

**THE PEOPLE MANAGER'S GUIDE
TO TALKING MENTAL HEALTH**

HOW TO
**HOLD
ON**

WHEN YOUR WORLD IS
ON HOLD





THE PEOPLE MANAGER'S GUIDE TO TALKING MENTAL HEALTH

WELCOME

This guide is intended to assist people managers in supporting their teams to stay healthy and feel comfortable to openly discuss any issues they may have in relation to their mental well-being.

Having our people “happy, healthy and here” will have a positive effect on them as individuals, on their colleagues and customers, and on the business as a whole. A happy and healthy employee is more likely to be engaged in the Company’s purpose and values, which means that this will be reflected in their performance and behaviours.

As a manager, you are often in one of the best positions to observe your team’s performance and behaviours and will, over time, come to understand what their “normal” is. You will also be best placed to notice if anything changes over time.

When changes occur and appear to be having a negative impact on an individual it is essential that you, as their line manager, show support and let them know that you are available to listen. If you already hold regular one-to-one discussions with your employees, it will be much easier to start a more sensitive conversation and raise your concerns. Even if you do not hold regular meetings, you should arrange to meet with the employee for a catchup to allow you to talk to the employee confidentially.



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WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO HAVE A CONVERSATION ABOUT MENTAL HEALTH?

As an employer, we have a duty of care to look after our employees' health and safety, including their mental well-being. Just as we would not walk past someone with a physical injury at work, neither should we ignore any concerns we may have about their mental health.

In addition, a mental illness may fall within the definition of a disability under the Equality Act 2010 if there is "a substantial and long-term effect (for at least a year) on an individual's ability to carry out normal day-to-day tasks."

If the employee is legally classed as disabled, their employer has an obligation to consider and introduce reasonable adjustments to support the individual at work, for example, reduced working hours, modified equipment, adapted start/finish times). Even in cases where the employee has not been classed as disabled, it is good practice for the employer to consider making reasonable changes in the workplace.

An early open conversation may enable the employee to continue coming to work when otherwise they may have eventually gone off sick. It could make all the difference to the individual and encourage them to seek appropriate help. In turn, this will benefit the individual, their colleagues and, ultimately, the business and your customers.



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STARTING THE CONVERSATION

Although it can feel awkward to start such a sensitive conversation and like you are prying, it is better to let someone know that you have noticed something is not right than to turn the other cheek and allow them to think that no one cares. In addition, if their ill health is having a negative impact on their performance or behaviour, it is always better to openly address any issues as soon as possible

The following guidelines will help you to consider when, where and how to start the conversation:

When:

- If you hold regular one-to-one meetings with your employees, it may make sense to raise your concerns in your next scheduled meeting unless this is not due for a while, in which case you should arrange to have a conversation sooner.
- The best time of day to hold the conversation will really depend on you and the needs of the business. However, it may be best to hold it towards the end of the employee's shift so if they become upset, they can go home immediately following the meeting without arousing the interest of their colleagues.



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Where:

- Sensitive and confidential conversations should always take place in a quiet and private area where interruptions are unlikely to occur (and remember to switch off your mobile phone). If this cannot be arranged, you could suggest going for a walk or a coffee if you think the employee would feel comfortable with this.
- If the employee is absent from work, you could offer to visit them at home or another location if they prefer.

How:

- Start the conversation by simply asking how the employee is doing. If they say they are fine, explain that you have noticed they are not themselves and you want to check that everything is okay.
- Allow the employee the opportunity to respond and do not rush them - silence can be a useful tool in encouraging them to open up in their own time.
- Show positive body language, active listening skills and good eye contact.
- Avoid trying to find a solution and forcing it onto the employee. Instead, support them in considering possible options and ask how you can best support them.
- If the employee is reluctant to speak to you, suggest that they may want to speak instead to a trusted colleague, a Company Mental Health First Aider (if you have them), HR or contact the Employee Assistance Programme (if there is one in place).
- If the employee becomes upset, you can offer to pause the conversation at any time to let them have a few minutes to take a breath or get a drink.



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QUESTIONS THAT YOU MIGHT WANT TO ASK:

How are you doing?

I've noticed that you've not been yourself lately, is everything okay?

I've noticed that you're not joining in the conversations with your colleagues/you've been very quiet recently, is anything wrong?

I've noticed that your work isn't up to its usual standard, are you managing okay?

I've noticed that you've been coming in late/early (or going home late/early), is there a reason for that?

Has something in particular caused you to feel this way?

Have you felt this way before?

What can I do to help?

What can the team do to help?

Is there anything else you can think of that might help?

Have you contacted your doctor or spoken to anyone else about the way that you're feeling?



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COMMENTS THAT SHOULD BE AVOIDED:

What's the matter with you?

What's wrong with you?

Your bad mood is having a negative impact on the rest of the team.

Have you fallen out with someone?

You should know how to do your job, you've been here long enough.

You shouldn't be making these mistakes.

You need to sort yourself out, this can't carry on.

We've all got the same challenges and everyone else is managing to just get on with it.

Everyone's got their own problems, but they don't bring them to work.

Your recent behaviour/performance isn't acceptable.



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ENDING THE CONVERSATION AND WHAT HAPPENS NEXT

If the employee has not already contacted their doctor, you should encourage them to do so. A lot of people do not like the stigma of being diagnosed with a mental health illness or being prescribed medication. However, as with any type of illness, they should seek appropriate advice to allow them to better understand their condition and how it can be treated.

