Simple Guide:
Promoting mental wellbeing in the workplace

Healthy Working Lives

NHS Health Scotland

Promoting mental wellbeing in the workplace

Our mental wellbeing is influenced by a range of factors, including our work and home life. It takes into account the way we feel about ourselves, our sense of purpose, belonging and control. We depend on it to perform and work effectively making the management of the mental wellbeing good business sense.

Through the course of our lives many of us experience physical health problems, from colds and sore throats to sprained ankles and broken bones. Similarly, one in six British workers a year is affected by some kind of distress or mental health problem such as depression. The vast majority, fortunately, will recover quickly. But for many, the result is a lengthy period of sickness absence or long-term unemployment. In spite of these figures, nearly half of employers think that none of their employees will ever suffer from a mental health problem.

Our understanding of mental health has changed over the years and we know, with or without a diagnosis from a doctor, that our mental health can be good, bad or indifferent at different times in our lives. We know that good work is good for us. Being in employment can give us a sense of belonging, it can be supportive and provide structure, income and confidence.

Money matters
As well as having a huge impact on the individual, the cost of mental health problems to business is very high. From research commissioned by the Scottish Association for Mental Health (SAMH), the estimated cost of sickness absence for Scotland's employers due to mental health problems is £360 million.[1]

The Sainsbury Centre for Mental Health estimates that the cost of mental health problems to employers is estimated at nearly £26 billion each year.[2] That is equivalent to £1,035 for every employee in the UK workforce. We know that it can cost employers much less to invest in existing staff, compared with recruiting and training new staff. The cost and effort involved in making adjustments to support people to sustain work can be minimal; estimated on average at £50 per person. This can save the business considerable cost and safeguard the individual's employment.

'Presenteeism' is an increasing concern, with almost double the cost of absenteeism. It's defined as the loss in productivity that occurs when employees come to work but function at less than full capacity because of ill health. Presenteeism is particularly important in the case of mental health problems; one reason for this is that workers may fear stigma or discrimination from their employer or colleagues and may turn up for work even if feeling unwell.

Cost per average employee (£)
Sainsbury Centre for Mental Health

- Absenteeism — 335
- Presenteeism — 605
- Turnover — 95
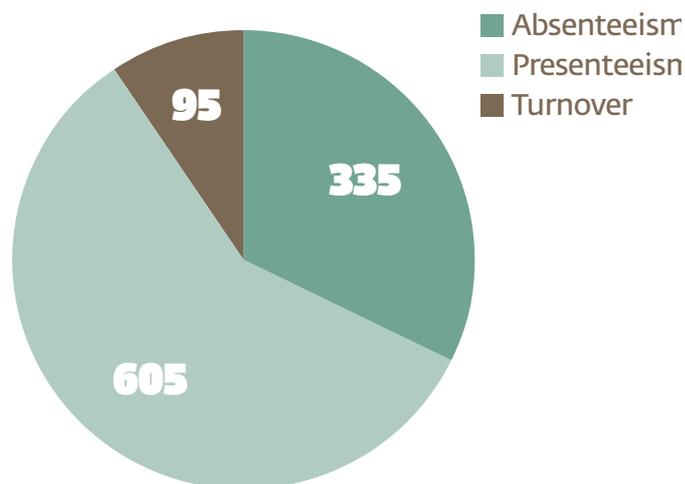
[1] SAMH, *Making Reasonable Adjustments at Work for People with Mental Health Problems*. SAMH, Glasgow

[2] Sainsbury Centre for Mental Health (2007) *Mental Health at Work: Developing the Business Case* Policy Paper 8. Sainsbury Centre for Mental Health, London

Supporting a colleague or employee who has a mental health problem

First things first; remember you're not a medical expert.

It's not your job to act as a counsellor. There are other people to do that; the person's GP, for example, should have a key role in supporting the person.

As a manager or colleague your role is to think about how you respond to the situation. The first and most important thing you need to do is talk.

It is also worth remembering that you don't have to manage this alone. There are usually people within your organisation who can help you manage mental health effectively and positively in the workplace or your workplace may want to invest in the support of an employee counselling service or occupational health provider.

- Ask the person how they are.
- If there are specific grounds for concern, e.g. poor performance, it's important to discuss these.
- Ask if they're getting support.
- Suggest they speak to others for support, e.g. family, friends, HR or their GP.

General benefits of mental wellbeing

There are a number of advantages to be gained from promoting positive mental wellbeing.

