seasonal affective disorder
- Self harm

Due to the prevalence of mental health problems we probably all have friends, family and/or colleagues who have been affected by this issue and may require our support in the future.

## Mental illness ≠ poor mental wellbeing

It may seem counter-intuitive, but people with a diagnosed mental illness can experience good mental health and wellbeing. With the right support and treatment, many people learn to effectively manage their mental health problem and go on to live fulfilled lives - playing important roles in education, business and wider society.

## Myths and facts

The following myths and facts are taken from the **Time to Change** campaign. These could be used with colleagues to increase awareness and understanding of mental health problems.

**Myth** Mental health problems are very rare.

**Fact** Mental health problems affect one in four people.

**Myth** People aren't discriminated against because of mental health problems.

**Fact** Nine out of ten people with mental health problems experience stigma and discrimination.

**Myth** People with mental illness are violent and unpredictable.

**Fact** People with mental illness are more likely to be a victim of violence.

**Myth** People with mental illness can't work.

**Fact** You probably work with someone with mental illness.

**Myth** People with mental illness never recover.

**Fact** People with mental illness can and do recover.

**Myth** After experiencing a mental health problem, people are weaker.

**Fact** Many people who have gone through this actually feel stronger.

**Myth** It's best to leave people alone if they develop a mental health problem.

**Fact** Most people with mental health problems want to keep in touch with friends, family and colleagues.

## Why is this important to your role as a rep?

**One in six British workers are affected by conditions like anxiety, depression and stress every year.**

Although this can have an impact on the workplace, it is vital to understand that people with mental health problems can and do work. Many recover or learn to manage their mental health problem with the right support. You never know when a fellow employee might want to speak to you about their mental health and wellbeing.

**1 in 4**  
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## The current financial climate

Since the beginning of the recession in 2008 life has become increasingly difficult for workers across the UK, as they have battled with cuts, welfare reform, the cost of living and threats to job security. Trade union representatives have reported that colleagues are approaching them much more frequently to talk about mental health problems and ask for information and support. The following issues are common during a time of austerity and could result in increased levels of stress, anxiety and depression among your workforce:

- Redundancies
- Reorganisations
- Overwhelming workloads
- Being expected to do more with less
- Low paid jobs
- The uncertainty of zero hour contracts

## This is only relevant to HR and management, right?

Wrong. Many people at work will choose to visit their HR department or manager, but others may feel more comfortable speaking to someone else within the workplace in a more informal setting. A trade union rep can provide confidential advice and support, without the formality of speaking to a HR officer or manager. As a result, it's important that trade union reps feel comfortable and confident to talk and listen to colleagues about their mental health problems. However, it is also important that trade union reps know their limitations as non-health professionals and have the right information to signpost colleagues to appropriate advice, treatment and support services.

## Impact on individuals and organisations

In 2007 the **Centre for Mental Health** published a briefing called 'Mental Health at Work: Developing the Business Case'. It estimated that mental health problems cost employers nearly £26 billion each year - equivalent to £1,035 for every employee in the UK workforce. This includes the costs of sickness absence, reduced productivity and increased staff turnover. A breakdown of these costs can be found in the table below:

**The costs associated with poor mental health in the workplace amount to nearly **£26 billion** per year**

	Cost per average employee	Total cost to UK employers
<b>Absenteeism</b>	£335	£8.4 billion
<b>Presenteeism</b>	£605	£15.1 billion
<b>Turnover</b>	£95	£2.4 billion
<b>Total</b>	£1035	£25.9 billion

Research conducted by the mental health charity **Mind** also showed that:

- **1 in 5 people take a day off work due to stress.**
- **1 in 10 people have resigned a job due to stress**
- **1 in 4 have considered resigning due to stress.**
- **19% of staff feel they can't speak to managers about stress at work.**
- **56% of employers said they would like to do more to improve staff wellbeing but don't feel they have the right training or guidance.**

## The economic case

Trade union representatives can use this information to make the case for improving mental health and wellbeing in the workplace. It is in the employer's interest as well as the employee's to put in place practices that promote wellbeing and support employees who experience mental health problems.

# Mental health and young people

The TUC Education department has produced the **Mental Health Workbook** for trade union reps. Some of the information from the section about young people and mental health is detailed below, along with relevant statistics from other organisations.

The **Young Minds** website includes the following statistics regarding common mental health problems experienced by young people:

- 8.9% of 16-24 year olds have self-harmed in their lifetime.
- 4.7% of 16-24 year olds screen positive for Post Traumatic Stress Disorder
- 3.6 of 16-24 year olds have a generalised anxiety disorder.
- 2.2% of 16-24 year olds in Great Britain experienced a depressive episode.
- 2.3% of 16-24 year olds have an obsessive compulsive disorder.

Austerity measures have had an enormous impact on young people with cuts to further education and student support, increases in youth unemployment, shortages in affordable housing, cuts to local services and social security and the rise in insecure employment such as the use of zero hour contracts. These are all issues that can have a considerable impact on young people's mental health and wellbeing. In July 2015 The House of Commons published statistics which showed that the unemployment rate for 16-24 year olds was 15.9%. This is nearly three times the unemployment rate for the general population of 5.5%.

The **Prince's Trust** Youth Index 2014 sampled 2,161 young people aged 16-25 and found that:

- 40 per cent of jobless young people have faced symptoms of mental illness - including panic attacks, suicidal thoughts and feelings of self-loathing - as a direct result of being unemployed
- One in 10 young people (11 per cent) have been prescribed anti-depressants. This more than doubles to 25 per cent amongst those unemployed for six months or more
- One in three long-term unemployed young people (32 per cent) have felt suicidal, compared to 26 per cent of their peers
- One in four long-term unemployed young people (24 per cent) have self-harmed. This compares to one in five (19 per cent) of their peers

Trade unions can play an important role in supporting young people in the workplace. They can ensure that young workers have access to meaningful training, qualifications and sustainable employment. Union reps can also play their part in negotiating high-quality apprenticeships and workplace training programmes that support young workers with mental health problems. Low pay and inadequate affordable housing also affect young people and their mental health - trade union reps can ensure that they have access to information and advice about their rights. Trade unions should also ensure that employers are paying the National Minimum Wage and where employers can afford it, to pay the 'Living Wage'.

It is equally important that young people have a democratic voice in society and the workplace and trade unions are uniquely placed to enable young people to have a voice in the workplace. This includes encouraging young people to take an active role in their trade union and identifying barriers in existing workplace structures to young people's participation.

