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An employer's guide to mental health in the workplace



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Introduction

Mental health is no longer just a personal concern; it's essential for businesses to recognise the profound impact mental ill-health can have on their teams and make a commitment to improving and prioritising their employees' mental health and wellbeing.

“If managers lack the necessary resources and support, they will struggle to address mental health issues effectively. This will ultimately lead to increased stress, burnout, and lower job satisfaction among employees. As a result, your business may experience a higher turnover rate, lower morale, and a negative impact on overall performance and company culture.”



Ian Nicholas, Global
Managing Director, Reed

Research by Deloitte found that **70% of managers have experienced organisational barriers to supporting their employees' mental health**, including in company policies, heavy workloads, unsupportive culture, and not being equipped with the right tools.

Investing in comprehensive mental health training and resources for managers is crucial. By doing so, organisations can create a more supportive and inclusive environment, where employees feel valued and understood. This not only enhances individual wellbeing but also fosters a more resilient and productive workforce.

In collaboration with SANE, this guide will provide you with the tools and strategies you need to build a workplace that is supportive, inclusive, and prioritises mental health, ensuring that every employee feels valued and supported.

We surveyed 2,000 workers...

To help inform this guide we commissioned a survey of 2,000 UK workers with OnePoll to gather insights into their experience of mental health in the workplace.



About SANE

SANE is a leading national mental health charity set up in 1986 by its Chief Executive, Marjorie Wallace CBE, following her pioneering articles, *The Forgotten Illness*, in *The Times*. These articles famously exposed the way in which society neglected individuals and families affected by mental illness and the lack of information, treatments and strategies for prevention.

The charity, which is independent of government, campaigns to improve the quality of life of people affected by mental illness.

It aims to:

- **Raise awareness and understanding of all mental health conditions.**
- **Fight to improve frontline mental health services for individuals and carers.**
- **Provide support, information and guidance through its helpline, SANEline (open 365 days a year 4pm-10pm), Textcare, and email and call back service.**
- **Promote and host research into causes, treatments and therapies at the Prince of Wales International Centre for SANE Research in Oxford.**

For more details, visit www.sane.org.uk

"There is often a conspiracy of silence surrounding mental health in the workplace, to the detriment of both employers and employees. Stigma surrounding mental ill-health can lead to reluctance to speak openly about it and potentially hinder career advancement and overall well-being.

It is important that people realise that treatment is available and seek help if they are struggling, and that employers receive support. A key factor in recovering from depression, anxiety or other conditions can be regaining self-respect and the knowledge that the individual is playing their part in the world of work."

Marjorie Wallace CBE, CEO of SANE

Understanding mental health


Just as we all have physical health, everyone has mental health, and both are equally important. Our mental health is not fixed, it can fluctuate based on life events and circumstances. And considering we spend approximately one-third of our lives at work, it's clear that our professional lives can have a significant impact on our mental health.

Mental health refers to our emotional and psychological state of mind. It affects how you think, feel, and act. It also influences how you handle stress, relate to others, and the choices you make.

Mental health encompasses both everyday mental states (such as stress and mood changes) and diagnosable mental health conditions (such as depression, anxiety, and bipolar disorder).

While mental health and wellbeing go hand in hand, wellbeing is a broader term that encompasses every aspect of someone's life and experiences, from physical, emotional, societal, and spiritual. It relates to how someone views their life and their place in the world.

It's essential to clearly differentiate between general wellbeing and mental health in company policies and resources. This distinction is important because some suggestions for improving wellbeing might seem trivial to those experiencing more serious mental health issues.



"Mental health is more than the absence of mental disorders. It exists on a complex continuum, which is experienced differently from one person to the next."

World Health Organization

Recognised mental health disorders

Recognised mental health disorders such as anxiety disorder, depression, bipolar disorder, eating disorders, schizophrenia, and personality disorders are complex conditions that require tailored approaches in the workplace.

Unlike stress and burnout, which can often be managed through workload adjustments and promoting work-life balance, these mental health disorders often necessitate comprehensive support systems, including access to professional mental health services, accommodations for treatment schedules, and fostering an inclusive environment that reduces stigma and encourages open communication.

Common mental health issues

Anxiety and depression are among the most prevalent mental health conditions globally, significantly impacting individuals' lives. In the workplace, stress and burnout are common challenges that can severely affect employees' wellbeing and productivity.

While stress and burnout can lead to serious health issues, it is crucial to distinguish these from clinically recognised mental health disorders, which may require professional diagnosis and treatment. Recognising this distinction ensures that company resources and policies are appropriately applied, without attempting to replace any necessary professional support.



"Each person's situation is unique, and a one-size-fits-all approach simply doesn't work. Creating personalised support plans means you can tailor your support to the individual's needs which helps them feel understood and supported but also promotes a more inclusive and compassionate workplace."

Fatima Khan, Director of Services, SANE



Anxiety

Anxiety is what we feel when we are worried, tense or afraid. It is a natural and common feeling that arises in response to certain situations and circumstances, characterised by fear or apprehension of what might happen, or what the future might hold. For this reason, it is often associated with situational circumstances such as illness, unemployment, money worries, moving house, exams or job interviews.

