

Mental Wellbeing for managers



Participant Handbook



Active Learning Team

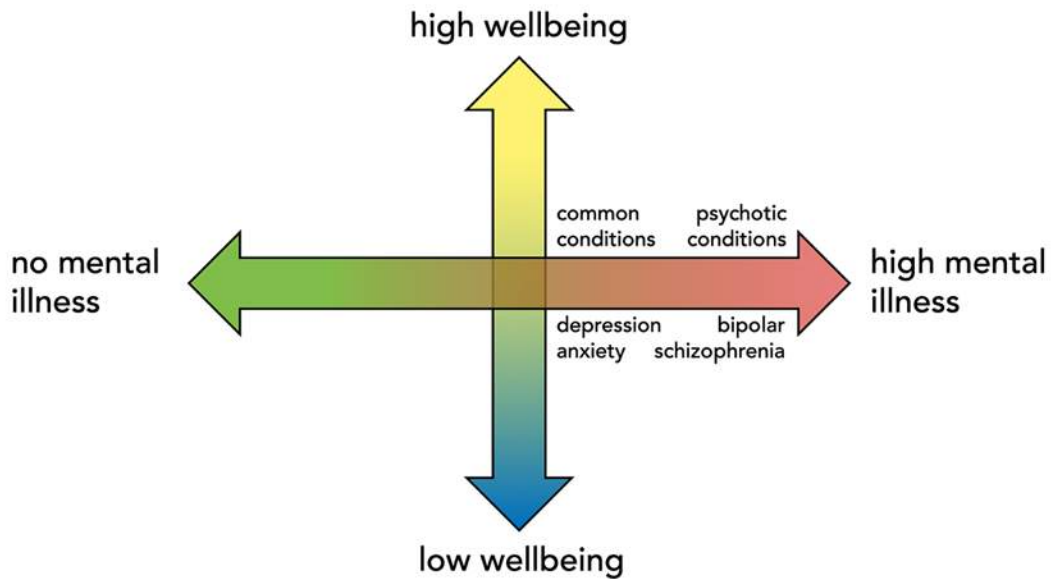
Supporting Mental Wellbeing Online with:

- Wellbeing webinars full of practical advice and inspiration
- Mental Health Training – spotting the signs, opening up the conversation, signposting support
- Sessions on screen-based communication/homeworking – essential to survival in our new world

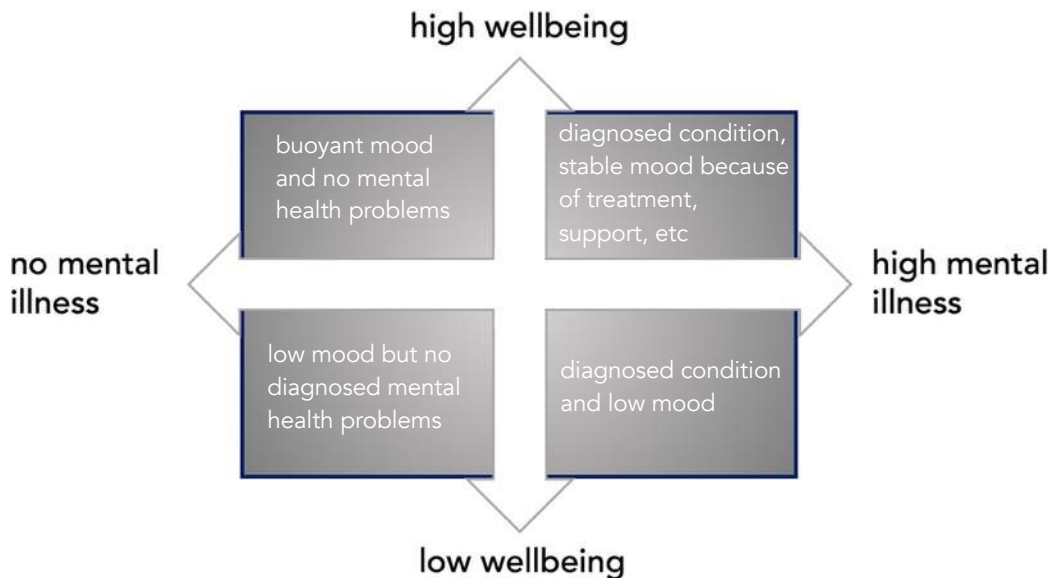
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What do we mean by ‘Mental Wellbeing’ and Mental Illness?

It is important to understand wellbeing as a scale on which we all exist. We can move up and down this scale every day as our anxiety levels or degree of happiness fluctuate – this is perfectly normal. The problem begins if someone gets ‘stuck’ on this scale, when they may be diagnosed with clinical depression and/or an anxiety disorder, the most common mental health conditions, which are exaggerated versions of everyday human experience. Psychotic disorders such as schizophrenia and bi-polar disorder are much less common and often depart from ordinary human experience, with symptoms such as hallucinations and delusional thoughts.