What can you  
do as a trade  
union rep?

## Tips for trade union reps

- **Ensure that your workplace has an appropriate mental health policy**, which is used and referred to regularly (see page 24 for more information).
- **Talk openly about mental health and wellbeing**, use non-discriminatory language and challenge stigma and discrimination. Download Time to Change resources here: [www.time-to-change.org.uk/resources/materials-downloads](http://www.time-to-change.org.uk/resources/materials-downloads)
- **Promote good mental health and wellbeing** for colleagues across your workplace - download health promotion materials such as the Five Ways to Wellbeing
- **Highlight available training** such as Mental Health First Aid to managers, reps and staff to help them spot the signs and respond appropriately. Find out more about Mental Health First Aid here: [mhfaengland.org/](http://mhfaengland.org/) - or contact local mental health charities to enquire about other training opportunities.
- **Create a supportive environment**, be open about mental health, talk about your union's campaign to ensure good workplace practice on mental health and let members know that you're there if they need to talk - so that all members of staff along with volunteers feel comfortable to raise an issue.
- **Raise awareness of local mental health support services** – provided by the workplace and local community - so that they know where they can signpost those who require help (e.g. counselling services, local doctors, voluntary organisations or helplines). Leave literature in the staff room, in common areas and on notice boards.
- **Campaign for improved provision of mental health support services** and Employee Assistance Schemes within your workplace.
- **Encourage people to become mental health champions** within your workplace.
- **Lobby your organisation to support the Time to Change campaign** and sign the Time to Change employer pledge. Chart their development towards becoming an exemplar employer. Find out more here: [www.time-to-change.org.uk/time-to-change-your-workplace](http://www.time-to-change.org.uk/time-to-change-your-workplace)
- **Encourage all members of staff to register with a local GP surgery** - so that they can easily access mental health support services if they need to.
- **Mark World Mental Health Day** (10th October) in your workplace. See the next page for some more information and ideas.

# Potential activities in the workplace

You may decide to raise awareness or mark specific days such as **World Mental Health Day** (10th October) in your workplace. Here are a few ideas:

## Display posters and leaflets

about mental health around your workplace, in staff rooms or canteens to better inform colleagues about mental health and where/how they can access help and support.



**Set up a stall** in the foyer offering advice, information and campaign materials. You can download or order campaign materials from Time to Change at: [www.time-to-change.org.uk/resources/materials-downloads](http://www.time-to-change.org.uk/resources/materials-downloads)

**Organise lunchtime wellbeing activities** for employees such as complementary therapies, mindfulness, yoga or tai chi sessions.



## Invite a Time to Change Champion

to speak to employees and management to help increase their understanding of mental health problems, stigma and discrimination.



## Invite local health organisations

to come and talk to employees.

**Organise a walk, fun run or bike ride** for employees to participate in - physical activity can be good for mental health!



**Join local charities and community groups** at World Mental Health Day events in your area.

# Prevention, recovery and return to work

The European Commission's Mental Health and Employment toolkit (March 2012) describes good workplaces as:

- All staff have some control of their working day
- Staff are able to make suggestions and influence activities
- Staff are clear about what they are expected to do
- Staff get feedback on performance
- There is a safe and healthy working environment

In the next section we have used this toolkit to identify a number of steps that employees can take to support employee mental health and wellbeing. Trade union reps can use this information to ensure that employers are taking action to improve workplace wellbeing and support employees who are experiencing mental health problems. In line with the European Commission's toolkit we have split into three headings: prevent, recovery and return to work.

## Prevention

- Promote staff wellbeing
- Increase understanding and reduce stigma
- Staff engagement and support
- Identifying issues
- Training for line managers
- Workplace policies

## Recovery

- Advice and support
- Contact with the employee
- Getting expert help
- Return to work action plan
- Briefing and supporting other staff

## Return to work

- Pre-return meeting
- Return to work action plan
- Line manager awareness
- Preparing the workplace
- Implementing agreed changes
- Informing colleagues
- Early identification of future issues

How can employers support good mental health and wellbeing?

## What can employers do?

This section focuses on things that your employer can do to improve workplace wellbeing and support employees who are experiencing mental health problems.

Firstly, we have looked at a whole person approach to mental health and wellbeing - highlighting lots of different areas of people's working lives that can make a difference to mental health and wellbeing.

Secondly, we have adapted information from the European Commission's Mental Health and Employment toolkit (March 2012) to identify a number of actions that employers can take to promote wellbeing, prevent mental health problems and support employees who are experiencing mental health problems.

Thirdly, we have included some tips for developing workplace mental health policies.

Finally, we have included information about how an employer can become a Mindful Employer and sign the Time to Change Employer Pledge.

You can use all of this information to have conversations with your employer and ensure that they are doing everything they can to support employee mental health and wellbeing.

## Why should employers care?

As detailed on page 8, it estimated that mental health problems cost employers nearly £26 billion each year - equivalent to £1,035 for every employee in the UK workforce. This includes the costs of sickness absence, reduced productivity and increased staff turnover.

Conversely, improving employee mental health and wellbeing is likely to improve staff retention and productivity. As a result, investing in employee wellbeing services and creating a supportive working environment will deliver benefits for all concerned.

**Good mental health and wellbeing can help people to reach their full potential at work!**

# Whole person approach to wellbeing

All aspects of life can affect and be affected by a person's mental health and wellbeing. As a result, Gofal advocates an holistic, whole person approach to mental health and wellbeing. Bearing this in mind, there are a number of things that your employer can do to improve mental health and wellbeing across the workforce. Trade union reps can play an important role in putting mental health and wellbeing on their agenda by taking positive action - whether that's raising issues at meetings, scrutinising budgets for support services or campaigning.

Here are a few examples of issues that you might want to raise in your workplace:

## Work and career progression

- Providing meaningful and supportive feedback to employees.
- Providing and facilitating useful work experience opportunities.
- Providing mentoring opportunities where staff can develop with full support from a more senior representative.

## Finance and money

- Providing financial advice services for staff or clear signposting to help and advice services such as **Citizens Advice**.
- Paying a living wage to staff - including young members of staff.
- Providing or facilitating transport loan schemes for employees.

## Education and training

- Providing support and information for employees who want to access education and training.
- Providing on-going training opportunities for front-line staff and managers.
- Allowing time off to attend training and personal development.

