



OUR MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING POLICY

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What's this policy about?

This policy is designed to give you confidence that we take the protection and nurturing of your mental health and wellbeing seriously. We'll do what we can to create and maintain a positive working environment and reduce workplace stress, and we need everyone's help to achieve this.

Our policy explains:

- our aims for protecting and nurturing your mental health and wellbeing at work,
- the detail of what we mean by common mental health issues such as stress, anxiety and depression,
- the practical steps we will take, and how we can all help reduce any impact of these issues at work, and
- our commitments to you about how we will deal with specific issues raised.

Is this policy part of my contract of employment?

No, and we can change this policy at any time, but if any changes are made, we'll always make you aware of them. We may also vary things like time limits in this policy, if we feel we need to.

Who's covered by this policy?

This policy applies to all employees, directors and other officers, workers and agency workers, volunteers and interns. We also require in any contracts with self-employed consultants or contractors that they comply with this policy, and we'll make sure they're given access to a copy. All these people are referred to as '**Staff**' in this policy.

Who's responsible for this policy?

In short, everyone. The successful operation of this policy depends on us all.

a) Directors

Directors (by which we mean the most senior people within our organisation) have overall responsibility for the effective operation of this policy and for ensuring compliance with our legal obligations.

b) Managers

All managers have a responsibility to recognise potential issues of work-related stress or mental ill health in the staff they manage, and:

- participate in the culture of open communication and encouragement,
- ensure that the staff they manage receive training,
- effectively plan and allocate workloads,
- monitor workloads and reallocate work where necessary.
- provide feedback on performance.
- ensure that staff they manage understand the standards of behaviour expected of them and others, and
- act on behaviour that falls below those standards.

c) All Staff

However, all staff need to take responsibility for the success of this policy. We therefore ask that you:

- familiarise yourself with this policy and go back to your manager with any questions you may have,
- act in accordance with its aims,
- plan and organise your work to meet personal and organisational objectives,
- speak to your manager if you experience or are aware of a situation that may lead to a mental health concern, and
- co-operate with support, advice and guidance you're offered by your manager.

Our mental health and wellbeing aims

We're committed to protecting your mental, as well as your physical, health, safety and

wellbeing and that of all those who work for us.

We know it's important to create an understanding, respectful and supportive workplace environment and working culture, to nurture positive mental wellbeing.

We're therefore committed to a programme of action, which includes:

- trying to maintain a working environment in which we all treat each other with dignity and respect,
- allowing you to feel confident in co-operating with and trusting your colleagues,
- identifying and reducing workplace stress and factors that can negatively impact your mental wellbeing,
- identifying, tackling and preventing the causes of work-related mental health issues,
- bringing these aims and this policy to everyone's attention, and
- encouraging everyone to co-operate to achieve these shared aims.

Our legal obligations

Protecting and nurturing positive mental health and wellbeing is also part of our legal duty to take reasonable care to ensure that your mental, as well as physical, health is not put at risk by excessive pressures or demands arising from the way your work is organised.

This policy therefore takes account of our obligations under the Health and Safety at Work Act etc. 1974, Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999, Employment Rights Act 1996, Protection from Harassment Act 1997, Working Time Regulations 1998 and Equality Act 2010.

Common mental health issues explained

It's important for us all to be aware of the symptoms of common mental health issues and the differences between them:

a) Stress

- Stress is the adverse reaction experienced in response to excessive pressures or demands. Stress is not an illness but, sustained over a period of time, it can lead to mental and/or physical illness.
- There is an important distinction between working under pressure and experiencing stress. Certain levels of pressure are acceptable and normal in every job. They can improve performance, enable individuals to meet their full potential and provide a sense of achievement and job satisfaction. However, when pressure becomes excessive, it produces stress.
- Pressures outside the workplace, whether the result of unexpected or traumatic events, such as accidents, illness, bereavement, family breakdown or financial worries, can result in stress. They can also compound normal workplace pressures.
- We recognise that what triggers stress, and the capacity to deal with stress, varies from person to person. Individuals react to similar situations in different ways.

b) Depression

- Depression is more than simply feeling unhappy or fed up for a few days. Most people go through periods of feeling 'down', but when a person is depressed, they feel persistently sad for weeks or months rather than just a few days.
- Depression is an illness with real symptoms. It isn't a sign of weakness or something that a person can 'snap out of'.

