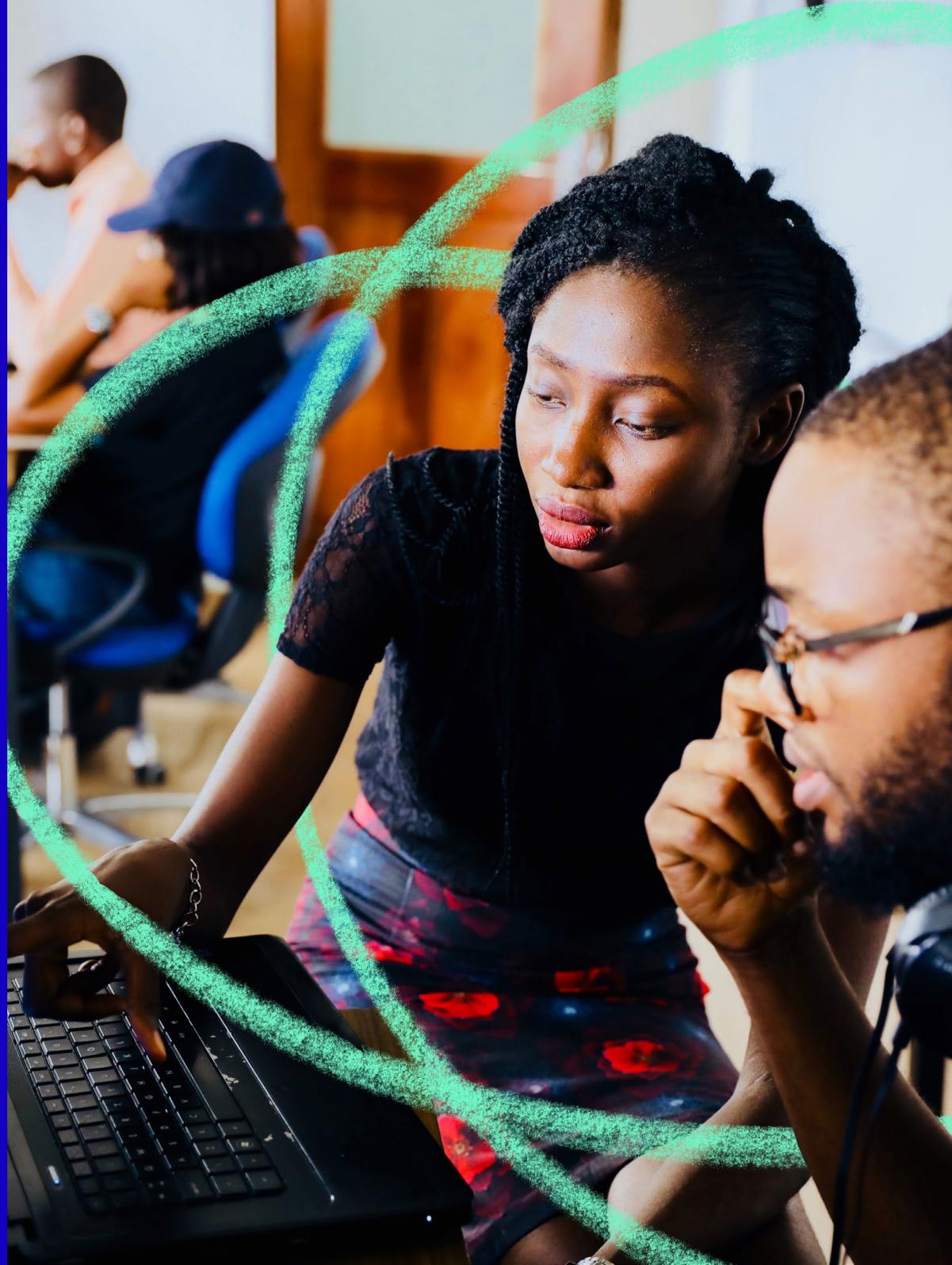




Mental health at work

A guide for small businesses





Helpful definitions

For the purpose of clarity, when we refer to ‘mental health’ in this guide we are using it in the broadest possible sense. Some useful definitions to terms used in this guide can be found below.