Anxiety can become a mental health issue if it disrupts your ability to live your life fully. It may be problematic if your anxiety is intense, disproportionate to situations, or leads to avoidance and distress. Even without a formal diagnosis, anxiety can significantly impact daily life and enjoyment.

Here are just some of the common symptoms of anxiety:

Emotional symptoms:

- Feeling tense, nervous or unable to relax
- A sense of dread or that the worst will happen
- Rumination (thinking about a bad experience over and over again)
- Feeling self-conscious and that everybody is staring at you
- Feeling that the world is either speeding up or slowing down
- Needing reassurance from others or worrying that they are upset or angry with you

Physical symptoms:

- Feeling lightheaded or dizzy
- A churning feeling in your stomach
- Faster breathing
- A fast, thumping heartbeat
- Sweating or hot flushes
- Teeth grinding
- Nausea
- Needing the toilet more or less often
- Panic attacks

Behavioural symptoms:

- Avoiding situations or activities
- Feelings of restlessness
- Difficulty concentrating
- Irritability
- Increased sensitivity



Depression

Depression is more than just low mood or feeling sad for a few days, it is a serious mental health condition where someone feels persistently sad and down for weeks or months at a time. Depression is said to affect one-in-10 people over the course of their lives.

Sometimes depression can be a result of big or traumatic changes in someone's life such as bereavement, job loss, having a baby, or relationship breakdowns, but someone can also be depressed without there being an obvious reason.

Here are just some of the common symptoms of depression:

Emotional symptoms:

- Continuous low mood or sadness
- Feeling bad about yourself, guilty or worthless
- Feeling hopeless
- Low self-esteem
- Not getting enjoyment out of life
- Feeling anxious or worried
- Feeling tearful
- Feeling numb to emotions
- Having suicidal thoughts or thoughts of harming yourself

Physical symptoms:

- Low energy
- Unexplained physical aches and pains
- Moving or speaking more slowly than usual
- Digestive complaints, such as constipation
- Changes in appetite

Behavioural symptoms:

- Reduced motivation
- Lack of interest in activities you would normally enjoy
- Isolating yourself from people, or the opposite and not wanting to be alone
- Loss of concentration
- Disturbed sleep
- Eating less or more
- Increased sensitivity

A few people with severe depression may also experience symptoms of psychosis. This could include hallucinations, delusions, or confused and disturbed thoughts.



Stress

Stress is your body's reaction to feeling under pressure or threatened. It can manifest both physiologically and emotionally. In small doses, and in certain circumstances, stress can be good, whether it's giving us the motivation to meet a deadline, or a boost of adrenaline to deliver a presentation.

But too much stress, or for too long, can have a real impact on your mental health, especially when it feels out of control. It's important to minimise stress as much as possible before it manifests into a more serious mental health condition.

Here are just some of the common symptoms of stress:

Emotional symptoms:

- Irritability
- Feelings of anger and/or frustration
- Feeling tearful
- Worried, anxious, hopeless or scared
- Racing thoughts or feeling overwhelmed

Physical symptoms:

- Digestive complaints
- Headaches
- General muscle aches and pains
- Skin problems, such as hives or rashes
- Feeling dizzy, sick or faint
- High blood pressure or chest pains
- Grinding your teeth or clenching your jaw

Behavioural symptoms:

- Difficulty concentrating
- Snapping at people
- Eating too much or too little
- Withdrawing from people around you



Burnout

Burnout is a state of physical, mental, and emotional exhaustion. It can occur when someone experiences prolonged stress and feels constantly under pressure. The World Health Organization has labelled it an “occupational phenomenon” as it’s synonymous with the workplace – however, burnout can be experienced alongside other life pressures and demands.

This is a widespread issue for businesses. Eighty-five per cent of respondents in our survey have experienced symptoms of burnout, and since it could be a risk factor for developing a mental health condition such as depression or anxiety disorder, it should be taken seriously.

Here are just some of the common symptoms of burnout:

Emotional symptoms:

- Loss of interest or enjoyment
- Feelings of hopelessness
- Self-doubt, feeling like you are a failure
- Persistent feelings of dread, worry and anxiety
- Feeling overwhelmed

Physical symptoms:

- Severe exhaustion
- Insomnia and sleep disturbances
- Headaches and muscle pains
- Digestive complaints such as feeling sick or reduced appetite
- Frequent illnesses due to lower immunity

Behavioural symptoms:

- Procrastination and taking longer to complete tasks
- Decreased output and productivity
- Becoming isolated and withdrawn
- Short-tempered and likely to snap at those around you
- Increased sick leave and absences

Hidden costs: the consequences of not prioritising mental health

As well as it being the morally responsible thing to do, prioritising mental health in the workplace is essential for business success. Here are just some of the ways that failing to support employees' mental health can negatively impact your organisation:



Reduced employee performance

Neglecting mental health can lead to reduced employee performance, as individuals struggle to reach their potential under stress.



Decreased productivity

When mental health is not a priority, decreased productivity often follows, with employees finding it harder to concentrate and complete tasks efficiently.



Increased absenteeism

A lack of support, or a culture where people feel unable to talk about mental health issues, can result in increased absenteeism, as employees take more time off to manage their mental health issues. They may not always be up front about their reasons for the absence so this may mean the real impact of mental health in your workplace goes under the radar.



Higher turnover rates

Employees leave in search of workplaces offering better support.