For the individual, the benefits of mental wellbeing can help:

- concentration and mental alertness
- memory
- stress management
- resilience and ability to cope with changes
- relationships with colleagues.

For the employer, promoting mental wellbeing among the workforce can:

- reduce staff absence from work
- increase staff productivity
- reduce staff presenteeism
- increase staff retention and lower staff turnover rate
- reduce staff stress levels
- enhance the reputation and profile of the employer as one who is seen to value their staff health and wellbeing
- make a contribution to the health of the wider community
- improve morale of the workforce.

Guidance for employers

As part of its role in promoting and supporting evidence-informed action for health improvement in Scotland, NHS Health Scotland produced the Scottish perspective on the NICE guidance *Promoting mental wellbeing through productive and healthy working conditions: guidance for employers*.

This commentary is intended for employers and professionals in small, medium and large organisations who have a direct or indirect role in improving health in the workplace. This includes those working in the NHS, local authorities, and the wider public, voluntary and community and private sectors.

It is recommended that employers should:

- develop an organisation-wide approach and integrate the promotion of mental wellbeing into all policies and practices concerned with managing people

- adopt a structured approach to assessing and managing risk around mental health and stress, including responding to those who may be at particular risk

- provide opportunities for flexible working and promote a culture that supports this – consider particular models for micro, small and medium-sized businesses

- strengthen the role of line managers in promoting the mental wellbeing of employees through supportive leadership style and managing practices. This could involve the following:

  - Promoting a management style that encourages participation.

  - Ensuring policies for recruitment, selection, training and development of managers recognise and promote these skills.

  - Ensuring that managers are able to motivate employees and provide training and support for development.

  - Increasing understanding of how management style can help promote mental wellbeing.

  - Ensuring that managers are able to identify and respond to employees' emotional concerns and symptoms of mental health problems.

  - Ensuring managers understand when it is necessary to refer to occupational health or other sources for support.

  - Considering competency frameworks, e.g. Health and Safety Executive (HSE), the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) and Investors in People as a tool for management development.

- collaborate with micro, small and medium-sized businesses; offer advice and establish mechanisms for supporting them.

Practical ways to promote mental wellbeing in the workplace

There are a number of ways in which an organisation of any size can promote mental wellbeing, some of which are very simple and inexpensive.

These include:

- raising awareness of what people can do to look after their own and others' mental health

- developing and implementing a Health and Wellbeing Policy that includes mental health

- identifying and addressing the factors that affect mental health in the workplace (for example carrying out stress risk assessments)

- having clear statements and policies on mental health so that employees feel secure in disclosing mental health problems

- consulting and communicating with staff on matters that affect their employment

- being aware of responsibilities around the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) and its impact on all areas of employment, including recruitment

- providing breakout areas for staff and ensuring staff take their lunch breaks and monitor working hours

- providing information about company support services, for example counselling, occupational health

- promoting the benefits of physical activity for positive mental health

- providing training on how to recognise and support mental health problems.

Additional resources

Healthy Working Lives can help you to promote mental wellbeing in your workplace. To find your nearest local team, please contact the Adviceline on 0800 019 2211 or visit **www.healthyworkinglives.com**

Samaritans can provide a confidential listening service for anyone who needs to talk. Phone 08457 90 90 90 **www.samaritans.org.uk**

Health and Safety Executive (HSE) provides information on work-related stress and mental health, including the management standards. **www.hse.gov.uk**

Work Positive is a resource developed to help employers carry out a risk assessment and to develop an action plan. Work Positive is a step-by-step process that will assist you in taking the necessary action to identify and reduce to potential causes of stress. **www.healthyworkinglives.com/ advice/workplace-health-promotion/ workpositive.aspx**

'See me' is Scotland's national campaign to end the stigma and discrimination of mental ill health. Their website provides information and free resources. **www.seemescotland.org.uk**

Choose Life is a campaign that aims to raise awareness and understanding of suicide among the general public, and more specifically, to encourage people at risk to get help early. **www.chooselife.net**

Breathing Space is a free and confidential phoneline service for any individual who is experiencing low mood or depression, or who is unusually worried and in need of someone to talk to. Phone 0800 83 85 87. **www.breathingspace.scot**

We are happy to consider requests for other languages or formats. Please contact 0131 314 5300 or email nhs.healthscotland-alternativeformats@nhs.net

Talk to the Healthy Working Lives experts **free** on:

0800 019 2211
www.healthyworkinglives.com