Coronavirus and mental health at work

During the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, you may be working from home, leaving your home to go to work or on 'furlough' (temporary leave).

In any of these situations, you may find it hard to look after your mental health and wellbeing. For example, you may be working longer hours, be under pressure, have childcare responsibilities or find it difficult to cope with minimal social contact.

There is no right or wrong way to feel in your situation. But some common feelings may include stress or anxiety.

If you already have a mental health problem, it's particularly important to talk to your manager about how you're feeling. Your manager may be able to give you extra support.

To help support your wellbeing you can:

- stay in contact with people – talk to colleagues or friends about how you're feeling
- have a routine so you plan in advance what you'll be doing each day
- keep active and exercise
- make time for activities you enjoy
- reflect on what helps you feel more positive and what does not

1. Working from home

Working from home can be an isolating and challenging time, particularly as you may need to adjust to this new way of working.

You might find it helpful to keep in touch with other people at work. You may want to think of ways you can keep social contact, for example by having coffee breaks or doing online social activities to talk about things outside of work.

Talk to your manager

It's a good idea to talk to your manager about your situation and how you're doing. They can help you work through problems, for example with managing your workload or working around childcare responsibilities.

You and your manager may want to discuss changing your working pattern to suit your situation. For example, your manager may change your start and finish time.

You can also let your manager know what kind of contact you'd like. For example, talking over the phone or through video meetings or having online social events with your team.

If you're going to work outside of your home

If you have any concerns around how health and safety at work may affect your mental health and wellbeing, you should raise them with your manager. They should listen to your concerns and be supportive.

Find out more about working safely and social distancing during coronavirus.

Support available through work

You can check with your employer what support is available if you have concerns about your mental health.

Employers have a 'duty of care'. This means they must do all they reasonably can to support your health, safety and wellbeing.

For example, some workplaces offer counselling. If it's offered it'll usually be through a scheme known as an Employee Assistance Programme (EAP).

Your workplace might also:

- have a mental health 'champion' – someone at work who leads on changing attitudes to mental health
- offer support in other ways, such as a mental health support group, or mental health network with other businesses or organisations

Find out more about the law and mental health.

Staff may need additional mental health support during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, particularly if they already have mental health problems.

In some cases staff may need support such as:

- time off
- reasonable adjustments

You'll need to be understanding towards the concerns and needs of your staff while they work in new or unexpected ways. For example, working from home or managing childcare while working.

You should also be understanding if staff need to take time off to look after someone else.

When talking about any difficult changes in your workplace, for example putting staff on 'furlough' (temporary leave), you should deal with matters sensitively. Staff may be feeling anxious or stressed so it's important to communicate in a clear and calm way.

2. Supporting your team

You should be approachable, available and encourage team members to talk to you if they're having problems.

Your management style should suit the needs of each person. For example, you could ask team members if they prefer to talk over the phone, through video meetings or by email.

You should keep in regular contact with your team to check how they're coping.

You should check:

- how they're feeling
- how their work is going and if they need support
- if they have any concerns about safety if they're leaving the home to go to work
- if they have the right set up when working from home

You can use 'Wellness Action Plans' to put steps in place to support your team's mental health. Find out more about Wellness Action Plans from Mind.

You should also make sure your team has realistic targets and clear priorities. Team members should still feel supported and motivated at work.

Supporting furloughed staff

It's a good idea to ask staff if they'd like to keep in touch while they're on furlough. You should agree how often you'll catch up depending on their needs. Staying in contact with employees can help them feel connected with their workplace. It's also a chance to ask them how they're doing.

Spotting possible signs of a mental health problem

Not everyone will show obvious signs of a mental health problem and it's important not to make assumptions. But some possible signs at work include:

- appearing tired, anxious or withdrawn
- increase in sickness absence or being late to work
- changes in the standard of their work or focus on tasks
- being less interested in tasks they previously enjoyed
- changes in usual behaviour, mood or how the person behaves with the people they work with

It's harder to spot these signs if employees are working from home, you have minimal contact with them or when many are feeling a heightened level of anxiety and stress. It's important to regularly ask your staff how they're doing and create an environment where they feel able to be open and honest about how they're feeling.

The sooner you become aware that someone you manage is experiencing a mental health problem, the sooner you can provide help and support.

Talking to someone experiencing a mental health problem

Knowing how to approach and talk to a team member who has a mental health problem may seem difficult.

If you believe a team member may be experiencing a mental health problem, you should:

- arrange a conversation as soon as possible, if appropriate
- make sure you talk to them in private
- be flexible about when and where
- approach the conversation in a positive and supportive way

If a team member talks to you about their mental health

It may be difficult for them to take this step. So it's important you're calm, patient, supportive and reassuring.