Mental health

We all have mental health, just as we all have physical health. How we feel can vary from good mental wellbeing to difficult feelings and emotions, to severe mental health problems.

Mental wellbeing

Mental wellbeing is the ability to cope with the day-to-day stresses of life, work productively, interact positively with others and realise our own potential. When we talk about wellbeing we are referring to mental wellbeing.

Poor mental health

Poor mental health is when we are struggling with low mood, stress or anxiety. This might mean we're also coping with feeling restless, confused, short tempered, upset or preoccupied. We all go through periods of experiencing poor mental health – mental health is a spectrum of moods and experiences and we all have times when we feel better or worse.

Mental health problems

We all have times when we struggle with our mental health. A mental health problem is when difficult experiences or feelings go on for a long time and affect our ability to enjoy and live our lives in the way we want. You might receive a specific diagnosis from your doctor, or just feel more generally that you are experiencing a prolonged period of poor mental health.

Common mental health problems

These include depression, anxiety, phobias and obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD). These make up the majority of the problems that lead to one in four people experiencing a mental health problem in any given year. Symptoms can range from the comparatively mild to very severe.

Severe mental health problems

These include conditions like schizophrenia and bipolar disorder which are less common. They can have very varied symptoms and affect your everyday life to different degrees, and may require more complex and/or long-term treatments.

Work-related stress

Work-related stress is defined by the Health and Safety Executive as the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressure or other types of demand placed on them at work. Stress, including work-related stress, can be a significant cause of illness. It is known to be linked with high levels of sickness absence, staff turnover and other issues such as increased capacity for error. Stress is not a medical diagnosis, but severe stress that continues for a long time may lead to a diagnosis of depression or anxiety, or other mental health problems.

Burnout

Burnout is a term used to describe a collection of experiences caused by long-term, unmanageable stress at work. Burnout can make people feel exhausted or unmotivated. People may start to feel distanced from or negative about their job. And they may worry that they're not achieving enough at work. Burnout can affect mental and physical health. It can also impact work performance.



Mental Health at work

Never before has there been such a need for mental health support at work.

Guide for Small Businesses Mental Health at work

The coronavirus pandemic has had a significant impact on the mental health and wellbeing of UK adults and presents a considerable increase to UK employers in the number of employees that will require workplace support now and in the years to come.

- The pandemic has exacerbated the scale and severity of mental health problems across the country. 29% of adults say their mental health has gotten much worse since March 2020 and more than 1 in 4 experienced mental distress for the first time during the pandemic.
- As a result, 1 in 6 have accessed mental health support for the first time during the pandemic and two thirds of these (65%) said they would continue to access support post-pandemic.¹
- The Centre for Mental Health estimates 8.5 million adults will need support for anxiety, depression, PTSD and other mental health problems following the pandemic. This is equivalent to 1 in 5 of all adults in England and Wales. Of these, a third will need help with their mental health for the first time.²

The impact of the coronavirus pandemic on employee mental health specifically has also been significant and as employers look to review their ways of working post-pandemic, considerable thought will need to be given to how organisations design work around wellbeing and best support their staff.

- CIPD estimates that 41% of employees experienced mental health symptoms caused or worsened by work in 2020 (up from 36% in 2018).³
- According to the Labour Survey not only did the number of self-reported illnesses caused or made worse by work increase by 19% over the last year, the number of those related to stress, depression or anxiety grew by 35%.

¹ Coronavirus One Year On Report, Mind, May 2021.

² Covid-19 and the nation's mental health, Centre for Mental Health, October 2020.

³ Wellbeing and Mental Health at work, BITC, October 2020



Guide for Small Businesses Mental Health at work

Small businesses have been hard hit in a number of ways:

Small businesses are more likely to have operated in sectors most affected by lockdowns and public restrictions. Placing additional pressures on owners and staff.

