

Employee mental health support: how to help your workforce

Do I really need to be concerned about my employees' mental health?

It seems like everyone's talking about their mental health these days, but what about in the workplace? Unfortunately, your employees' mental health difficulties don't stop when they start work – they may even get worse.

As many as 1 in 4 employees is affected by anxiety, low mood and stress. And this can be made worse by what goes on at work. Which means they need support in the workplace.

So as an employer, supporting your employees' mental health is no longer an option – it's a necessity.

Can you afford not to support your employees' mental health?

According to the mental health charity, [Mind](#), around 300,000 people lose their jobs each year because of a mental health issue. If you think that's a big number, try £74-99 billion! Because that's what it costs the UK economy a year.

Clearly, supporting your employees' mental health is good for business *and* productivity. But it's not just about the bottom line. Don't we all want to work in an atmosphere where it's "ok to be not ok" and where we feel secure enough to ask for help if we're struggling?

If you've answered yes to those two questions (and who wouldn't?), keep reading to find out how to create a workplace that provides a positive and supportive environment for your workforce.

So how can I support my employees' mental health?

Well, a good way to start is by answering some questions.

Take a long, hard, look at your organisation. Do you know if any of your employees are struggling with their mental health? How many? Do you know if any of them have been unable to work because of it?

If you can't answer these questions, you need to act now to improve things. And for you to find the answers to these questions, your employees will need to feel safe enough to talk about their mental health.

Why should employees be encouraged to talk about their mental health?

Isn't it funny how sporty types (or wannabees) think nothing of coming into work with a bandage, a sling or even a pair of crutches? Some people see it as a badge of honour – it certainly gets you attention.

But it's not the same when someone is suffering from anxiety or depression because there's so much stigma associated with mental health problems. And a lot of the stigma comes from ignorance and stereotyping.

The best way to reduce the stigma is to make talking about your mental health as normal as talking about your bad back or a hangover!

And to create a more open and supportive atmosphere in your workplace, it's not just the employees who need to be having the conversations – managers need to talk about it, too!

How can employers encourage employees to talk about their mental health problems?

If the drive to normalise the whole topic of mental health and mental ill-health has to come from the top, it's important that you are approachable and available to your employees.

If they think you're genuinely interested, they're more likely to trust you with what is, after all, some very personal information.

If an employee seems to be struggling, finding a quiet place (maybe not in the workplace) and then asking the right questions is crucial - here are a few suggestions.

- How are you doing at the moment?

- You seem a bit down. Is everything alright?
- Some of your reports have been late, which is unusual for you. Is everything ok?
- Can I do anything to help?
- Is there anything you need?

Using open questions like these gives the employee the option to say as much, or as little, as they wish. There's no hidden agenda here. It's just about opening up the line of communication because building trust can take time.

What else can I do to support my workforce's mental health?

Making sure that the overall culture of your workplace is supportive and that it promotes good mental health is your top priority. If it's not right, there is both a business and a human cost.

- Again, you need to lead by example by adopting healthy working habits such as: taking breaks, going home at a reasonable hour and taking annual leave.
- Inform yourself about mental health and ensure that your organisation has a policy in place that is up-to-date and fit for purpose.
- Treat your employees as individuals by playing to their strengths when tasks are allocated.
- Use praise to celebrate their achievements. What about rewards for good work?
- Use a coaching style of management and encourage employee input in decisions which directly affect their work. Let them know how they fit into the overall structure of your organisation and why they matter to its success.
- Create a learning culture by ensuring that your employees are well-trained and equipped to do their job to the best of their ability. Investing in human capital is always worth it.

- Why not organise some outreach work with a local mental health charity? By setting up a fundraiser, for example, you get all the benefits of doing the activity, plus the opportunity to meet people who are directly affected by mental health difficulties. They are the real experts you and your workforce need to get to know.

And what about me?

Leading by example also means remembering not to neglect your own mental health needs. After all, nobody's perfect – in fact, striving for perfection can be an underlying cause of many mental health problems.

On the other hand, admitting to insecurity or anxiety can create a strong bond and a sense of common purpose in your workplace – we're in this together.

Of course, it's not a quick fix but don't be discouraged. There is more help out there if you know where to look.

SupportRoom

Here, at [SupportRoom](#), we offer employee therapy for small to medium businesses. Our platform allows employees to receive therapy on-demand from a dedicated, qualified therapist.

Our SME Employee Support platform is designed to give insightful data that allows your employees to track their progress and monitor their own mental and physical health.