## Physical wellbeing

- Providing healthy, affordable food in the workplace, through the canteen and vending machines
- Encouraging physical activity through discounted gym membership or cycle to work schemes.
- Providing employee health care schemes.
- Delivering appropriate health and safety measures such as workstation assessments, proper eye-care, safety equipment and cold/hot weather provision.

## Parenting or caring relationships

- Providing information and support for parents/carers.
- Providing childcare and maternity services for employees.
- Providing advance shift timetabling to allow reasonable opportunities to organise child care.
- Promoting good practice and complying with family friendly policies.
- Providing part-time / flexible working opportunities.

## Social, cultural or spiritual issues

- Respecting cultural and religious needs of employees.
- Promoting good practice and complying with equality and diversity policies.
- Providing faith spaces.
- Being supportive of employees who want to organise extra-curricular activities such as team-building days, sporting activities and/or cultural events.
- Organising and funding regular staff wellbeing days.

## Medical and other forms of treatment

- Encouraging registration with local GP surgeries and dentists.
- Providing Employee Assistance Programmes/Schemes.
- Supporting employee led wellbeing initiatives such as peer support groups.
- Providing mental health training for staff to ensure they can spot early signs of mental health problems.

## Accommodation

- Providing a good quality working environment that supports employee wellbeing.
- Providing information and signposting employees to housing or homelessness organisations such as **Shelter** or **Crisis** for help with accommodation problems.

# Preventing poor mental health in the workplace

Anyone can experience mental health problems, but there are many things that employers can do to promote wellbeing and reduce the likelihood of the workplace leading to poor mental health. The European Commission's Mental Health and Employment toolkit (March 2012) included a number of useful actions and resources, which we have adapted and added to in the table below.

Actions for employers	Resources
<p><b>Promote staff wellbeing</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide information about mental health and wellbeing in communal staff areas.</li> <li>• Form a staff wellbeing group and organise staff wellbeing days and activities.</li> <li>• Encourage staff to become mental wellbeing champions in the workplace.</li> <li>• Become a Mindful Employer.</li> </ul>	<p>Five Ways to Wellbeing <a href="http://www.fivewaystowellbeing.org/">www.fivewaystowellbeing.org/</a></p> <p>Creating a healthy workplace: <a href="http://tacklementalhealth.org.uk">tacklementalhealth.org.uk</a></p> <p>Become a Mindful Employer (page 27) <a href="http://www.mindfulemployer.net">www.mindfulemployer.net</a></p>
<p><b>Increase understanding and reduce stigma and discrimination</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encourage people to talk openly and positively about mental health.</li> <li>• Provide training to all staff (especially managers) on mental health awareness, recognising signs of mental ill health and how to deal constructively with this.</li> <li>• Support the Time to Change campaign and sign the Time to Change Employer Pledge.</li> </ul>	<p>Mental Health Foundation: <a href="http://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/publications/what-works-for-you/">www.mentalhealth.org.uk/publications/what-works-for-you/</a></p> <p>Spot the signs (page 31)</p> <p>Time to Change (page 26) <a href="http://www.time-to-change.org.uk">www.time-to-change.org.uk</a></p> <p>Mental health and the law (page 29) <a href="http://www.advicenow.org.uk/is-that-discrimination">www.advicenow.org.uk/is-that-discrimination</a></p>
<p><b>Staff engagement and support</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make sure that every member of staff has opportunities to discuss concerns, or raise issues with their line manager.</li> <li>• Ensure that any disclosure is treated in a supportive manner.</li> <li>• Make sure that all staff know where to get help or support.</li> </ul>	<p>Mindful Employer <a href="http://www.mindfulemployer.net/managers">www.mindfulemployer.net/managers</a></p> <p>Shaw Trust: <a href="http://www.tacklementalhealth.org.uk/">www.tacklementalhealth.org.uk/</a></p> <p>A practical guide to managing and supporting people with mental health problems in the workplace <a href="http://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/pdfs/management-mental-health.pdf">www.hse.gov.uk/stress/pdfs/management-mental-health.pdf</a></p>

Actions for employers	Resources
<p><b>Identifying issues</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Regularly survey staff wellbeing and work with a staff wellbeing group to agree actions to address any issues that have been raised in the survey.</li> <li>• Be mindful of any absence trends - look out for signs of workplace stress or mental ill health in the workplace and take action to address the causes.</li> <li>• If the organisation is going through a period of change (such as a re-structure) develop a mental health impact assessment to understand how it could impact on staff wellbeing.</li> </ul>	<p>Workplace stress standards and risk assessment:  <a href="http://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/">www.hse.gov.uk/stress/</a></p> <p>A practical guide to managing and supporting people with mental health problems in the workplace  <a href="http://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/pdfs/manage-mental-health.pdf">www.hse.gov.uk/stress/pdfs/manage-mental-health.pdf</a></p>
<p><b>Training for line managers</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure that line managers have access to information and advice about mental health.</li> <li>• Include mental health in line manager training and continuous professional development.</li> <li>• Make sure that line managers understand how to identify an individual experiencing poor mental health and what to do if they think someone needs help.</li> <li>• Help line managers understand the impact of poor mental health on employees.</li> <li>• Ensure that all managers have been trained in having difficult conversations.</li> </ul>	<p>Mindful Employer  <a href="http://www.mindfulemployer.net/managers">www.mindfulemployer.net/managers</a></p> <p>Mental Health First Aid  <a href="http://mhfaengland.org/">mhfaengland.org/</a></p> <p>A practical guide to managing and supporting people with mental health problems in the workplace  <a href="http://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/pdfs/manage-mental-health.pdf">www.hse.gov.uk/stress/pdfs/manage-mental-health.pdf</a></p> <p>Acas website: health and wellbeing  <a href="http://www.acas.org.uk/index.aspx?articleid=1361">www.acas.org.uk/index.aspx?articleid=1361</a></p>
<p><b>Workplace policies</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop and put in place a supportive mental health policy that includes actions to tackle workplace stigma about mental ill health.</li> <li>• Ensure the disciplinary procedure does not penalise people with mental health conditions.</li> <li>• Develop and implement a bullying and harassment policy.</li> <li>• Develop and implement a policy for flexible working.</li> </ul>	<p>Workplace policies  <a href="#">(page 24)</a></p> <p>Flexible working and equalities:  <a href="http://www.acas.org.uk/index.aspx?articleid=1461">www.acas.org.uk/index.aspx?articleid=1461</a></p> <p>CIPD resources:  <a href="http://www.cipd.co.uk/hr-topics/bullying-harassment.aspx">www.cipd.co.uk/hr-topics/bullying-harassment.aspx</a></p>

## Supporting people's recovery

Sometimes people experience mental health problems and may need to take time off work. It's important to remember that people can and do recover - and that the majority want to get back to work. The European Commission's Mental Health and Employment toolkit (March 2012) included a number of useful actions and resources, which we have adapted and added to in the table below.