According to FSB's [Business Without Barriers report](#), 30% of small business owners say that their employees reported a decline in their mental health [over the course of the pandemic] and 34% of small business owners reported their own mental health had declined over the same period.

Investing in the mental health and wellbeing of your people is also good business. In a [report](#) published in March 2022 by Deloitte, the cost of poor mental health to UK employers is now estimated to be £53 - £56 billion, equivalent to 2.6% of the UK's annual gross domestic product. It is made up of:

- £6.1 billion in absenteeism costs
- £24.8 - £27.6 billion in presenteeism costs
- £22.4 billion in staff turnover costs

The same report also found that around a third (31%) of employees now expect more support from their employer for their mental health than they did pre-pandemic and according to a report by the [City Mental Health Alliance](#) amongst those in their early careers (aged 20 – 26), 47% said that one of the most important things they would look for in a future employer is whether they would prioritise mental health.

The purpose of this guide

This guide has been created in partnership between Mind, the mental health charity, and the Federation of Small Businesses, the UK's leading business organisation.

Recognising the importance of effective mental health and wellbeing support for our people in enabling our staff to thrive, this guide provides:

- Guidance on the signs of poor mental health
- Guidance on how to start a conversation about mental health with an employee
- An overview to the use of Wellness Action Plans
- An introduction to reasonable workplace adjustments and an employer's legal obligations in this area
- An introduction to the Mental Health at Work Commitment framework
- An overview of workplace stress, HSE's Stress Management Standards and an employer's legal obligation to undertake stress risk assessments
- Useful signposting information for employees

Further information on common mental health problems, their symptoms and treatments can be found on the [Mind website](#).

Toolkits and blog articles from a range of business leaders on implementing mental health support can be found on the [Mental Health at Work website](#).



**Supporting
your people**

Spotting the signs of poor mental health

Every person’s experience of poor mental is different, which is why it is so important to invest time in regular catch-ups with your team members and ensuring wellbeing is part of that conversation. However, whilst symptoms vary, there are some common potential signs you can look out for. This table isn’t exhaustive, but does provide some guidance as to what you might want to look out for. As you’ll note, often a key indicator is a change in typical behaviour.

Physical signs	Psychological signs	Behavioural signs	Workplace specific examples
Frequent headaches or stomach upsets	Anxiety or distress	Increased smoking and drinking	Increased errors, missing deadlines or forgetting tasks
Suffering from frequent minor illnesses including joint and back pain	Tearfulness	Using recreational drugs	Taking on too much work and volunteering for every new project
Difficulty sleeping or ongoing tiredness	Feeling loww	Being withdrawn, not participating in conversations or social activities	Working too many hours; being the first in and last out; emailing out of hours or whilst on holiday
Feeling run-down	Changes in mood	Resigned attitude	An employee who is typically punctual frequently arriving late
Lack of care over appearance	Indecision or an inability to concentrate	Irritability, anger or aggression	Increased sickness absence
Sudden changes in weight or appetite	Loss of motivation	Restlessness	Becoming fixated with fair treatment and quick to use grievance procedures
Visible tension or trembling	Loss of humour	Intense or obsessive activity	Uncharacteristic problems with colleagues
Nervous trembling speech	Increased sensitivity	Uncharacteristic risk-taking	Uncharacteristic errors
Sweating	Distraction or confusion	Erratic or socially unacceptable behaviour	Reduced or inconsistent performance
	Difficulty relaxing.		Apparent over-reaction to issues
	Difficulty remembering things		
	Illogical or irrational thought processes		
	Difficulty taking information in		
	Increased suicidal thoughts		



Conversation Checklist

Sometimes we avoid talking about mental health or shut down the conversation because we don't know what to say or we are worried about getting it wrong. Often managers feel that they don't have the relevant experience to have a discussion about mental health.

Guide for Small Businesses Conversation Checklist

Don't worry about having all the answers. The fact you are asking and listening will make an enormous difference. Practicing these types of conversations can be very helpful, so finding a peer that you are comfortable with and practicing is recommended. Use the conversation checklist and question suggestions below to guide you.