When they approach you, you should thank them for opening up to you and give them as much time as they need.

During the conversation, you should:

- listen carefully to what they say
- try to identify what the cause is, for example by keeping questions open ended
- think about ways to help, for example if there's any support they can get at work
- reassure them – let them know you'll help them get the support they need

If either of you need to think about what's been discussed before any decisions are made, you should agree to have some time to think things through.

Being clear about confidentiality

You should reassure the person that you will not share anything they tell you with anyone else without their permission, unless there's a good reason to. If there is, you should be clear about who you'll share it with.

Reasonable adjustments for someone with a disability

If the person's mental health problem is considered a disability under the law, your workplace must consider making reasonable adjustments to help them carry out their job without being at a disadvantage.

Find out more about mental health legal rights and responsibilities.

Getting support for yourself

You may find that you need advice and support for your own mental health. For example, you may be under more pressure than usual to support your team and resolve problems.

It may be helpful to talk things through with someone who can support you, for example:

- your own manager
- someone else at work
- through a mental health 'champion' or network at work
- a counsellor, if you can access one through work

If your workplace offers counselling, it'll usually be through a scheme known as an Employee Assistance Programme (EAP).

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Employers have a 'duty of care'. This means you must do all you reasonably can to support employees' health, safety and wellbeing. This includes:

- making sure staff can work safely and healthily
- protecting staff from discrimination, for example making sure reasonable adjustments are considered for employees with a

disability
- carrying out risk assessments

During the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, you should do all you reasonably can to encourage positive mental health. For example, it might be helpful to:

- arrange mental health training for managers and staff
- appoint mental health 'champions' who staff can talk to
- promote existing wellbeing support, such as counselling

You should also remind managers to communicate regularly with their team and support them if they need to have sensitive conversations with team members.

[Find out more about mental health and the law](#).

3. Communication during this time

It's important to communicate regularly and openly with staff because the pandemic is changing the way we work and staff need to adapt quickly. Staff may be feeling worried so you should reassure employees and acknowledge their concerns. Making it clear how you plan to support them will build trust and reduce anxiety.

You must tell staff about important workplace updates and let them know you're available if they need support.

To help staff feel reassured, you should:

- communicate openly and share information in a highly visible location, for example on the intranet or by emailing all staff
- 'consult' with staff (ask for and consider their views) so they can give feedback and share concerns
- provide timely information so staff are regularly updated

You should also brief managers so that they can share information with their teams. If staff have concerns about mental health and wellbeing, they may be more likely to talk to their manager.

You should communicate information and decisions in a clear and straightforward way, with empathy. This will help avoid panic and reassure staff.

You should know what resources and support you can offer and signpost them clearly. For example, an Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) offering staff counselling or 'drop-in' sessions with someone from HR or a third party to talk through any issues.

Assessing mental health in your workplace

You should talk to managers to understand how their teams are doing, which resources are helpful and if they need any more support.

If you have an online channel where staff can share updates, it may be useful to look through it to understand staff's concerns and areas where they need more support.

You could also use wellbeing surveys to understand how staff are feeling at work.

Support available

You may feel overwhelmed trying to manage mental health in your workplace during the pandemic. You should not be expected to be

an expert in mental health. But, knowing what support is available can help.

Trade unions and other employee representatives can help you promote positive mental health.

Trade union representatives are usually:

- trained by their union on mental health
- more willing to share concerns than staff may be
- aware of issues that could cause mental health problems
- able to work with you to promote the support and resources available to staff

You can also find support services that can help you improve mental health in your workplace, for example:

- Mindful Employer – workplace mental health training, information and advice
- Remploy – provides a free Access to Work Mental Health Support Service to improve mental wellbeing in the workplace

Acas training on mental health

Our practical mental health training course can help managers:

- recognise signs and symptoms of mental health conditions
- have conversations about mental health with more confidence
- identify and address issues earlier
- support employee wellbeing, both remotely and in the workplace

Our training is currently run remotely.

Book mental health training for managers, or arrange training tailored for your workplace.

Related content
Coronavirus advice
Mental health and the law
Tips and videos on mental health during coronavirus

For support on looking after mental health during coronavirus, see our mental health tips and videos.

You can also find advice from:

- NHS Every Mind Matters
- Mental Health at Work
- Mental Health First Aid
- Mental Health Foundation
- Mind
- Rethink

You can use 'Wellness Action Plans' to put steps in place to support your mental health. If you're a manager, you can use them with your team. Find out more about Wellness Action Plans from Mind.

Some workplaces will offer counselling. It'll usually be through a scheme known as an Employee Assistance Programme (EAP).

If you need to talk to someone, you can find mental health helplines on the NHS website.

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