Actions for employers	Resources
<p><b>Advice and support</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If an individual has to take time off due to mental ill health make sure they have all the advice and support they need from HR and management and are clear about their rights.</li> <li>• Ensure management and HR are working with the individual to discuss the best recovery for them, check the individual has also consulted their GP and their advice is also being put into action.</li> </ul>	<p>Mental Health and the Law (<a href="#">page 34-35</a>)</p> <p>TUC: Disability and Work (2011) <a href="http://www.tuc.org.uk">www.tuc.org.uk</a></p> <p>TUC: Representing and supporting members with mental health problems at Work (2008) <a href="http://www.tuc.org.uk">www.tuc.org.uk</a></p>
<p><b>Contact with the employee</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If the individual needs to take time off, ensure they are kept in regular contact and that management and HR keep in touch but do not put them under pressure to return until they are ready.</li> <li>• Get in touch with the employee at an early stage of absence and discuss a contact plan.</li> <li>• Listen to the employee and take on board their suggestions. Try to make the conversation supportive and informal.</li> <li>• Check who the employee wants as their main contact. This may not be their line manager.</li> <li>• Check with the individual whether their manager has been part of the problem, if so, they may wish to speak to another member of senior management or HR.</li> <li>• Ensure management and HR are working with the individual to discuss an action plan for return to work.</li> </ul>	<p>Mental Health Foundation <a href="http://www.mentalhealth.org.uk">www.mentalhealth.org.uk</a></p> <p>Health and Safety Executive <a href="http://www.hse.gov.uk/sicknessabsence/">www.hse.gov.uk/sicknessabsence/</a></p>

Actions for employers	Resources
<p><b>Getting expert help</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure line managers speak with occupational health in workplaces where it is available.</li> <li>• Encourage the member to speak to their GP about what support may be needed.</li> <li>• Ask HR or management to write down the job role and responsibilities and make this available for the GP or relevant health professional and the employee to discuss.</li> </ul>	<p>Health 4 work adviceline <a href="http://Health4work.nhs.uk">Health4work.nhs.uk</a></p> <p>A practical guide to managing and supporting people with mental health problems in the workplace <a href="http://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/pdfs/manage-mental-health.pdf">www.hse.gov.uk/stress/pdfs/manage-mental-health.pdf</a></p>
<p><b>Return to work action plan</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop a return to work action plan with the individual.</li> <li>• Use services such as occupational health reports (if this service is used) and any information a GP offers in supporting the employee.</li> <li>• Include the line manager, occupational health (if used) and employee in the discussions.</li> <li>• Be flexible about work changes – can you accommodate flexible hours; a gradual return to work; changes to the employee’s workstation etc?</li> <li>• Be clear with the employee about what changes you will put in place.</li> </ul>	<p>DoH: Advice for employers on workplace adjustments for mental health conditions <a href="http://www.nhshealthatwork.co.uk/dhguidance.asp">www.nhshealthatwork.co.uk/dhguidance.asp</a></p> <p>Health and Safety Executive: <a href="http://www.hse.gov.uk/sicknessabsence/">www.hse.gov.uk/sicknessabsence/</a></p> <p>Mental Health Foundation: <a href="http://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/publications/returning-to-work-exec-summary/">www.mentalhealth.org.uk/publications/returning-to-work-exec-summary/</a></p>
<p><b>Briefing and supporting other staff</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Help alleviate tensions and concerns in the workplace where an employee is absent.</li> <li>• Agree with individual how or if colleagues will be informed of their condition. This should be done in as supportive a way as possible.</li> <li>• Brief staff on any changes that might affect them e.g. changes to the employee’s shift pattern and any knock on effects.</li> <li>• Offer training on mental health awareness to all staff.</li> </ul>	<p>TUC: Representing and Supporting members with mental health problems at Work (2008) <a href="http://www.tuc.org.uk">www.tuc.org.uk</a></p> <p>Mental Health Foundation: <a href="http://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/publications/what-works-for-you/">www.mentalhealth.org.uk/publications/what-works-for-you/</a></p>

# Supporting people's return to work

When people are ready to return to work it is important that they are supported to do so. The European Commission's Mental Health and Employment toolkit (March 2012) included a number of useful actions and resources, which we have adapted and added to in the table below.

Actions for employers	Resources
<p><b>Pre-return meeting</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Speak to the employee before they return to work.</li> <li>• Focus on the individuals' health and wellbeing, ensuring they feel ready to return and not returning out of pressure or fear. Returning to work before the individual is ready could negatively impact on their health and wellbeing and could lead to further periods of absence.</li> <li>• Be clear about what changes, especially to job roles and responsibilities will be made in the workplace.</li> </ul>	<p>Mental Health Foundation: <a href="http://www.mentalhealth.org.uk">www.mentalhealth.org.uk</a></p> <p>Health and Safety Executive: <a href="http://www.hse.gov.uk/sicknessabsence/">www.hse.gov.uk/sicknessabsence/</a></p> <p>TUC: Representing and supporting members with mental health problems at Work (2008) <a href="http://www.tuc.org.uk">www.tuc.org.uk</a></p>
<p><b>Return to work action plan</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Jointly agree a back to work plan with the individual including when they will be returning who will greet them and where they will be located.</li> <li>• Discuss and agree a back to work plan.</li> <li>• Discuss workplace changes and help the employee to understand their responsibilities.</li> <li>• Discuss any changes in work hours – especially around flexible work hours or a phased return to work – along with their associated responsibilities and management.</li> <li>• Discuss and agree to review this back to work plan regularly to examine progress and any changes.</li> </ul>	<p>Mental Health Foundation: <a href="http://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/publications/returning-to-work-exec-summary/">www.mentalhealth.org.uk/publications/returning-to-work-exec-summary/</a></p> <p>How's your business feeling? <a href="http://howsyourbusinessfeeling.org.uk">howsyourbusinessfeeling.org.uk</a></p> <p>Health and Safety Executive: <a href="http://www.hse.gov.uk/sicknessabsence/">www.hse.gov.uk/sicknessabsence/</a></p>
<p><b>Line manager awareness</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure the line manager is aware of the condition and how to support the individual.</li> <li>• Ensure manager has discussed with occupational health service (if this service is available).</li> <li>• Share any relevant statements or guidance from the employee, occupational health service or health professionals with the line manager.</li> <li>• Ensure manager has read appropriate guidance, had the correct training to deal with the situation.</li> </ul>	<p>TUC: Representing and supporting members with mental health problems at Work (2008) <a href="http://www.tuc.org.uk">www.tuc.org.uk</a></p> <p>Mindful Employer <a href="http://www.mindfulemployer.net/managers">www.mindfulemployer.net/managers</a></p>

