



 access People

Let's Talk About Mental Health and Wellbeing

The first in our latest series of guides designed for employers and HR teams looking to support the psychological wellbeing of their people and put mental health awareness at the heart of business culture.

Mapping the landscape

Let's start with the facts. Mental health is now the leading cause of sickness absence in the UK according to the most recent statistics issued by HSE, the national regulator for health and safety at work.¹

More than half (55%) of all working days lost due to ill health over the past 12 months were due to work-related stress, depression, anxiety or other mental health issues. Our latest research also shows that 87% of HR managers say psychological wellbeing is the biggest health priority facing their organisation over the coming 12 months.²

This shows the scale of the challenge employers are facing, and the huge impact that poor approaches to mental health can have on both individual wellbeing and their ability to perform as a business. Clearly, ensuring positive mental health throughout your workforce isn't just the right thing to do; it also makes sound business sense.

The good news is that more and more organisations are realising the psychological health of their staff deserves just as much care and attention as their physical health. A vibrant, engaged workforce is the backbone of every successful business and senior leaders are now turning to HR to find new ways to protect the mental wellbeing of their people.

Our mission at Access is to ensure every person has the support and resources they need to solve personal challenges, stay engaged and lead a healthy life at work. We hope this series will prove useful if you're currently mapping out your own approach to workplace mental health and find yourself in need of some expert guidance along the way.



More than half of all working days lost due to ill health over the past 12 months were due to:

- Work-related stress
- Depression
- Anxiety
- Other mental health issues

¹ Source: Working days lost in Great Britain, HSE

² Source: Future of People Management Survey 2021, Access

Mental health at work

The fundamentals

Our mental health determines how we think, feel, perform and interact with others in the workplace. Most adults spend a significant amount of their time working, so it stands to reason that mental health issues may arise whilst at work, whether on site or remote.

For employers, it's crucial to prepare for both mental health issues caused in the workplace and any pre-existing issues which may impact employees at work.

Here are a few core considerations that organisations should be thinking about:



Understand key definitions

Employers and their staff need to recognise that mental health and mental illness are not synonymous. We all have mental health, just as we have physical health, and it can improve or deteriorate depending on a range of factors. Mental illness refers to conditions and behaviours that can be diagnosed by a standard set of criteria. Stress is not a mental illness, for example, though it can exacerbate existing illnesses or give rise to more serious conditions.



Fulfil duty of care

Just as with physical health, employers have a legal obligation to support their employees if the nature of their work is causing or aggravating symptoms. Risks must be assessed and employers will be judged on the steps taken to manage issues and safeguard against discrimination, such as providing specialist mental health training for managers and staff.



Keep stress levels in check

Although the majority of mental health problems people experience at work are not long-term issues and can be resolved through treatment, it's important for employers to be aware that both new and pre-existing conditions can become worse when aggravated by stressful situations or ongoing challenges at work.



Prepare for common conditions

Anxiety and depression are the two most common mental health conditions experienced by people at work. Though they can often be a reaction to difficult life events, bereavement or other health challenges such as menopause, these conditions can also be caused by work-related issues. Beyond anxiety and depression, employers should be aware of the broader spectrum of mental health conditions, such as OCD, PTSD, bipolar and schizophrenia.

Opening the conversation

Despite the heightened cultural awareness we've seen develop over the past five years or so, the stigma around discussing mental health at work still exists - and open discussion is the only way to beat it.

All too often employees are reluctant to disclose mental health problems to their HR representatives, line managers or senior leaders because they are unsure of the response they will receive, or whether it will be taken as a sign of weakness in their role.

The discussion has to start at the top and trickle down through each layer of leadership. HR teams must also be empowered with the tools and training needed to understand how to monitor mental health and wellbeing, encourage open conversations with employees and inspire greater confidence and resilience across their workforce.

Is your business looking to establish a more open culture around mental health?

Find out how **Access People** can support your organisation with our industry-leading range of employee mental health and wellbeing courses.