Lower job satisfaction

Ignoring mental health concerns can cause lower job satisfaction, as employees feel undervalued and unsupported.



Negative workplace culture

A workplace that does not promote mental health can develop a negative culture, where employees feel disconnected, and the general morale is low.



Poor employer brand

Companies that neglect mental health may suffer from a poor employer brand, making it harder to attract and retain people in the workforce.



Reduced organisational success

Overall, failing to prioritise mental health and wellbeing can result in reduced organisational success, as the cumulative effects of these issues hinder business growth and performance.

What does a positive workplace look like?

Before you begin making positive changes in your workplace, it's helpful to know what it is you are striving for. We have all heard about a positive workplace culture, but what exactly does that look like?

Take a look at this conversation. This is a great example of what a supportive workplace culture looks like.

Manager: Hi Alex, thanks for taking the time to meet with me today. How have you been feeling lately?

Employee: Hi, thanks for asking. Honestly, I've been feeling a bit overwhelmed and stressed out. It's been hard to keep up with everything.

Manager: I'm really sorry to hear that. It's important to me that you feel supported. Can you tell me more about what's been causing you stress?

Employee: Well, it's a combination of work and personal stuff. The deadlines have been tight, and I've been struggling to balance everything.

Manager: That sounds tough. Balancing work and personal life can be really challenging. Have you had a chance to take any breaks or time off recently?

Employee: Not really. I've been pushing through, but I think it's starting to take a toll on me.

Manager: I understand. It's crucial to take care of your mental health. How about we look at your workload and see if we can adjust some deadlines or delegate tasks to ease the pressure?

Employee: That would be really helpful. I think having a bit more breathing room would make a big difference.

Manager: Absolutely. Let's also consider scheduling some regular check-ins to see how you're doing and make sure you're not feeling overwhelmed. And remember, it's okay to take time off if you need it. Your wellbeing is a priority.

Employee: Thank you. I really appreciate your understanding and support. It means a lot to know that I can talk about this openly.

Manager: Of course, Alex. We're a team, and your health and happiness are important to us. If there's anything else you need or any other ways we can support you, please let me know.

Employee: I will. Thanks again for being so open and supportive.

Manager: Anytime.

The language used in this conversation is the key. It's so important to use supportive and non-judgemental language when discussing someone's mental health. Your words have the power to either uplift or harm, and choosing the right words can make a significant difference in how someone perceives and responds to conversations about their mental health.

You could say things like...

That sounds really difficult ✓

Is there anything I can do to help? ✓

You are important ✓

I don't have any answers, but I can listen ✓

If you want to talk, I'm here for you ✓

Avoid saying things like...

You can't be depressed. You are at work, and you look okay ✗

You are what you eat. Try eating healthy food ✗

Medication doesn't help. Stop taking it and you will feel better ✗

Just try to think positively ✗

Smile and walk tall ✗

REMEMBER: You are not a mental health professional. Your role is simply to respond, support, empathise and signpost to professionals for advice. If you are concerned, check with them if they are happy for you to make HR aware.

Five steps to creating a mentally healthy workplace



1

Assess
your
workplace

2

Implement proactive
mental health
strategies

3

Consider legal
and ethical
factors

4

Create a
supportive
culture

5

Measure success
and continuous
improvement



Before implementing new measures to enhance mental health in your workplace, you first need to understand your current situation. Start by conducting a comprehensive mental health audit. This will help you identify existing strengths and areas for improvement, providing a clear benchmark from which to measure your progress.

Step 1

Assess your workplace

By understanding your starting point, you can develop targeted strategies that effectively address the specific needs of your organisation.

Set clear goals

Setting clear goals is the foundation of any successful audit. Without well-defined objectives, the audit process can become unfocused and ineffective. Clear goals help you measure progress, allocate resources efficiently, and communicate the purpose of the audit to all stakeholders. Ask yourself; what do you hope to achieve with this audit? Are you looking to identify stressors, evaluate existing support systems, or understand employee needs?

Involve key stakeholders in the goal-setting process. This includes HR, managers, and employee representatives. Their input can provide valuable perspectives and ensure that the audit addresses the real needs and concerns of your workforce.

Collect feedback

Gather information through various methods such as surveys, interviews, focus groups, and reviewing existing documentation. Ensure anonymity and confidentiality to encourage honest feedback from employees. Collecting diverse data provides a holistic view of your workplace's mental health environment, setting the stage for meaningful analysis.

We've created a downloadable feedback survey to help you gather valuable insights from your employees.

The image shows a preview of a feedback survey form titled 'Employee mental health and wellbeing at work feedback survey'. It is divided into two main sections: 'Section 1: General Information' and 'Section 2: Job satisfaction'. Section 1 includes fields for Name, Job title, and Department. Section 2 contains four Likert-scale questions with five response options each (Excellent, Good, Fair, Poor, Very Poor). The questions are: 1. How satisfied are you with your current role? 2. Do you feel your job utilizes your skills and abilities effectively? 3. How would you rate your work-life balance? 4. How often do you feel that your workload is manageable?

→ Click here to download and use it within your organisation.

Decoding the data

Once you have collected and collated your feedback and data, it's time to review and analyse it.