Actions for employers	Resources
<p><b>Preparing the workplace</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure the individuals work area has been cleaned and is tidy for their return.</li> <li>• If their work area has moved for any reason make sure they are informed before hand.</li> <li>• If the work area has been used by another person, return the work area to its original condition.</li> </ul>	<p>How's your business feeling?  <a href="http://howsyourbusinessfeeling.org.uk">howsyourbusinessfeeling.org.uk</a></p> <p>Health and Safety Executive:  <a href="http://www.hse.gov.uk/sicknessabsence/">www.hse.gov.uk/sicknessabsence/</a></p>
<p><b>Implementing agreed changes</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure the workplace changes that have been agreed are put in place before the employee returns.</li> <li>• Changes might include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- change to working environment</li> <li>- a buddying scheme or personal support</li> <li>- technological assistance</li> <li>- change to starting hours</li> <li>- agreement for longer breaks</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<p>Mental Health Foundation:  <a href="http://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/publications/returning-to-work-exec-summary/">www.mentalhealth.org.uk/publications/returning-to-work-exec-summary/</a></p> <p>DoH: Advice for employers on workplace adjustments for mental health conditions  <a href="http://www.nhshealthatwork.co.uk/dhguidance.asp">www.nhshealthatwork.co.uk/dhguidance.asp</a></p>
<p><b>Informing colleagues</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Agree with the individual how colleagues are to be informed and will talk about their absence/return to work.</li> <li>• Brief staff on the return to work arrangements for the employee including any adjustments.</li> <li>• Inform any staff whose job role, hours or responsibilities will be affected and provide support through this change.</li> <li>• Be clear about confidentiality of the employee and boundaries.</li> </ul>	<p>TUC: Representing and supporting members with mental health problems at Work (2008)  <a href="http://www.tuc.org.uk">www.tuc.org.uk</a></p> <p>Mental Health Foundation:  <a href="http://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/publications/what-works-for-you/">www.mentalhealth.org.uk/publications/what-works-for-you/</a></p>
<p><b>Early identification of future issues</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make a plan with the individual about what will happen if things aren't going well.</li> <li>• Recognise that recovery may involve cases of relapse and that good work can lead to a good recovery.</li> <li>• Be open and honest with the individual that this is a plan that is meant to support the individual.</li> <li>• Understand the indicators of a relapse in mental ill health and put in place measures to support the individual.</li> <li>• Regularly reassess the plan and be flexible to any changes that might be suggested.</li> </ul>	<p>Spot the Signs (page 31)</p> <p>Mental Health Foundation  <a href="http://www.mentalhealth.org.uk">www.mentalhealth.org.uk</a></p> <p>A practical guide to managing and supporting people with mental health problems in the workplace  <a href="http://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/pdfs/manage-mental-health.pdf">www.hse.gov.uk/stress/pdfs/manage-mental-health.pdf</a></p>

## Workplace policies

One of the steps that employers can take to support employees with mental health problems is to develop and implement a workplace policy, negotiated with the recognised trade union(s). A good workplace mental health policy should cover the following areas:

- **Recruitment and selection** - Encourages, supports and provides reasonable adjustments for applicants with mental health issues.
- **Defines mental ill health** - Clear definition of Mental Health and Mental Health Problems – not limited to stress or anxiety.
- **Provides some indicators of mental ill health** - Signs that an individual may be having mental health problems, for example - changes in an employee's usual behaviour.
- **Commitment to promote awareness** - How the policy will be promoted. As well as how awareness and understanding of the policy will be shared across the organisation.
- **Promotion of good mental health wellbeing** - Identifies steps employer will take to support and promote mental health wellbeing
- **Links to other policies and procedures**, e.g. flexible working, disability leave, career breaks, grievance, disciplinary, capability, sickness absence, performance management, substance abuse & dependency; dignity at work (bullying and harassment), training and development.
- **Identifies how the Mental Health Policy relates to other policies and procedures** in the workplace, Identifying how the employer supports people with mental health problems through these linked policies/procedures.
- **Links to Health & Safety Stress Management Policies** - Identifies how the policy relates to Health & Safety policies and procedures on Work-related Stress. Including reference to Risk Assessment and implementing Control Measures.
- **Defines the role of line managers** - Identifies the role of line managers in encouraging people to disclose mental health problems and their role in supporting people with mental health problems.
- **Defines the role of Human Resources** - Identifies the role of Human Resources department and staff. Including monitoring the effectiveness of the policy and linked policies/procedures in developing a mentally healthy workplace. This could include services available through Human Resources, such as Occupational Health or access to a confidential counselling service.

- **Defines the role of union reps** - Including Shop Stewards, Safety Reps Union Learning Reps and other reps e.g. Equality Reps. Identifies the role Reps have in the workplace to promote mental health, supporting members, representing members and monitoring the impact of workplace policies and procedures on mental health.
- **Clarifies the roles and responsibilities of employees** - Identifies the responsibilities employees have towards each other on mental health issues. This could include roles for specific employees e.g. Mental Health First Aiders.
- **Provides a list of key contacts** internal and external to the employer - Who employees can contact in the organisation should they need advice or support (for themselves or others in the workplace). As well as information about support and advice available in the local community.

## Supporting a workplace policy

Training should also be provided to support the workplace policy – including raising awareness; roles and responsibilities; mental health first aid.

The policy should be further supported through a workplace campaign providing:

- Information for workers about mental health wellbeing, mental ill health, help available and the workplace policy
- Sources of help and advice available locally, external to the employer
- Information on the workplace Mental Health First Aid arrangements.