Facilitating the conversation

- ✓ Avoid interruptions – switch off phones, ensure colleagues can't walk in and interrupt.
- ✓ Ask simple, open, non-judgemental questions.
- ✓ Avoid judgemental or patronising responses.
- ✓ Speak calmly.
- ✓ Maintain good eye contact.
- ✓ Listen actively and carefully.
- ✓ Encourage the employee to talk.
- ✓ Show empathy and understanding.
- ✓ Be prepared for some silences and be patient.
- ✓ Focus on the person, not the problem.
- ✓ Avoid making assumptions or being prescriptive.
- ✓ Follow up in writing, especially agreed actions or support.

Questions to ask

- ✓ How are you doing at the moment?
- ✓ You seem to be 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 usually are not. Is everything OK?
- ✓ Is there anything I can do to help?
- ✓ What would you like to happen? How?
- ✓ What support do you think might help?
- ✓ Have you spoken to your GP or looked for help anywhere else?

Questions to avoid

- ✓ You're clearly struggling. What's up?
- ✓ Why can't you just get your act together?
- ✓ What do you expect me to do about it?
- ✓ Your performance is really unacceptable right now – what's going on?
- ✓ Everyone else is in the same boat and they're okay. Why aren't you?
- ✓ Who do you expect to pick up all the work that you can't manage?

Guide for Small Businesses Conversation Checklist

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What is a Wellness Action Plan?

Given the high levels of stress and poor mental health we are seeing in the workplace, there is a growing demand for innovative and proactive ways of managing our mental health at work.

Guide for Small Businesses What is a Wellness Action Plan?

The Wellness Action Plan is inspired by Mary Ellen Copeland's Wellness Recovery Action Plan® (WRAP®): an evidence-based system used worldwide by people to manage their mental health.

Wellness Action Plans are a personalised, practical tool we can all use – whether we have a mental health problem or not – to help us identify what keeps us well at work, what causes us to become unwell, and how to address a mental health problem at work should you be experiencing one.

As a manager, encouraging your team members to draw up a Wellness Action Plan gives them ownership of the practical steps needed to help them stay well at work or manage a mental health problem.

By giving your team an opportunity to draw up a Wellness Action Plan, they will be able to plan in advance and gain an awareness of what works and what doesn't work for them. A Wellness Action Plan can help your people to develop approaches to support their mental wellbeing.

It also opens up a dialogue between you and your team member, to help you better understand their needs and experiences and therefore better support their wellbeing. This in turn can lead to greater productivity, better performance and increased job satisfaction.

By regularly reviewing the agreed, practical steps in the Wellness Action Plan, you can support your team member to adapt it to reflect their experiences or new approaches they find helpful. By allowing the individual to take ownership of the process and of the Wellness Action Plan itself, you will be empowering them to feel more in control.

Wellness Action Plans are also particularly helpful during the return to work process, as they provide a structure for conversations around what support will help your team member and what workplace adjustments might be useful to discuss and consider.





**Supporting
your team
members
to develop
a Wellness
Action Plan**

How to get your team started with a Wellness Action Plan

Mind provides [three Wellness Action Plan templates](#) and associated guides for your team members to make use of depending on their predominant way of working. We have guides for:

- People working in a workplace
- People working remotely
- People who are hybrid working

Start by sharing our guides with your team and encouraging them to protect time in their calendar to reflect on what keeps them well at work and complete the appropriate Wellness Action plan template.

Completing a Wellness Action Plan can take some time, particularly if it is the first time a team member has ever been asked to consider what keeps them well at work, so look to schedule some time to discuss their completed Wellness Action Plan template at least a week after sharing the guides to allow time for a person to properly reflect on the questions being posed.