Start by organising the collected data in spreadsheets, databases, or specialised software to categorise and store the information. This makes it easier to identify patterns and draw meaningful conclusions. Look for recurring themes in employee feedback, common stressors, and areas where employees feel unsupported. Then ask yourself "why?" to try and determine the root causes. This is essential in guiding your next steps.



Taking action

The next step to your mental health audit is to turn your findings into actionable steps – this is where the real impact of your audit can be seen. Not all recommendations can be implemented straight away, so take the time to prioritise them.

Using the following impact/effort matrix can be helpful in this instance. Prioritise the quick wins, and then the big projects, making time for the filler tasks in between.



Impact/effort matrix template



Now you are ready to **implement your plan.**

After completing your audit and pinpointing areas for improvement, you can now roll out proactive mental health initiatives throughout your organisation, adhering to the priorities set in your impact/effort matrix.

Step 2

Implement proactive mental health strategies



Here are some examples of proactive strategies that will help you create a mentally healthy workplace.

Early intervention

As an employer, you need to implement measures that seek to intervene before mental health issues escalate. It's about being one step ahead and creating an environment where employees feel supported and empowered to address their mental health needs early on.

One of the key ways you can do this is by providing mental health awareness training for managers and team leaders to help them recognise signs of mental health struggles, discuss these issues with empathy and understanding, direct employees to additional resources and support, and foster an open and safe environment within their teams.

Another way to be proactive is to integrate conversations of mental health into employee one-to-ones and reviews. This way, you can ensure mental health issues don't go unnoticed.

Here are some of the signs to look out for:

- Noticeable shifts in mood, such as increased irritability, sadness, or withdrawal
- Uncharacteristic outbursts or emotional reactions
- Making negative or highly critical remarks about themselves
- Being unusually sensitive to feedback or perceived criticism
- A drop in productivity or quality of work
- Difficulty concentrating, making decisions, or completing tasks
- Frequent unexplained absence or lateness
- Taking more sick days than usual
- Regular complaints of physical symptoms such as headaches, stomach issues, or chronic fatigue
- Avoiding social interactions and events
- Reduced participation in team meetings or activities
- Decline in personal hygiene or grooming
- Difficulty expressing thoughts clearly or coherently

If you notice any of these signs, it's important to approach the individual with empathy and offer support. However, while these are a selection of some common symptoms, mental health issues manifest differently in everyone. The key is to look for any changes in behaviour. For example, if someone is always sensitive to criticism this may be their personality type, but if they used to take it well and then suddenly you notice a change, this may be cause for concern.



Assign mental health advocates

Assigning mental health advocates within your organisation is a proactive step towards fostering a supportive and inclusive workplace. These advocates promote mental health awareness, provide peer support, and help reduce stigma. Start by identifying employees that are passionate about mental health and wellbeing. These individuals should be approachable, empathetic, and respected by their peers. It's best to select individuals outside of HR or senior leadership teams, as employees may feel more comfortable opening up to those not directly involved in productivity assessments.

Provide comprehensive training to your advocates on recognising signs of mental health issues, effective communication skills, and offering support and resources. Equip them with necessary resources, including mental health literature, contact information for services, and guidelines for handling sensitive situations. Additionally, ensure advocates receive extra support to manage the potential stress of their role, as they may bear the emotional weight of those who confide in them.

Make sure that advocates understand their role and responsibilities. Their primary role is to act as a point of contact for employees seeking support or information about mental health rather than providing advice and counselling. Advocates should listen without judgement, provide guidance on accessing professional help, and offer ongoing support. Additionally, they can promote mental health initiatives within the company, such as organising awareness campaigns, facilitating workshops, and encouraging participation in wellness programmes.

Ensure all employees are aware of your mental health advocacy programme and know how to access support. You could promote the programme through internal comms, such as newsletters, emails, and meetings, highlighting the role of your mental health advocates and encouraging employees to reach out if they need assistance.



Promote work-life balance

A healthy work-life balance is key to ensuring a mentally healthy workforce. In fact, our survey revealed that work-life balance (**34%**) was the second most common factor contributing to poor mental health, after heavy workloads (**36%**).

Maintaining a good work-life balance can be more straightforward in certain roles, while others may find their job responsibilities encroaching on personal time. This challenge has become even more pronounced in the remote and hybrid work environments that are now more common. With many employees having remote access to their work, the boundaries between our professional and personal life can blur, leading to an imbalance if individuals work beyond their regular hours too often.

In the remote/hybrid work setting, the convenience of accessing work from home can inadvertently extend the workday. Employees might find themselves responding to emails, attending virtual meetings, or completing tasks outside of their designated working hours. This constant connectivity can make it difficult to switch off and fully engage in personal activities, leading to increased stress and burnout.

To address this issue, employers should encourage clear boundaries between work and personal time. This can be achieved by setting expectations for response times and availability, having designated 'no meeting' times, promoting the importance of taking breaks, and respecting employees' off-hours.

Additionally, implementing policies that discourage after-hours work and providing tools to manage workload effectively can help employees maintain a healthier balance. It's also important to ensure that someone's workload isn't excessively high, meaning they cannot reasonably complete their work within their scheduled hours. Our survey revealed that more than one-in-three people felt a heavy workload negatively affected their mental health.