## Sign the Time to Change pledge

Time to Change is England's biggest programme to challenge the stigma and discrimination facing people with mental health problems. It is run by the charities Mind and Rethink Mental Illness, with funding from the Department of Health, Comic Relief and the Big Lottery Fund. But at heart, Time to Change is a social movement made up of hundreds of thousands of individuals and organisations across England, who are all doing their bit to change the way the nation thinks and acts when it comes to mental health.

There are lots of things that people can do to help us spread the word about Time to Change, to get people talking about mental health, and support friends, family or colleagues. Hundreds of organisations have got involved in Time to Change through the Employer Pledge, Employee Champions, workplace workshops and anti stigma activities.

Find out more here: [www.time-to-change.org.uk/time-to-change-your-workplace](http://www.time-to-change.org.uk/time-to-change-your-workplace)

## Time to Change Employer Pledge

The Time to Change Employer Pledge is an aspirational statement with meaning, indicating to employees, people with mental health problems and the public that an organisation wants to take action to tackle the stigma and discrimination around mental health, focusing on the workplace in particular. There are four stages you will go through as an employer to sign the pledge:

- Register your interest here: [www.time-to-change.org.uk/register-interest-employer-pledge](http://www.time-to-change.org.uk/register-interest-employer-pledge)
- Develop a plan detailing the tangible actions you have planned to deliver within your workplace to tackle mental health stigma and discrimination.
- Submit your completed action plan to Time to Change for review.
- Formally sign the Time to Change Employer Pledge at an event or high profile meeting of your choosing.

**By signing your organisation will be joining a growing movement of more than 300 employers in England**

In order to make the Pledge signing meaningful, Time to Change will ask you to develop a Pledge action plan. This will detail the tangible anti-stigma activities you will undertake or celebrate at the time you sign the Pledge. Your plan can be expanded over time but it must provide some immediate goals to make the Pledge a reality and signal your commitment. Action plans should be realistic and manageable but also capable of engaging a diverse range of staff and groups. Considerations such as the technology in your business, how many sites there are and where they are located will have an influence on the best approach. Whether there is finance available and whether or not you have a budget allocated to pay for any staff to spend time organising activities could also be determining factors, especially if the programme is going to be conducted by staff volunteers only.

# Become a Mindful Employer

**MINDFUL EMPLOYER** is an NHS initiative run by Workways, a service of Devon Partnership NHS Trust. Workways supports people with a mental health condition to find or remain in employment. Mindful Employer was developed by employers in Exeter and launched in 2004. Initially intended as a purely local initiative, it has since developed throughout the UK and has been launched abroad. Mindful Employer has been recommended as good practice by the UK government and other national organisations.

## Being a Mindful Employer

- Shows others and your own staff that you are a good employer
- Expresses your corporate social responsibility
- Reduces recruitment and training costs
- Helps towards complying with legislation (e.g. Equality Act & HSE)
- Reduces sickness levels
- Enhances customer service
- Improves productivity
- Makes you more attractive to people with mental health issues and others
- Helps you retain staff who have experienced discrimination in the past
- Makes yours a healthier workplace

Developed, led and supported by employers, MINDFUL EMPLOYER® provides businesses and organisations with easier access to information and support for staff who experience stress, anxiety, depression or other mental health conditions. Whether you run your own business or organisation, are a manager or an employee, finding the right information can be very time-consuming. However, on the Mindful Employer website you'll find a wealth of information about the law, good practice, managing mental health, training and organisations who can help, together with publications for managers and staff.

## Charter for employers

Over 1.3 million people work for employers who are signatories to the Charter for Employers who are Positive About Mental Health. The Charter is just one part of the MINDFUL EMPLOYER® initiative and over 1,200 employers have signed it since the initiative began in 2004. The Charter is a voluntary agreement seeking to support employers in working within the spirit of its positive approach. It's not an accreditation or a set of quality standards nor a policy or target but about working towards the principles of it – signing up is a step along a journey not the end of it. It is completely voluntary. Any employer can sign the Charter - small, medium or large, public, private or voluntary sector, anywhere in the UK.

For more information visit: [www.mindfulemployer.net/](http://www.mindfulemployer.net/)

Information,  
advice and  
resources

# Mental health and the law

## The Equality Act

A new Equality Act came into force on 1 October 2010, bringing together over 116 separate pieces of legislation into one single Act. Combined, they make up a new Act that provides a legal framework to protect the rights of individuals and advance equality of opportunity for all. The Act simplifies, strengthens and harmonises previous legislation to provide Britain with a new discrimination law which protects individuals from unfair treatment and promotes a fair and more equal society. The nine main pieces of legislation that have merged are:

- the Equal Pay Act 1970
- the Sex Discrimination Act 1975
- the Race Relations Act 1976
- the Disability Discrimination Act 1995
- the Employment Equality (Religion or Belief) Regulations 2003
- the Employment Equality (Sexual Orientation) Regulations 2003
- the Employment Equality (Age) Regulations 2006
- the Equality Act 2006, Part 2
- the Equality Act (Sexual Orientation) Regulations 2007

The Equality Act protects people from being discriminated against because of certain characteristics, such as gender, age or disability. You might not think of yourself as disabled, but if your mental health condition has a serious impact on your day-to-day life over a long period then it might be considered a disability under this law.

The Equality Act applies to all employers in the UK. It also covers contract workers, office holders and business partners. It is a very detailed law, and Mind has produced a legal briefing called 'Disability discrimination under the Equality Act' which explains how it works. Some of the most important things to know about it are:

- An employer must not treat a disabled person less favourably than another employee because of disability.
- It is wrong for your employer to treat you badly because they think that you have a disability.
- It is wrong to treat you unfavourably where this is linked to disability.
- Employers must make reasonable adjustments to work practices, and provide other aids and adaptations, for disabled employees.
- The law covers you during recruitment, employment and if you are being dismissed for any reason, including redundancy.
- Employers are not allowed to use 'pre-employment questionnaires' to ask about your health before you are offered a job.

The law is there to protect you from mental health discrimination. You should not be treated differently to other employees or lose your job because of your mental health problem. However, the law only applies where you have told your employer about your disability - there are pros and cons to doing this.