Discussing a Wellness Action Plan

While the Wellness Action Plan itself will provide a structure to your discussion with your team member, it's important to create an environment in which they feel safe and comfortable to share the details they've prepared. Consider the following in preparing for your conversation:

Choose an appropriate place

- When discussing mental health and wellbeing, it's important to make people feel comfortable so that they feel able to have an open and honest conversation. If holding your discussion in the workplace, find a private and quiet space.
- If your team member is working remotely, be sure to provide appropriate notice of the meeting so they can find an appropriate space to have the discussion. A person working from home may not feel comfortable having a conversation about mental health if sharing a working space with a partner or other members of their household.
- Sometimes a neutral space outside of the workplace like a coffee shop can help a team member to feel at ease. Depending on the location of any remote workers in your team, consider whether it might be possible to hold the meeting in person in a mutually agreeable location.

Listen and don't make assumptions

- It can be difficult for people to share information relating to their mental health. The Wellness Action Plan template will hopefully have provided your team member time and structure to order their thoughts and articulate their feelings in a way they're comfortable.
- Provide your team member the space to talk through their Wellness Action Plan in their own words in their own time. Listen and be respectful.
- Support your team member to explore the support they need
- We are all experts on our own mental health and the support or adjustments we may need. Don't make assumptions about what may or may not be of support to your team member and try not to influence them by offering your own suggestions unless it is sought.
- Workplace adjustments for poor mental health don't need to be costly or require significant changes. They can be simple. See our section on workplace adjustments for further information.

Carry out regular reviews

- A Wellness Action Plan is most effective when treated as a live, flexible document, so a regular feedback loop with your team member to discuss and assess what is working and what isn't is an important part of the process.
- Look to protect time to review wellbeing and your team member's Wellness Action Plan as part of regular catch-ups or one to ones and make any necessary changes or capture any learnings.
- If your team members are comfortable and happy to do so, you might consider the benefit of a session with your wider team to discuss any key considerations for ways of working together that are useful to share. Understanding one another's communication preferences for example can ensure the team work in a way that supports everyone to perform at their best. Some team members might be happy to share their written Wellness Action Plan in entirety, you might consider where might be best to save these documents to enable appropriate restricted access to the immediate team. But do remember: team members should be supported to only share as much as they are comfortable.



A note on confidentiality

Your team member owns their Wellness Action Plan. It should be written by the individual, expressing their own personal choices, experiences and needs.

The Wellness Action Plan should only be held confidentially between you and your team member and only read or shared with their permission.

If you are encouraging a team member to fill out a Wellness Action Plan as a result of being unwell, you might wish to ask whether they consent for a copy of it to be held with HR, alongside similar documentation such as an Occupational Health report or a Return to Work plan.

It should be up to the team member to determine whether they are happy for it to be held by HR or kept confidential between them and yourself as their manager.

In order to fulfil your duty of care to keep your staff members safe at work, you will be obliged to break confidentiality if they are experiencing a crisis. If you become aware that someone is at serious risk of harm, whether this is the employee or someone else, you should call the emergency services. When beginning a discussion about a Wellness Action Plan, it is best to ensure they understand the circumstances under which you might be required to share information they disclose.



Workplace Adjustments

As a result of completing a Wellness Action Plan, you might decide along with your team member that some workplace adjustments are needed in order to support them.

Guide for Small Businesses Workplace Adjustments

Adjustments for mental health are often simple and it is best practice to offer support to all staff, whether or not they have a formal diagnosis or a disability according to the legal definition in the Equality Act 2010. Where a team member meets the requirements of the Equality Act 2010, further information regarding an employer's legal duty to provide reasonable adjustments can be found in the legal obligation section below.

Adjustments

Below are some types of adjustments that may help mitigate mental health symptoms and the impact on your team member's performance at work. They are not prescriptive, but people with lived experience of a mental health problem have found some or all of these useful.

It is important to be guided by the needs of your team member, however, this list could act as a prompt for you to explore symptoms and support needs together.