- Depression affects people in different ways and can cause a wide variety of symptoms ranging from lasting feelings of unhappiness and hopelessness, to losing interest in the things that a person used to enjoy and feeling very tearful. Many people with depression also have symptoms of anxiety as well as physical symptoms, such as feeling constantly tired, sleeping badly, loss of appetite and aches and pains.
- Many women (around one in five) commonly experience peri-natal or post-natal depression while pregnant or after having given birth.

c) Anxiety

- Anxiety is a feeling of unease, such as worry or fear that can be mild or severe.
- Everyone has feelings of anxiety at some point in their life – for example, prior to sitting an exam or a job interview – and feeling anxious at these times is perfectly normal.
- However, some people find it hard to control their worries. Their feelings of anxiety are more constant and can often affect their daily lives.
- Anxiety is the main symptom of several conditions, including panic disorder, phobias (for example, agoraphobia or claustrophobia) and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).
- General anxiety disorder (GAD) is a long-term condition that causes sufferers to feel anxious about a wide range of situations and issues rather than one specific event. People with GAD feel anxious most days and often struggle to relax or remember the last time they felt relaxed. GAD can cause both psychological and physical symptoms, including feeling restless or worried, having trouble concentrating or sleeping, dizziness and/or heart palpitations.

d) Other mental health problems

Other problems that people may experience, and you may need to be aware of, include conditions such as:

- bipolar disorder (a disorder in which your mood becomes extremely high or low),
- personality disorders (for example, schizophrenia – a psychotic condition where your experience does not match up with reality as other people see it),
- eating and body image disorders (for example, anorexia),
- self-harming,
- obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD),
- panic attacks, and
- issues arising from drug or alcohol abuse.

Practical steps we will take

We will:

- provide appropriate support and consideration to staff suffering from a mental health condition – whether caused by work-related or external factors – on a confidential basis;
- promote a culture of open communication, participation and encouragement, so that staff can develop their skills and confidence and feel able to raise any concerns they have about their work or working environment, through:
 - training,
 - effective planning and allocation of workloads, and

- ensuring feedback is provided on performance;
- use staff development, staff support systems and policies reflecting current good practice, to:
 - help staff understand and recognise the causes of mental health conditions,
 - tackle work-related factors that may relate to the causes of mental health conditions, and
 - tackle the impact of external issues on mental health at work;
- provide a workplace free from harassment, bullying and victimisation;
- address violence, aggression and other forms of inappropriate behaviour through disciplinary action;
- ensure risk assessments include or specifically address mental health;
- maintain an appraisal process to ensure the suitability of workloads, supported by our Capability Procedure;
- facilitate requests for flexible working where reasonably practicable in accordance with our Flexible Working Policy; and
- communicate effectively when going through workplace changes.

How we will deal with specific mental health issues raised

If you believe you are suffering from a mental health issue, please raise this with your manager in the first instance. If you don't feel able to talk to your manager for any reason, please consider talking to a Director to tell them about your concerns.

Once we're aware of an issue affecting your mental health, we'll take steps to try to deal with it, which may include any of the following:

- reviewing your workload, reallocating some of your work, monitoring your future workload or possibly moving you to another role,
- making other temporary or permanent adjustments to your work, such as considering a change of working hours/flexible working or a change to your tasks and/or responsibilities,
- where appropriate, carrying out an investigation under our Disciplinary and/or Grievance Procedures or our Anti-harassment and Bullying Policy (in the case of bullying/harassment, etc. towards you),
- asking for medical advice, perhaps from your GP or any other medical specialist treating you, or from our medical advisers,
- applying our Sickness Absence Policy, for example to ensure we organise a safe return to work for you, and
- applying our Capability Procedure, in order to support you in carrying out your role.

If you are absent because of a mental health issue

Where you need to be off work because of any mental health issue, please follow the sickness absence reporting procedure contained in our Sickness Absence Policy. That policy, and our Capability Procedure, both apply in the same way as for any other illness.

Confidentiality

Confidentiality is clearly an important part of this policy. Every member of staff is responsible for observing the high level of confidentiality that is required, whether they are suffering from

a mental health problem, supporting a colleague who is suffering from a mental health problem, or because they are otherwise involved in the operation of a policy or procedure dealing with mental health.

Any breach of confidentiality may give rise to disciplinary action.

However, there are occasions when matters reported by a member of staff suffering from mental health problems may have to be disclosed to third parties. Examples of when this might be appropriate include:

- where duties need to be reallocated within a team, or
- where a disciplinary or other investigation or proceeding is taking place because of a report of bullying or misconduct.

If this is the case, matters will be discussed with the member of staff concerned before any action is taken.

Protection for those reporting mental health problems or assisting with an investigation

We will protect you from any form of intimidation or victimisation if you:

- report that you are suffering from a mental health condition,
- support a colleague in making such a report, or
- participate in any investigation connected with this policy in good faith.

If you feel that you've been subjected to any such intimidation or victimisation, please seek support from your manager.

Alternatively, or in addition, you can make use of our Anti-harassment and Bullying Policy, or raise a complaint in accordance with our Grievance Procedure.

Any member of staff who is, after investigation, found to have acted in bad faith, or to have provided false information, will be subject to action under our Disciplinary Procedure.

Sources of information and support

There are also a number of external organisations that might be able to offer you specialist support with mental health issues, and we've listed some here:

- www.mind.org.uk
- www.nhs.uk/using-the-nhs/nhs-services/mental-health-services/how-to-access-mental-health-services/
- www.mentalhealth.org.uk/

And that's it... for now

We understand that things change, so we'll continue to review the effectiveness of this policy and make sure it's achieving its objectives.

In particular, we'll monitor the development of good practice in relation to mental health in the workplace and recognising symptoms of stress.