## Advice and information about your rights

### Advice Now Guides

Advice Now have produced a website called [Is that discrimination?](http://www.advicenow.org.uk/is-that-discrimination/) which is packed with easy-to-understand information about discrimination, unfair treatment, bullying and harassment.

Find out more here: [www.advicenow.org.uk/is-that-discrimination/](http://www.advicenow.org.uk/is-that-discrimination/)

### Direct Gov Advice

This Direct Gov website explains the differences between discrimination and bullying, and provides links to further information and sources of support.

Find out more here: [www.gov.uk/discrimination-your-rights/discrimination-at-work](http://www.gov.uk/discrimination-your-rights/discrimination-at-work)

### Equality and Human Rights Commission

The EHRC has produced a series of guides to explain your rights under the equality law. They include:

- Your rights to equality at work: when you apply for a job
- Your rights to equality at work: working hours, flexible working and time off
- Your rights to equality at work: pay and benefits
- Your rights to equality at work: training, development, promotion and transfer
- Your rights to equality at work: how you are managed
- Your rights to equality at work: dismissal, redundancy, retirement and after you have left a job
- Pre-employment health questionnaires for job applicants
- The employer's duty to make reasonable adjustments to remove barriers for disabled people
- What to do if you've been discriminated against
- Equality Act 2010 Code of Practice on employment
- Equality Act 2010 Code of Practice on equal pay

You can download these guides at:

[www.equalityhumanrights.com/your-rights/employment/guidance-workers](http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/your-rights/employment/guidance-workers)

## Spot the signs

Mental ill health is a very personal experience and although there are common symptoms, they can present themselves differently in each person. Symptoms also vary between mental illnesses - as they would for physical illnesses - but some similarities can exist. If you think someone may be experiencing mental health problems, here are a few things to look out for:

- Becoming isolated
- Change in eating or drinking habits
- Doing less well at work
- Relationships suffering
- Absence
- Lack of focus or interest
- Tiredness
- Erratic behaviour
- Forgetfulness

## What you can do to help?

- **Be there to talk and listen.**
- If someone talks to you **acknowledge their problem** and let them know you're there for them.
- **Make time to stay in touch.** If the member is on a period of absence, call or email them to keep them updated and reassure them you are there to help them to put in place a suitable plan for their return when they feel ready
- **Ask the person how you can help** - people will want support at different times in different ways.
- Keep in mind that having **a mental health problem is just one part of the person**. People don't want to be defined by their mental health problem.
- **Think about the words you use.** Words like 'nutter', 'crazy' and 'psycho' can hurt.

## Talking tips

Many people find it difficult to talk about mental health. But one in four of us will be affected by a mental health problem, so being able to talk about it is important for us all. Whether it's fear of talking about our own mental health or feeling awkward about talking to someone we know about their mental health, avoiding the subject isn't good for anyone. The following 'talking tips' have been developed by **Time to Change** to help people talk to someone who is experiencing mental health problems.

- **Take the lead:** If you know someone has been unwell, don't be afraid to ask how they are. They might want to talk about it, they might not. But just letting them know they don't have to avoid the issue with you is helpful.
- **Avoid clichés:** Phrases like 'Cheer up', 'I'm sure it'll pass,' 'Pull yourself together' definitely won't help the conversation! Being open minded, non-judgemental and listening will.

**Think about body language:** Try to be relaxed and open. It probably goes without saying that a gaping mouth, regular clock watching or looking uncomfortable won't go unnoticed.

- **Ask how you can help:** People will want support at different times in different ways, so ask how you can help.
- **Don't just talk about mental health:** Keep in mind that having a mental health problem is just one part of the person. People don't want to be defined by their mental health problem.
- **Don't avoid the issue:** If someone comes to you to talk, don't brush it off because this can be a hard step to take. Acknowledge their illness and let them know that you're there for them.
- **Give them time:** Some people might prefer a text or email rather than talking on the phone or face to face. This means they can get back to you when they feel ready. What's important is that they know you'll be there when they're ready to get in touch.
- **Find out more:** If you think you might feel awkward or uncomfortable, you could find out more about mental illness. If you think it would help, you could also find about other help that's available.

# Looking after trade union reps and activists

Workplace reps, trade union activists and campaigners often contribute a huge amount of time and energy in order to make a difference to their colleagues' lives. They work tirelessly throughout the year to support their colleagues and run campaigns, often without any expectation of personal reward. However, it is crucial that trade union representatives, activists and campaigners receive the right support to safeguard their mental (and physical) health.

## Top 10 Tips - by activists

The NUS UK Disabled Students' campaign recently produced four 'Activist Mental Health Guides' that provide information and advice about looking after the mental health of student activists and campaigners. Although this is a different context to trade union activism, some of the advice and guidance is equally as relevant. In particular, one of these guides includes a list of top ten tips written by activists and campaigners themselves:

- 1. Learn when to say 'no' to being involved in things.**
- 2. Set your own limitations and stick to them.**
- 3. Take care of yourself by doing the things that you enjoy.**
- 4. Take time to do things other than activism.**
- 5. Set small, tangible goals and celebrate achieving these.**
- 6. Find some inspirational quotations and look at these every day.**
- 7. Know when to go and get help for yourself.**
- 8. Make sure you talk to people about how you are feeling.**
- 9. Develop your own personal support network with friends, family and fellow activists.**
- 10. Remember: you are a more effective campaigner when you are happy, healthy and take care of yourself.**

# Sources of information, advice and support

We have compiled a list of information, advice and support services for people who are experiencing mental health issues or having problems with contributing factors such as their finances or accommodation. You might find it useful to print out or photocopy this information sheet and display it on workplace noticeboards or give to colleagues who may benefit from information, advice and support services.

## Mind infoline

The Mind infoline provides information on a range of topics including: types of mental health problem, where to get help, medication and alternative treatments; and advocacy.

**Phone:** 0300 123 3393

**Website:** [www.mind.org.uk](http://www.mind.org.uk)

## The Samaritans

The Samaritans helpline offers a 24-hour confidential emotional support service.

**Phone:** 08457 90 90 90

**Website:** [www.thesamaritans.org](http://www.thesamaritans.org)

## C.A.L.M.

The C.A.L.M. helpline offers confidential, anonymous and free support, information and signposting to men throughout the UK.

**Freephone:** 0800 58 58 58

**Website:** [www.thecalmzone.net](http://www.thecalmzone.net)

## Young Minds

YoungMinds is the UK's leading charity committed to improving the emotional wellbeing and mental health of children and young people. Driven by their experiences we campaign, research and influence policy and practice.