Implement flexible working policies

Offering flexible working is key in supporting employees' mental health and wellbeing. Reed and SANE's mental health research highlighted that among those who felt their employer was unsupportive when taking time off for mental health issues, **46%** attributed this to a lack of flexibility from their employer. And when asked what improvements respondents would suggest to their employer to better support mental health at work, the most common response was more flexible working arrangements (**37%**).

Flexible working hours, remote and hybrid work options, and other accommodations such as flexi-time, can significantly help employees manage their mental health by providing them with greater control over their schedules and work environments.

Flexible hours

Flexible working hours allow employees to adjust their work schedules to better fit their personal lives and mental health needs. This can include options such as staggered start and end times, compressed work weeks, or part-time arrangements.

By enabling employees to choose when they work, employers can help reduce stress and improve employees' work-life balance. For example, an employee who struggles with anxiety in the mornings might benefit from starting their workday later, while another who has regular counselling sessions might prefer a schedule that allows them to leave early.

Remote/hybrid working

Remote or hybrid work provides employees with the flexibility to work from home or other locations outside the traditional workplace setting. This can be particularly beneficial for those who find commuting stressful or who need a quieter environment to focus.

Remote work can also help employees manage their mental health by allowing them to create a workspace that suits their needs. Additionally, remote work can reduce the pressure of constant in-person interactions, which can be challenging for individuals with social anxiety, for example.

Provide resources and support

To have a supportive workplace environment, you need to offer a variety of resources and support to help employees manage their mental health. Here are some key initiatives that can make a significant difference:

Employee assistance programme (EAP)

An employee assistance programme (EAP) is a confidential, and generally independent, service that provides employees with access to professional counselling and support for a range of personal and work-related issues. EAPs typically offer short-term counselling, referrals to specialised services, and resources for managing stress, anxiety, and other mental health concerns. By providing an EAP, employers demonstrate their commitment to supporting employees' wellbeing and offer a valuable resource for those in need.

Providing an EAP is beneficial, but it's crucial that employees know how to access it, understand its purpose, and feel encouraged to use it when needed. Based on survey results, an EAP is the most commonly offered mental health resource in the UK workforce, yet it remains underutilised. While **29%** of respondents reported having access to an EAP, only **10%** have actually used one.

Fatima Khan, Director of Services at SANE said: "I can't stress enough how vital it is for businesses to offer an employee assistance programme. It's a proactive way to show that you care about your team's mental health and are committed to supporting them. By offering this, you're not only helping individuals cope with stress and challenges in their personal and professional lives but also creating a healthier work environment."



Wellness programmes

Wellness programmes are designed to promote overall health and wellbeing among employees. These programmes can include activities such as fitness classes, nutrition workshops, mindfulness sessions, and stress management training. By encouraging healthy lifestyle choices and providing opportunities for physical and mental wellness, employers can help reduce stress and improve the overall health of their workforce.

Toolkits

Providing employees with mental health toolkits can equip them with practical strategies and resources to manage their symptoms. These toolkits might include information on recognising signs of stress, tips for maintaining work-life balance, relaxation techniques, and contact details for mental health services. By making these resources readily available, you can empower employees to take proactive steps in managing their own mental health.

Internal webinars

Webinars are an effective way to provide ongoing and up-to-date mental health education and support – especially if your workforce is geographically displaced. These online sessions can cover a wide range of topics, such as coping with stress, building resilience, and understanding mental health conditions. Webinars can be led by mental health professionals and scheduled regularly to keep mental health awareness at the fore and provide valuable learning opportunities.

Mental health days

Allowing employees to take mental health days is a great way to support their wellbeing. However, only **13%** of respondents in our survey reported that their workplace offers this benefit.

A mental health day gives employees the opportunity to take time off to rest, recharge, and address any mental health concerns without stigma or penalty. Encouraging the use of mental health days demonstrates that you value your employees' mental health and recognise the importance of taking time for self-care.

Quiet spaces

Allocating quiet spaces within the workplace provides employees with a designated area to take breaks and recharge. These spaces can be used for activities such as meditation, deep breathing exercises, or simply taking a moment of solitude. By offering a quiet and private retreat, employers help workers manage stress and maintain focus throughout the day. Quiet spaces contribute to a more supportive and calming work environment.



Free mental health toolkit

To help you implement positive changes in your workplace, we have created a free mental health toolkit which includes:

- An editable mental health policy template
- A mental health and wellbeing calendar, featuring key national awareness days and suggestions for webinars and workshops
- A mental health checklist for managers
- A mental health and wellbeing feedback survey to help you gather valuable insights from your employees

Download now



When addressing mental health in the workplace, employers must consider both legal and ethical factors. Ensuring compliance with relevant laws and maintaining ethical standards helps create a supportive and fair environment for all.

Step 3

Consider legal and ethical factors

Legal obligations

Employers have a legal responsibility to provide a safe and healthy workplace, which includes supporting employees' mental health.

Under the Equality Act 2010, "a person (P) has a disability if a) P has a physical or mental impairment, and b) the impairment has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on P's ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities."

This means that mental health conditions that qualify as disabilities are protected under this law. Employers must not discriminate against employees or job applicants based on their mental health status and are required to provide reasonable accommodations to employees, unless doing so would cause unjustified hardship.

Confidentiality and privacy

Employers must handle employees' mental health information with strict confidentiality. This includes ensuring that any disclosed information is only shared with those who need to know in order to assist with adjustments, such as the employee's direct manager or human resources.