[Discover more](#)



Spotting the signs early

Unlike a physical injury, it's not always obvious when somebody is suffering with mental ill health. Being able to pinpoint the warning signs is invaluable in any organisation because it allows managers to offer support to staff sooner rather than later, which could have a huge positive impact on their health and performance.

It's not just managers, either. Great wellbeing cultures enable colleagues to look out for one another and discuss mental health concerns before they have a chance to develop into more serious issues.

Here is a short, non-exhaustive list of symptoms that may indicate an employee is experiencing poor mental health:

- **Uncharacteristic behaviour or absence**
- **Low levels of engagement**
- **Decrease in productivity**
- **Changes in sleeping or eating patterns**
- **Regular mood swings**
- **Withdrawn from social situations**

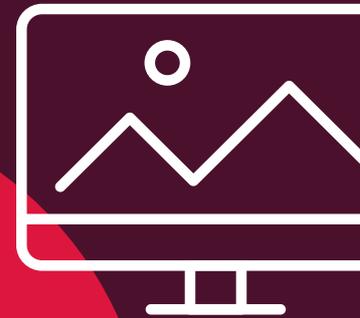
Symptoms differ from person to person, of course, and they don't necessarily mean someone has a mental health issue. Even so, they could still signal another problem which is important to discuss and support.

Why mental health & wellbeing training matters

If employers are to break the stigma around mental health and enable people to thrive, they must equip managers and staff with the knowledge needed to address and prevent the onset of disorders.

People need guidance if they are to understand the importance of looking after their own mental health and develop confidence in supporting their colleagues. By learning more about mental health, managers can promote greater psychological wellbeing, manage different scenarios and gain the ability to hold important conversations with staff when needed.

Fortunately, workplace mental health training has never been more accessible and eLearning content and resources now make it possible to engage employees with quality interactive content in a range of formats, from any location. Without this knowledge, it can be difficult for employers to develop a supportive network around mental health in their workplace.



Cutting the costs of absence

A recent study led by Lancet Psychiatry found that mental health training programmes lead to a significant reduction in work-related sickness absence, with an associated return on investment of £9.98 for each pound spent on such training.³

Are you enabling your people to thrive?

Workplace mental health has become a priority for all employers, yet the right leadership and investment is still needed to break stigmas and build a proactive culture that enables their staff to thrive. Often, there's a direct link between the transparency of discussion around mental health at senior management level and the willingness for employees to bring forward and resolve mental wellbeing issues.

HR leaders and line managers also require the tools and expertise to conduct practical and engaging one-to-ones with employees that may be suffering from mental ill health. Done right, this leads to a healthier, more engaged workforce, and stronger performance across the organisation.

Businesses now have a huge opportunity to get the jump on their industry by reducing absence due to ill health and demonstrating how much they value the wellbeing of their people. The way in which employers handle mental health at work is already a serious competitive advantage when attracting and retaining the best available talent – and it will continue to define the way we look at businesses from now on.





Mental health and wellbeing courses

Get in touch with one of our friendly learning experts to discuss your challenges and discover how our mental health and wellbeing courses can take your mental health culture to the next level.



Introducing Access People

Access People features an unrivalled comprehensive portfolio of HCM software applies over three decades of knowledge and innovation, supporting HR, learning and compliance professionals to deliver seamless people experiences.

Our all-in-one fully integrated suite serves up joined-up People data, but with the modular capability to work alongside existing systems to suit your business size and need. Modules include workforce management, talent management and acquisition, learning and development, risk and compliance and payroll and designed to be flexible, to scale with your business as it grows.

Our integrated HR solution helps you to create a culture of continuous feedback for employee development and growth and align staff skills and competencies to future proof your business.

[Find out more](#)

If you're looking for more useful mental health and wellbeing resources, stay tuned for our next instalment in the Mind Matters series which will be taking a close look at how employers should be managing the financial wellbeing of their people.

Contact us today

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