We totally understand that trying to support someone with their mental health can be really difficult so, if you think you need some help, refer to Appendix 1 which sets out a number of useful contacts ranging from H&S, HR and mental health advice.

If the Company has a trained Mental Health First Aider, encourage the employee to speak confidentially to them, or provide details of the employee assistance programme if you have one in place. You can also offer details in relation to a number of organisations which are a useful source of information and advice for employees concerning mental health.

Where you have agreed to provide any additional support to the employee at work, this should be summarised in writing and shared with the employee. Ensure that all documentation/emails are stored and forwarded confidentially – the employee may prefer you to send any correspondence to their personal email or home address.



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ENDING THE CONVERSATION AND WHAT HAPPENS NEXT

Agree to meet with the employee on a regular basis to see how they are getting on and to review any measures which may have been introduced to support them.

If it appears over time that nothing has changed and the employee's performance or behaviour is still adversely affected by their mental health condition, it may be necessary to consider next steps. This could include requesting medical information from their doctor, referring them to an Occupational Health Advisor, formally managing their performance/behaviour or considering dismissal on the grounds of ill-health. However, each of these scenarios are complex and we would recommend that you take legal advice before initiating any process.



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APPENDIX I: USEFUL SOURCES OF INFORMATION FOR EMPLOYERS/PEOPLE MANAGERS/HR

If you feel out of your depth in trying to support your employee, the good news is that there are lots of resources and assistance available out there to guide you through, you are not alone!

Guardian HR (providing bespoke HR support to UK employers):

W: www.guardian.online
E: support@guardian.online
T: 0115 870 0150

Red Umbrella (mental health experts)

W: <https://red-umbrella.co.uk>
E: getwell@red-umbrella.co.uk
T: 0300 002 0061

Health and Safety Executive:

W: www.hse.gov.uk/stress

Mind:

W: www.mind.org.uk/information-support/

Mindful Employer:

W: www.mindfulemployer.net

Mental Health at Work:

W: www.mentalhealthatwork.org.uk/organisation/mindful-employer/

NHS:

W: <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/mental-health-helplines/>

Fit for Work Adviceline (free occupational health advice):

W: www.health4work.nhs.uk
T: 0800 032 6235



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APPENDIX II: USEFUL SOURCES OF INFORMATION FOR EMPLOYEES

Company Contact Information:

Name	Contact Number	Email address
Human Resources	[INSERT DETAILS]	[INSERT DETAILS]
Mental Health First Aider: [INSERT NAME/S]	[INSERT DETAILS]	[INSERT DETAILS] <input type="checkbox"/>
Health & Safety	[INSERT DETAILS]	[INSERT DETAILS]
Employee Assistance Programme: [INSERT PROVIDER NAME]	[INSERT DETAILS]	[INSERT DETAILS]
Occupational Health	[INSERT DETAILS]	[INSERT DETAILS]



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APPENDIX II: USEFUL SOURCES OF INFORMATION FOR EMPLOYEES

We have also collated some useful contacts in order to help signpost employees who may be struggling to find the most appropriate external support.

Financial Help:

The Money Saving Expert website provides plenty of advice in relation to the following topics:

- Financial product help:
- Mortgages;
- Loans and credit cards;
- Overdrafts;
- Savings;
- Pensions and investments.
- Renting
- Energy bills
- Subscriptions and other bills (including Council Tax)

www.moneysavingexpert.com/news/2020/03/uk-coronavirus-help-and-your-rights/

Citizens Advice Bureau:

W: www.citizensadvice.org.uk/

T: 0800 702 2020

Health:

If you have any concerns regarding your health, the NHS has some useful information regarding numerous conditions and their symptoms.

www.nhs.uk/conditions



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Emotional Support:

If you are struggling emotionally and do not feel able to talk to anyone, remember you are not alone:

Samaritans – Confidential support for people experiencing feelings of distress or despair

W: www.samaritans.org/how-we-can-help/contact-samaritan/
T: 116 123 (free 24-hour helpline)

Mind – Provides advice and support to anyone experiencing a mental health problem

W: <https://www.mind.org.uk>
T: 0300 123 3393 (Mon – Fri, 9am to 6pm)

CALM – The Campaign Against Living Miserably (for men aged 15 to 35)

W: <https://www.thecalmzone.net>
T: 0800 58 58 58 (daily, 5pm to midnight)

Relate – Provides relationship support

W: <https://www.relate.org.uk/>
T: 0300 100 1234

Cruse Bereavement Care – Offers support, advice and information to children, young people and adults when someone dies

W: <https://www.cruse.org.uk>
T: 0808 808 1677 (free helpline Mon – Fri, 9.30am to 5pm)



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APPENDIX III: MEETING NOTES TEMPLATE

ONE TO ONE MEETING NOTES

INSERT COMPANY LOGO

STRICTLY PRIVATE & CONFIDENTIAL

Employee: _____

Line Manager: _____

Date: _____

<p>Introduction: <i>(explain the purpose of the meeting with supporting information if required)</i></p>
<p>Meeting Notes: <i>(briefly record the content of the discussion - continue on a separate page if necessary)</i></p>
<p>Agreed Actions <i>(note any agreed actions, who owns the action, date/s for completion or review, potential next steps etc.)</i></p>

Date of next one-to-one: _____

Signed: _____

Date: _____
(Employee)

Signed: _____

Date: _____
(Line Manager)