Changes to how team members perform their role:

- Flexible hours or change to start or finish times; change of workspace, for example quieter, more or fewer people around, dividing screens
- Working from home at certain times or on certain days in a given period
- Changes to break times
- Provision of quiet rooms
- Light-box or seat with more natural light
- Agreement to give a team member time off for appointments related to their mental health, such as therapy and counselling

Changes to the role itself (temporary or permanent):

- Temporarily changing duties, for example changing the balance of desk work and customer-facing work, reducing caseloads, changing shift patterns
- Reallocation of some tasks or amendments to the team member's job description or duties

Extra support:

- Redeployment to a more suitable role
- Increased supervision or support from manager, buddy or mentor
- Extra help with managing and negotiating workload
- Debriefing sessions after difficult calls, customers or tasks
- Mediation can help if there are difficulties between colleagues
- Access to a mental health support group or disability network group
- Identifying a 'safe space' in the workplace where the person can have some time out or access support
- Provision of information to promote self-care
- Encouraging to participate in activities that support good mental health such as exercise, meditation or eating healthily
- Providing regular opportunities to discuss, review and reflect on people's positive achievements – this can help people to build up positive self-esteem and develop skills to manage better their triggers for poor mental health

Legal obligation

Under the Equality Act 2010, there is a legal duty on employers to make reasonable adjustments for employees with a disability to enable that person to continue with their duties without being at a disadvantage compared to others.

What is 'reasonable' will depend on the individual circumstances of the team member and their role in your team. Adjustments should be considered on a case-by-case basis, but factors you might find helpful to consider include:

- The effectiveness of the adjustment in preventing the disadvantage
- The practicability of making the adjustment
- The extent to which making the adjustment would impact on service delivery
- Financial and other costs
- The potential impact on other colleagues

If you are in a position of assessing a proposed adjustment from an employee with a disability captured by the Equality Act 2010, you should make clear the considerations that will be taken into account in reviewing whether an adjustment is reasonable and practicable to implement.

However, as above, we recommend employers do not follow a rigid approach to workplace adjustments. Adjustments for mental health are often simple and it is best practice to offer support to all staff, whether or not they have a formal diagnosis or a disability according to the legal definition.

Allowing staff flexibility in how and when they perform their role, in line with business needs, can reap rewards in terms of loyalty, increased productivity and reduced absence, and can help normalise mental health and disability in the workplace.

Mental health and the Equality Act

A team member doesn't have to have a particular mental health condition to be legally protected under the Equality Act and entitled to reasonable workplace adjustments. What they do need to demonstrate is that their mental health problem is considered a disability.

'Disability' has a special legal meaning under the Equality Act, which is broader than the usual way we might understand the word. The Equality Act says you have a disability if you have a physical or mental impairment that has a substantial, adverse, and long-term effect on your ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities.

Long term can be considered an impairment that has lasted at least 12 months, is likely to last 12 months, or (if your mental health problem has improved) that it is likely to recur.

If a team member's mental health problem meets this definition of a disability, they will be entitled to the protections covered by the Act - including the legal duty to provide reasonable adjustments.



**Creating
mentally
healthy
workplace
environments**

Mental Health at Work Commitment

Developed with the knowledge and expertise of mental health charities, leading employers and trade organisations, the Mental Health at Work Commitment provides a simple framework for employers who recognise the importance of promoting staff wellbeing.

The Mental Health at Work Commitment is a set of actions, organised into six standards, that any organisation can follow to improve and support the mental health of their people.

Through it you can examine your organisation's current mental health interventions and support and explore the activities your organisation might look to undertake to support employees who are:

- thriving at work,
- struggling in work
- who are ill and may or may not currently be in work

Signing your organisation up to the Commitment is free and by signing you will be declaring publicly that mental health at work is a priority for your business, joining a growing movement of over 1900 like-minded employers, businesses and organisations across the UK including over 1200 SMEs.

For further information about the Mental Health at Work Commitment and to sign visit

www.mentalhealthatwork.org.uk/commitment

You can also download our [PDF Introduction Guide](#) to the Mental Health at Work Commitment

1

Prioritise mental health in the workspace by developing and delivering a systematic programme of activity

2

Proactively ensure work design and organisational culture drive positive

3

Promote an open culture around mental health

4

Increase organisational and confidence capability

5

Provide mental health tools and support

6

Increase transparency and accountability through internal and external reporting



Managing Stress

Workplace stress

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) defines stress as ‘the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressures or other types of demand placed on them’.

