

Promoting positive mental health at work

A guide for employers



Mental health and the workplace

Poor mental health affects at least one in five people in Northern Ireland.

Mental health is the foundation for our health and wellbeing. It gives us the ability to cope with everyday pressures, manage changes in our lives such as the birth of a child, redundancy, retirement or bereavement and helps us to bounce back from difficulties.

Anyone can suffer from poor mental health. Mental health problems are characterised by changes in thinking, mood or behaviour, and include anxiety and depression.

In general, employment has a positive effect on people's mental health. It can provide a sense of purpose and self-worth and opportunities to meet people and make friends. Being in work can also help in the recovery of those with mental health problems.

Various factors in the workplace can cause stress or increase the risk of developing or worsening existing mental health problems. These include unrealistic workloads, lack of support, long hours, poor management practices, bullying or harassment, lack of communication, unclear role and responsibilities, poor work/life balance, the physical environment (eg lighting, noise, ventilation) and lack of opportunities for career progression.

Events outside the workplace such as bereavement, domestic violence, relationship breakdown, financial problems or physical illness/health problems can also impact on a person's mental health and their work.

Productivity, performance, attendance, staff retention and morale are all affected when employees experience poor mental health.

Why promote positive mental health at work?

Mental health problems cost the Northern Ireland economy over £790 million every year.

Between 10% and 25% of full-time workers may experience mental health problems.

Mental health problems can affect people at any age, but they often begin when a person is young and can last for a long time, so the cost from lost or reduced productivity in the workplace is high.

It makes good business sense to protect and promote the mental health of your employees. There are a number of benefits for employers:

- reduced staff turnover/better staff retention;
- improved productivity/performance/creativity;
- reduced staff absences and associated savings;
- compliance with the Disability Discrimination Act 1995;
- enhanced reputation as an employer;
- strengthened capacity of an organisation;
- improved working relationships.

Benefits for staff include:

- improved mental and physical health;
- reduced risk of mental health problems;
- support in recovery from mental health problems;
- improved morale;
- increased self-esteem and confidence;
- better working conditions;
- better work/life balance.

The workplace offers an opportunity to reach large numbers of people with information and support to improve their mental health and to reduce the stigma associated with mental health problems.



Good practice in supporting mental health in the workplace

It is important to promote mental health at both organisational and individual level.

Create a culture of openness

- Outline the organisation's commitment to the health of its employees through a mental health policy.
- Make employees aware that it is safe for them to discuss mental health problems without fear of job loss, harassment or isolation.
- Provide mental health awareness training.
- Actively support employees experiencing mental health problems at work and where necessary assist their return to work.

Recognise the work/life balance

- Show trust and respect, and acknowledge that people do have a right to a fulfilled life inside and outside work.
- Consider offering flexible working opportunities such as flexitime, part-time work, job share, working from home or term-time work.

Set realistic job demands

- Pay attention to the way a job is designed – vary tasks to avoid monotony.
- Make sure that employees have the physical resources and skills for the job.
- Encourage employees to take their regular breaks and leave entitlement.
- Create a culture where excessive hours are discouraged.
- Review work demands regularly.

Give employees a say in how they work

- Provide opportunities at the beginning of a project for employees to influence how work is planned and carried out.
- Allow employees some control over the pace of their work.



Provide employees with support

- Provide appropriate training, on the job support and mentoring schemes.
- Use appraisals to provide constructive feedback.

Encourage good relationships

- Develop appropriate policies and procedures to deal with violence, bullying or harassment.
- Create teams with the appropriate expertise and experience.
- Encourage honest, open communication at all levels within the organisation.
- Create opportunities for social activities.

Make the job role clear

- Provide employees with clear job descriptions and review at regular intervals.
- Provide new employees with a thorough induction.
- Ensure the roles and responsibilities of team members are clearly defined and understood.

Manage and communicate change in the organisation

- Ensure that employees are made aware of the aims and objectives of any change.
- Outline the timetable for change and keep employees informed.
- Develop a system so that employees can ask questions/discuss concerns during phases of change.
- Make employees aware of how the change will affect their work and provide training to support this.

If you have concerns for an employee's mental health or require further information on looking after employees who are experiencing mental health problems, supporting those returning to work following a period of absence or employing those with mental health problems, refer to the 'Help is at hand' section of this leaflet.

Mental health in the workplace: legal requirements

By
promoting
mental
health,
you are
complying
with
legislation.

Health and Safety at Work (Northern Ireland) Order 1978

Employers are required, so far as is reasonably practicable, to protect the health, safety and welfare of their employees at work. This applies to both the mental and physical health of employees.

Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2000

Employers are required to assess the nature and scale of risks to health and safety in the workplace and put in place appropriate measures to protect employees. This includes identifying issues that may cause or worsen mental health problems.

Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (DDA)

This Act defines disability as a "physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long term adverse effect on a person's ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities". A mental health impairment may include mental illness, other mental health condition or learning disability. It is against the law for an employer to discriminate against disabled employees or applicants. Employers have a duty to make "reasonable adjustments" to their working arrangements, practices and premises in order to assist a person with a disability to apply for, or do their job. Failure to comply with this is a form of disability discrimination.

Disability Discrimination (Northern Ireland) Order 2006

This Order strengthens and extends the coverage of the DDA, increasing the scope of legislation to include more people with disabilities. For example, people with mental ill health will no longer have to prove their condition is "clinically well-recognised".

The Human Rights Act 1998

For some employers, this act may also have implications for mental health issues at work, for example in relation to privacy and confidentiality.

Key steps for action

For successful change, consult, communicate and plan.

There are a number of key actions that employers can take to promote mental health in the workplace.

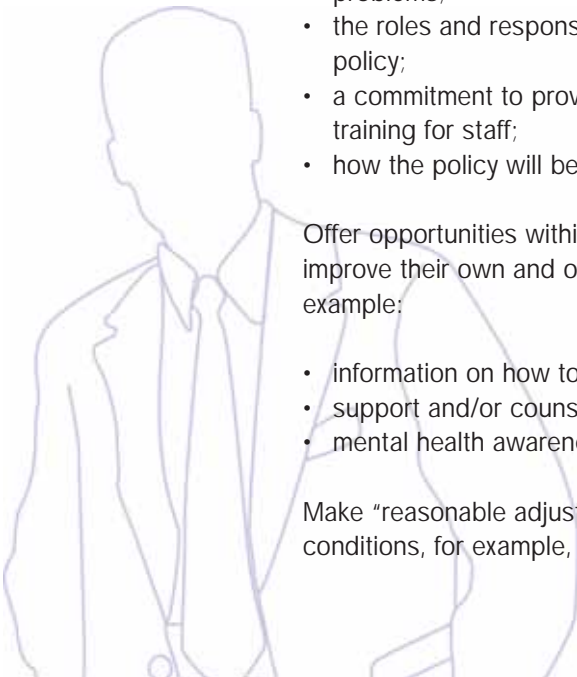
Consult and communicate with employees to develop and implement a policy on mental health and commit to addressing the issue. A policy should include the following:

- a definition of mental health;
- the legal obligations of the employer;
- the aims of the policy – to promote mental health and wellbeing, to identify issues that have a negative impact on mental health, and to provide assistance and support to staff experiencing problems;
- a statement that the policy applies to all staff;
- the commitment to consulting and communicating with all staff;
- the organisation's strategy to address mental health problems;
- the roles and responsibilities of staff in implementing the policy;
- a commitment to provide mental health awareness and training for staff;
- how the policy will be monitored and reviewed.

Offer opportunities within the workplace for employees to improve their own and others' mental health by providing, for example:

- information on how to look after their mental health;
- support and/or counselling;
- mental health awareness training.

Make "reasonable adjustments" to employees' working conditions, for example, flexitime or working from home.



Help is at hand

For further information on how to promote mental health in the workplace, or for information you would like to provide for employees about mental health, the websites of the following organisations are useful:

Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service	www.acas.org.uk
British Occupational Health Research Foundation	www.bohrf.org.uk
Equality Commission for Northern Ireland	www.equalityni.org
The Health and Safety Executive for Northern Ireland	www.hseni.gov.uk
Mental Health Foundation	www.mentalhealth.org.uk
Mind out for Mental Health	mindout.clarity.uk.net
Northern Ireland Association for Mental Health	www.niamh.co.uk
The Royal College of Psychiatrists	www.rcpsych.ac.uk
Rethink	www.rethink.org
Shift	www.shift.org.uk
Shaw Trust	www.tacklementalhealth.org.uk

Information leaflets on promoting mental health can be downloaded from www.mindingyourhead.info and are available from the central health promotion resource service in your local Health and Social Care Trust. Details can be found at www.healthpromotionagency.org.uk

Call Lifeline on 0808 808 8000. Counsellors are experienced in dealing with suicide, self-harm, abuse, trauma, depression, anxiety and many other issues.



**Health
Promotion
Agency**



Health Promotion Agency for Northern Ireland

18 Ormeau Avenue, Belfast BT2 8HS.

Tel: 028 9031 1611 (voice/minicom). Fax: 028 9031 1711.

www.healthpromotionagency.org.uk