Adhering to data protection regulations, such as UK GDPR (General Data Protection Regulation), is essential when handling sensitive information.

Health and safety regulations

Employers are obligated to assess and manage risks to employees' mental health as part of their overall health and safety responsibilities. This includes identifying workplace stressors and implementing measures to mitigate them.



Ethical considerations

Beyond legal obligations, ethical considerations play a vital role in supporting mental health at work. Here are some ethical practices that will help build trust and foster a positive workplace culture:

- **Promote fairness and equity**

Ensure that all employees have equal access to mental health resources and support, regardless of their role or status within the organisation.

- **Respect and dignity**

Treat all employees with respect and dignity, especially when discussing mental health issues. Avoid stigmatising language and behaviours that could make employees feel marginalised.

Worryingly, of those who felt their employer was unsupportive when taking time off for mental health issues, **35%** of people surveyed by us said this was due to them being more hostile towards them on their return. It's important to encourage an open and supportive dialogue about mental health, where employees feel safe to share their experiences without fear of judgement.

- **Transparent communication**

Be transparent about your company's mental health policies and the available support. Clearly communicate these policies through various channels, such as employee handbooks, intranet sites, and training sessions. And regularly update employees on any changes to policies or resources.

- **Continuous improvement:**

Commit to continuously improving mental health support within your business. This includes regularly reviewing and updating policies, seeking feedback from employees, and staying informed about best practices in workplace mental health. Invest in ongoing training and development for managers and mental health advocates to ensure they are equipped to support employees effectively.

Mental health resources and support will be ineffective without a genuine culture of wellness and support. Authentic and effective initiatives require a culture that prioritises employee wellbeing.

There are no 'quick fixes'. It takes time, consistent effort, commitment from leadership, and active participation from all employees.

Step 4

Create a supportive culture

Commitment from leadership

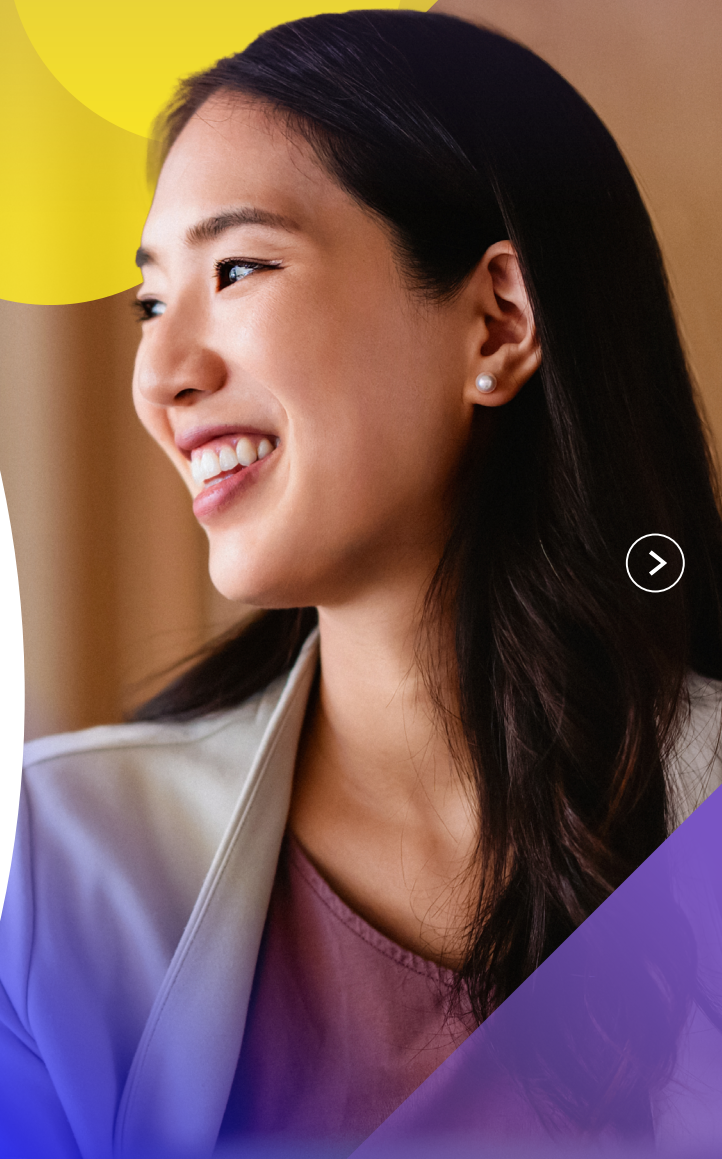
Commitment from leadership is the cornerstone of creating a supportive and mentally healthy workplace culture. Leaders should visibly champion mental health initiatives by participating in wellness programmes, attending mental health training, and openly discussing the importance of mental health. This sets a positive example and signals to employees that mental health is a priority.

From our survey, we observed that **one-in-five** respondents over the age of 55 believe mental health should be addressed outside of the workplace, compared to only **10%** of those under 55. This perspective, prevalent among some business leaders, can significantly influence their approach to mental health at work.

Therefore, it's crucial for leaders to possess both knowledge and understanding of mental health, as well as the business rationale for prioritising it, if they want to reap the benefits of having a mentally healthy workforce – for which there are many.