**Website:** [www.youngminds.org.uk/](http://www.youngminds.org.uk/)

## Time to Change

Time to Change is England's biggest programme to challenge mental health stigma and discrimination. It works with people of all ages but aims to reach children and young people through the work of the Children and Young People's Team

**Website:** [www.time-to-change.org.uk/youngpeople](http://www.time-to-change.org.uk/youngpeople)

## The Mental Health Foundation

The Mental Health Foundation is a leading UK mental health research, policy and improvement charity. A wide range of information and advice can be found on its website.

**Website:** [www.mentalhealth.org.uk/help-information/](http://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/help-information/)

## Five Ways to Wellbeing

The New Economics Foundation has developed the Five Ways to Wellbeing, which encourage people to take simple actions to improve their mental health and wellbeing. Trade union reps can encourage their members to embed these in their everyday lives - at home and at work. They include: Connect, Be active, Take notice, Keep learning, and Give.

**Website:** [www.fivewaystowellbeing.org/](http://www.fivewaystowellbeing.org/)

## TUC Education

TUC Education provides a broad range of training for trade union representatives (reps) and professionals. TUC Education courses include training for all kinds of reps, including: Union reps; Health and safety reps; Union learning reps; Green reps; and Equality reps. The purpose of TUC Education courses is to provide a quality learning experience, with a system of accreditation that points to future learning opportunities and qualifications.

**Website:** [www.tuceducation.org.uk](http://www.tuceducation.org.uk)

## Citizens Advice

Citizens Advice provides free, independent, confidential and impartial advice to everyone on their rights and responsibilities.

**Phone:** 03454 04 05 06

**Website:** [www.citizensadvice.org.uk](http://www.citizensadvice.org.uk)

## Shelter

Shelter gives practical housing advice and support online, in person and by phone. Our expert advisers give free, confidential advice 365 days a year, helping with everything from mortgage arrears to finding a place to sleep.

**Phone:** 0808 800 4444

**Website:** [www.shelter.org.uk/](http://www.shelter.org.uk/)

# Case Studies

## Good practice: Creating mentally healthy workplaces

USDAW call centre workers were finding work very stress full, dealing with angry callers and having to complete specific objectives with every caller, along with pressures on targets, performance, time-keeping, and out of work pressures. The union became aware that some long term absences were down to stress, depression and anxiety.

After initial resistance to doing anything about the situation the union asked to survey its members. They refused, so the union said it would do the surveying outside the workplace and distribute information about mental health. At this, the employer decided to begin a programme of mental health first aid training that would be cascaded down to 30 mental health first aiders who were trained to spot early stages of mental health problems and provide help on a "first aid" basis. The union argued successfully that the ten existing USDAW workplace representatives be included because of the trust and confidentiality they already had with their colleagues.

Michelle Griffiths volunteered to attend the first set of training courses, having represented members in disciplinary meetings and finding that stress and anxiety were often raised in discussion. The course was delivered over two days and comprised four sessions. The first looked at what mental health is; the impact and cost of mental health problems; drugs, alcohol and depression and their influence on mental health; and why we should have Mental Health First Aid. The second session dealt with suicide and how to listen and help somebody who may be suicidal; treatment and resources for depression; and listening non-judgementally. Session three covered anxiety; first aid for panic attacks; reactions to stress; self harm; and eating disorders. The fourth session focused on psychosis; bipolar and schizophrenia and recovery from these conditions; and action planning for using MH First Aid.

Overall, the training taught how to:

- Spot early signs of a mental health problem;
- Feel confident in helping someone with a problem;
- Prevent someone harming themselves or others;
- Help stop mental illness getting worse;
- Help someone to recover faster;
- Guide someone to the right support; and
- Very importantly, reduce the stigma attached to mental health problems.

The benefits for the business were assistance in tackling prejudice and stigma, assisting employees with MH issues, assisting employees to remain in work, a reduction in sickness and absence, and the promotion of emotional and mental health well being. The costs had the training been done off-site would have been £6,750 for 30 trainees, whereas the employer's Occupational Health counsellor provided it on site. The employer is now extending the same training to other sites.

In summary, the Mental Health First Aid process:

- Provides help on a first aid basis, using company rest rooms when assisting individuals;
- Helps MH first aiders be confident in helping someone experiencing a problem;
- Help prevent someone harming themselves or others;
- Assists in faster recovery;
- Guides people to the right support; and
- Promotes the company's mental health well being.

## Good practice: Adjustment to working hours

A member of PCS union had a depressive illness. She took medication in the mornings that did not take effect for a few hours. This, combined with the fact that she did not sleep well at night, meant that she was often not capable of getting to work before usual work hours began. She would call in sick and this led to the employer enacting attendance management procedures. Her rep worked with the employer to agree that the member could arrive at the office later, once the medication had started working, and that she could work later in the evenings to make up the time during the period of her illness. This meant that she could complete her work on time, improve her sickness record and lessen the pressures on her.

## Good practice: Keeping in contact with an employee

A member of PCS had been off sick for a couple of months. The employer was wary of contacting them in case the person felt pressured to come back to work when they were not ready. The union rep advised the employer that they could make contact with the member to find out how they were, and to update them on things at work. The rep also suggested that the employer might want to reassure the member that they wanted to keep the person in their job and would work with their rep to make this happen.

The rep also discussed a possible return-to-work strategy with the employer and suggested some reasonable adjustments that could help their member return to work, such as:

- a phased return
- buddy support from another staff member
- time off to attend counselling.

The rep then had an informal chat with their member so that they felt wanted and supported, and reassured them that there were things that could be put into place to help them return to work.

## Good practice: Changing the person's work duties

A member of UNISON who had a mental health problem found it difficult to deal with members of the public. His job role was mostly desk-based clerical work, but he was increasingly asked to cover the reception desk because of staff shortages. This caused him anxiety, which had a knock-on effect on his confidence to perform the rest of his role.

The union agreed with the employer that reception duties would be transferred to another member of staff. To ensure a fair workload on other staff, and to ensure that the member did not feel that they were letting anyone down or being difficult, the rep agreed that the member took on some of the desk-based admin duties that the other employee would fall behind on if they did more reception work. Some of the reassigned tasks were new to the member, so the rep made sure that their member was given some support and training to develop his confidence in dealing with the new work.