HSE identifies six main areas of work design which can affect stress levels, which employers should look to identify, assess and manage properly. These six areas, also known as HSE’s Stress Management Standards, are:

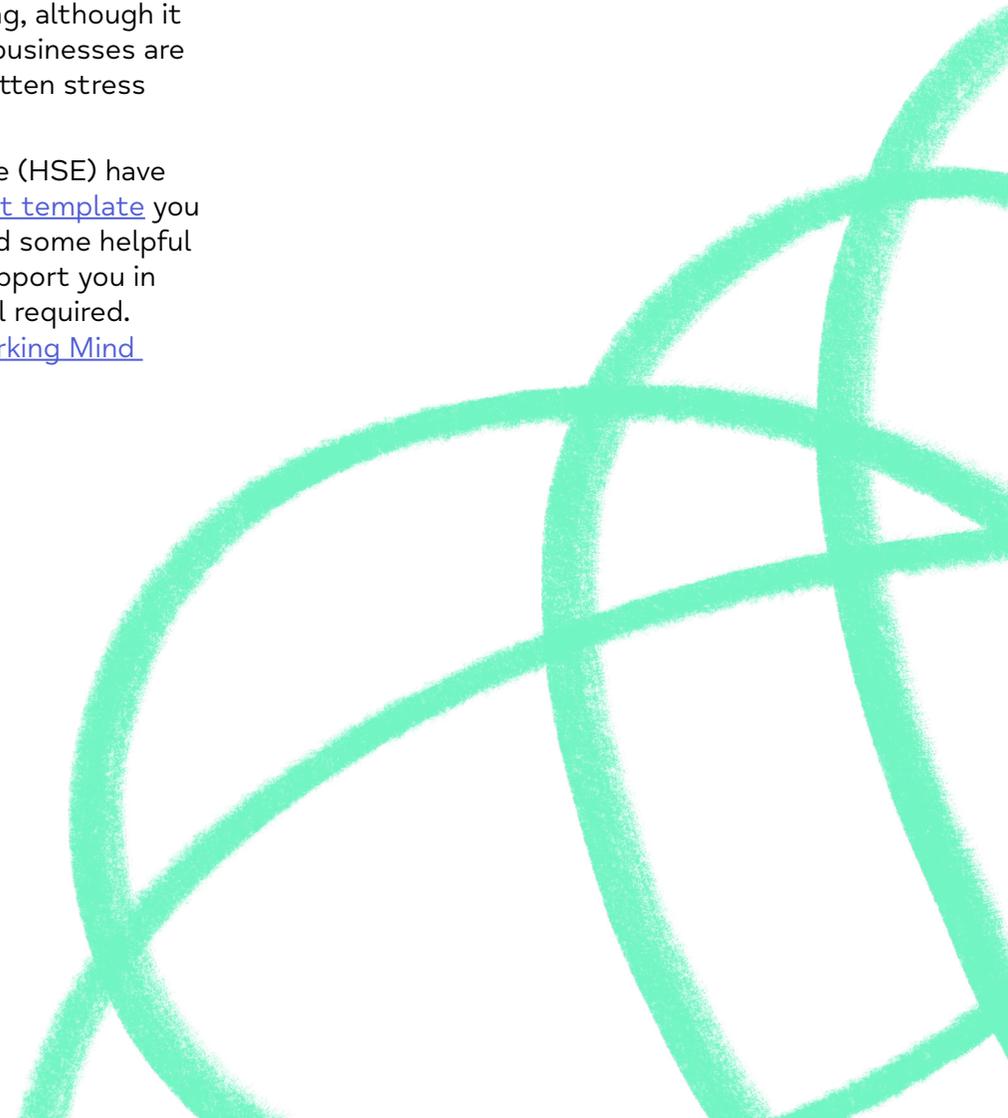
- [Demands](#) – this includes issues such as workload, work patterns and the work environment
- [Control](#) – how much say an employee has in the way they do their work
- [Support](#) – this includes the encouragement, sponsorship and resources provided by the organisation, line management and colleagues
- [Relationships](#) – this includes promoting positive working to avoid conflict and dealing with unacceptable behaviour
- [Role](#) – whether employees understand their role within the organisation and whether the organisation ensures that they do not have conflicting roles
- [Change](#) – how organisational change (large or small) is managed and communicated

Stress risk assessment

Employers have a legal duty to protect their team members from stress at work by undertaking a stress risk assessment and acting on it.