In addition to undertaking training in mental health awareness themselves, leaders need to also prioritise training and development in the wider business, particularly for line managers. Thirty-five per cent of respondents in our survey said they want their employer to invest in mental health awareness training for managers. It's important that all managers are aware of how to approach mental ill-health with their teams and know where to signpost them for additional support.

Companies should also consider having an HR representative in the boardroom. It's a great way to ensure that mental health is given the attention it deserves. This will allow human resources to ensure mental health initiatives are integrated into the overall business strategy – leading to a more positive and supportive workplace culture.



Cultivating a culture of honesty and openness

Honesty and openness build trust... trust fosters open communication... and open communication creates a safe environment where people feel comfortable sharing their experiences.

According to our survey, almost half (**47%**) of the 2,000 respondents said they felt comfortable discussing mental health at work. This alone demonstrates the importance of establishing trust and cultivating an environment where people can disclose and discuss their mental health. And this starts from the top. If leaders are secretive and uncommunicative, then this mindset can easily trickle down throughout the company.

How leaders can create a culture of honesty and openness:

- **Open-door policy**
Implement a genuine open-door policy where leaders are approachable and available to discuss any issues or ideas. This can help break down hierarchical barriers and promote open communication.
- **Transparency in decision-making**
Share the rationale behind major decisions and changes within the company. This transparency can build trust and reduce uncertainty among employees.
- **Lead by example**
Leaders should model the behaviour they wish to see by being open, honest, and transparent in their own communications. This sets a standard for the rest of the organisation; the phrase 'be the change you want to see' comes to mind.
- **Be visible**
Hold regular meetings or release weekly communications to keep all employees informed, engaged, and connected. Share the latest company news, publicly acknowledge and reward employees, and keep the company values and mission at the forefront of people's mind.

Building purpose and connection

In order for employees to feel truly engaged and connected with the company they work for, they need to feel a sense of purpose; that their work is having meaningful impact on the organisation, customers, or wider society.

This sense of purpose is essential. Employees who feel engaged and connected are more likely to experience higher levels of wellbeing, leading to a healthier, more productive workforce.



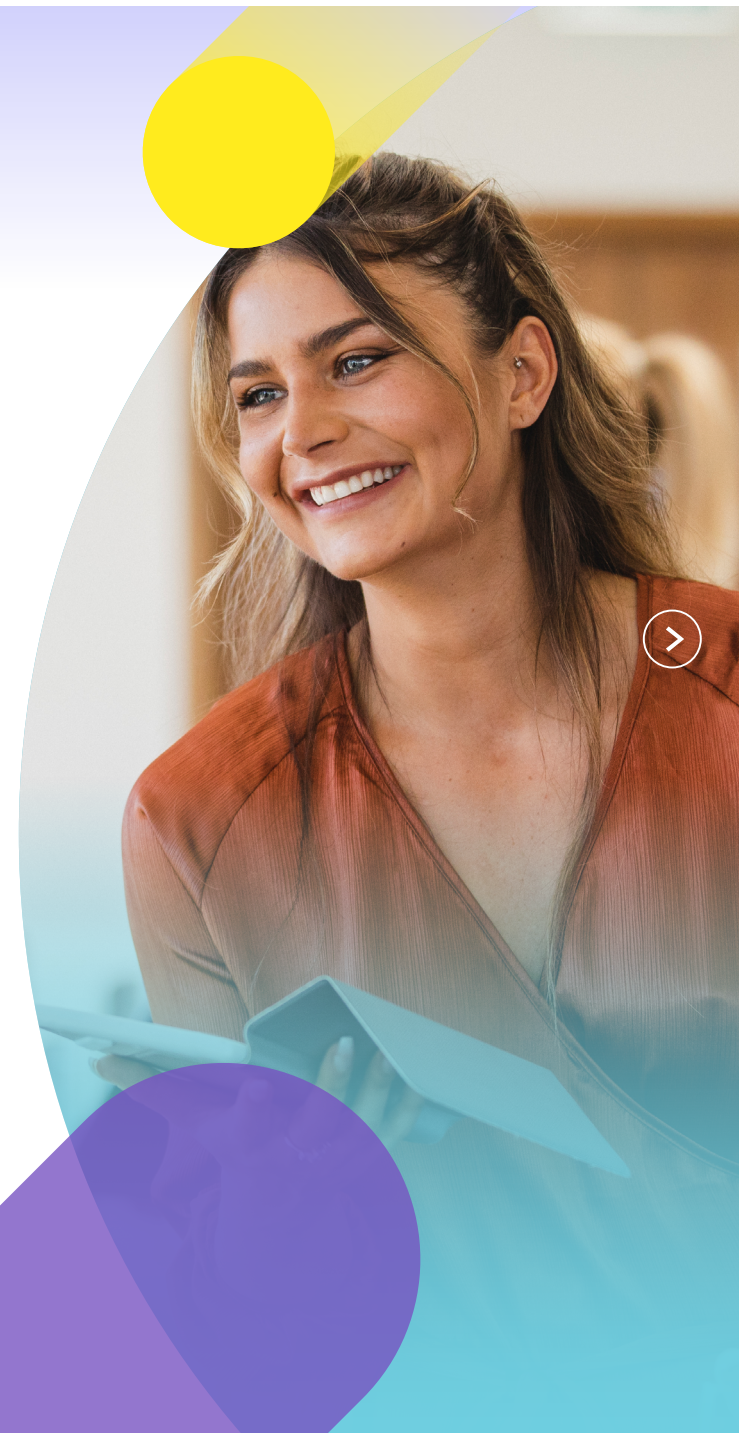
When employees understand how their roles contribute to the larger goals of the business, they feel valued and motivated. This can reduce feelings of stress and burnout, as they see their work as significant and impactful. Ensure that you regularly recognise and appreciate employees' contributions as this reinforces their sense of purpose. Celebrating achievements, both big and small, can boost morale and create a positive work environment.