Organisations with fewer than five employees don’t need to document anything, although it is useful to do so, but all other businesses are required by law to produce a written stress risk assessment.

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) have created a simple [risk assessment template](#) you can complete and have produced some helpful example risk assessments to support you in understanding the level of detail required. You can find these on [HSE’s Working Mind campaign website](#).





**Sources of
support for you
and your team**

Mind Infoline

Telephone: 0300 123 3393

Email: info@mind.org.uk

www.mind.org.uk/information-support/helplines

Mind provides confidential mental health information services. With support and understanding, Mind enables people to make informed choices.

The Infoline gives information on types of mental distress, where to get help, drug treatments, alternative therapies and advocacy.

The line is open 9am to 6pm, Monday to Friday (except for bank holidays).

Side by Side, Mind's online community

[Side by Side](#), is a supportive online community where you can feel at home talking about your mental health and connect with others who understand what you are going through. We all know what it's like to struggle sometimes, but now there's a safe place to listen, share and be heard.

Whether you're feeling good right now, or having a hard time, it's a safe place to share experiences and listen to others. The community is available to all, 24/7. Side by Side is moderated daily from 8.30am to midnight.

Mind Legal line

Telephone: 0300 466 6463

Email: legal@mind.org.uk

Mind's Legal line provides legal information and general advice on mental health related law. We can provide information about:

being detained under the Mental Health Act (sectioning)

- mental capacity
- community care
- discrimination and equality.

The line is open 9am to 6pm, Monday to Friday (except for bank holidays).

Shout, text support

Text: SHOUT to 85258

Shout is a free, confidential 24/7 text messaging support service for anyone who is struggling to cope. The service is anonymous and won't appear on any phone bill.

Samaritans

Telephone: 116 123

Whatever you're going through, Samaritans are there to listen – 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Samaritans offer a safe place for you to talk any time you like, in your own way about whatever's getting to you. They won't judge or tell you what to do, they'll listen to you.

CALM helpline

Telephone: 0800 58 58 58

The CALM helpline is there for anyone who needs to talk confidentially about a tough time they are experiencing. Calls are taken by trained staff who are there to listen, support, inform and signpost you to further information. The helpline is open from 5pm to midnight every day, 365 days a year.

Mental Health at Work

mentalhealthatwork.org.uk

The Mental Health at Work website is your first stop for better mental health at work and key enabler for organisations in the implementation of the Mental Health at Work Commitment.

Curated by Mind, the Mental Health at Work website makes navigating the mental health landscape easy through: original content including a range of tips, ideas, examples and thought pieces on workplace mental health as it relates to different issues, people and industries; and a growing curated database of over 450 resources from a wide range of providers, to give people the tools they need to take action.

FSB Wellbeing Hub

fsb.org.uk/wellbeing

Running your own business comes with huge responsibilities and challenges, so it can be easy to forget to take the time to look after your health and wellbeing.

FSB have curated resources, downloads, and top tips from experts to help you get started with workplace wellbeing. Whether it's finding time between meetings with clients to get active, or sharing mental health resources with your team, you'll discover accessible ways to prioritise wellbeing.



We're Mind, the mental health charity. We're here to fight for mental health. For support. For respect. For you.

We provide advice and support to empower anyone experiencing a mental health problem. We campaign to improve services, raise awareness and promote understanding.

mind.org.uk

 **MindCharity**

 **mindforbettermentalhealth**

 **mindcharity**

 **mind_2**

Mind, 2 Redman Place, London E20 1JQ

Mind is a registered charity in England (no. 219830) and a registered company (no. 424348) in England and Wales.