Communicating a clear vision and mission also helps employees align their personal values with those of the company. This then fosters a sense of belonging and commitment, which is crucial for mental wellbeing.

Dr Benjamin Barnard, Deputy Head of Fundraising at SANE expressed: "Encouraging employees to participate in community service and social responsibility initiatives can strengthen their connection to the company and society. This involvement can provide a sense of fulfilment and reduce feelings of isolation, which is even more important in today's world."

According to research by KPMG, one-in-five people said they had turned down a job because the company's environmental, social and governance (ESG) commitments were not in line with their values, rising to one-in-three for 18-24-year-olds. Additionally, nearly half (**46%**) want the company they work for to demonstrate a commitment to ESG.

An inclusive environment where diverse perspectives are valued also helps employees feel seen and heard. This inclusivity can enhance their sense of purpose and connection, contributing to better mental health.



The final step in the process is to evaluate the success of your initiatives and ensure continuous improvement of your policies, procedures, and programmes.


Step 5

Measure success and continuous improvement


Measuring success

Measuring success can be challenging, particularly when it comes to aspects like company culture. However, there are some effective methods, both quantitative and qualitative, to gauge the impact of your efforts.

Quantitative methods of measurement

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1. During the initial audit, you likely gathered feedback from your employees. You can now repeat these surveys and compare the results to measure progress and identify areas for further enhancement.
 2. You can also monitor the usage rates of mental health resources such as your EAP, counselling services, webinar attendance, and wellness activities. Increased usage can indicate that employees are feeling more comfortable in seeking support.
 3. In order to gauge if your initiatives have improved business KPIs, assess metrics such as absenteeism, presenteeism, turnover rates, and productivity. Improvements in these metrics can suggest that mental health initiatives are having a positive impact.
 4. Compare your company's metrics with industry benchmarks to see how you stack up against your competitors and the wider employment market. This can provide context for your progress.

Qualitative methods of measurement

1. Gather feedback from leaders and managers on the effectiveness of the initiatives and how they have improved team dynamics and performance.
 2. Conduct focus groups from across the business, ensuring that there are representatives from all seniorities and departments. Allow them to be open and honest and listen to their feedback. These can be a great way to gather context to explain your quantitative data.
 3. Ensure that exit interviews include questions about their experiences with the mental health resources provided and their perceptions of how the company culture supports, or fails to support, mental health. Prioritise the feedback obtained from these interviews, as it is often the most candid and insightful, given that departing employees may feel more comfortable expressing their true feelings without fear of repercussions.
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Continuous improvement

Continuous improvement is essential because it ensures that the support provided to employees remains relevant, effective, and responsive to their evolving needs. Mental health is a dynamic field, with new research, treatments, and best practices emerging regularly. By committing to continuous improvement, you can stay up to date with the latest developments and integrate them into your strategies. This proactive approach helps to address any gaps or shortcomings in existing policies and ensures your employees receive the best possible support. It will also help you foster a culture of openness and adaptability.

Encouraging regular feedback and active participation from employees, will make them feel valued and heard. This ongoing dialogue can reveal insights and areas for enhancement that might not be apparent through your initial assessments. By prioritising continuous improvement, you demonstrate your commitment to mental health, building trust and loyalty. This, in turn, leads to higher engagement, productivity, and overall job satisfaction, creating a healthier and more resilient workforce.



Final thoughts...

In today's fast-paced and dynamic work environment, prioritising mental health is not just a moral imperative but a strategic necessity. Throughout this guide, we have explored various aspects of fostering a supportive workplace culture that values employees' mental health. From providing mental health resources and support to cultivating a culture of openness and honesty, the importance of leadership commitment, and the benefits of continuous improvement, each element plays a crucial role in creating a healthier and more resilient workforce.

By integrating mental health into the core values and everyday practices of your business, you can ensure that your initiatives are authentic and effective. Building purpose and connection, promoting transparency, and encouraging open communication are some of the key strategies that help employees feel engaged and valued. Additionally, having HR representation on the board can further enhance the focus on mental health, ensuring that it is prioritised at the highest levels of decision-making.

Ultimately, a workplace that genuinely supports mental health fosters trust, collaboration, and productivity. Employees who feel cared for and supported are more likely to thrive both personally and professionally, leading to a more engaged and successful organisation. By committing to these principles, you can create a positive and lasting impact on your workforce and contribute to a healthier, happier society.



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SANEline

Need to talk?

SANEline is a national out-of-hours mental health helpline offering specialist emotional support, guidance and information to anyone affected by mental illness, including family, friends and carers.

**Open between 4pm and 10pm,
365 days a year.**

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