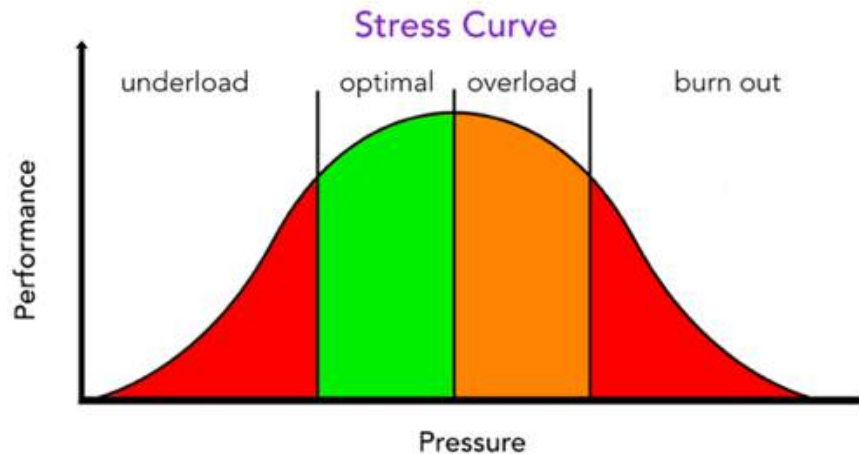
We can also consider this as quadrants:



Whilst workplaces strive to help staff stay within the top left quadrant, it is important that they recognise the vital role they can play in supporting those in the top right quadrant.

... and Stress?

Stress is not a mental health disorder; it is a perfectly normal and necessary response to challenge and difficulty (threat). However, if it isn't managed and moderated, it creates fertile ground for mental health problems to develop. If you're a manager, you can play an important role in keeping your staff within the 'optimal' zone of the stress curve. It is ok if people go over into the 'overload' zone for a while, as long as you help them pull back in order to recuperate and safeguard their mental wellbeing.



How do you know where your staff are on these various scales and curves? You need to develop the following skill:

Skill 1



Tune in – spot the signs

You need to be observant when it comes to the people around you, ensuring that no one falls off your radar. Team members often don't have the confidence to speak up, so you can help by being able to spot the outward signs that someone may be experiencing mental health problems.

Spotting **change** is crucial in recognising signs, so that you are not drawn into stereotypes of how someone who is experiencing mental health problems will behave. Changes often occur in these areas:



Remember:

They are 'flags' not proof

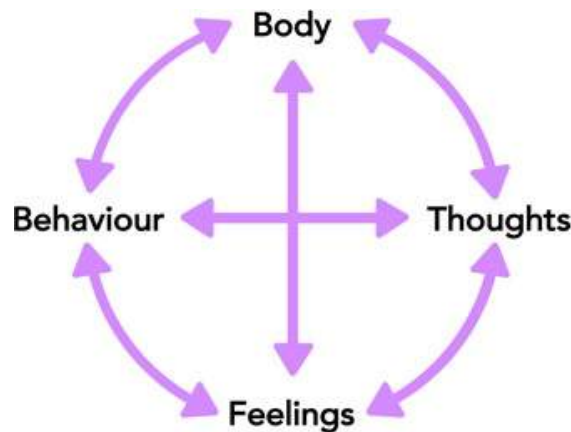


You need to strike the right balance in your response to signs of mental ill-health.

Make sure that you know your team well enough to spot any changes in the above areas and allow yourself some time to be observant, to tune in to what is going on in your team.

The Symptoms

Mental ill-health affects the four areas of human functioning all of which influence each other:



Symptoms of the most common mental health problems include:

Depression

- sleep & appetite problems
- thoughts of hopelessness & helplessness
- poor memory/concentration
- inability to find any enjoyment in life
- consistently low mood
- social withdrawal, poor self-care

Anxiety Disorder

- fast heart rate & breathing, tense, perspiring, nausea
- thinking something bad will happen
- fear, shame
- panic, avoidance

GPs may use a depression questionnaire, such as the Beck Inventory (<https://www.ismanet.org/doctoryourspirit/pdfs/Beck-Depression-Inventory-BDI.pdf>) to diagnose. They would be looking for the number of symptoms, their severity and their persistence (at least 3 weeks) and to be having an impact on everyday functioning.

The Triggers

It is important for us to understand the triggers that can lead to mental health issues because they may be able to anticipate a potential problem and be more observant in spotting signs that a member of their team needs support. The most common triggers are in people's 'home life' but work-related issues can also be important. Some common triggers:

Home

Bereavement

Relationship Problems

Illness

Money

Work

Change

Bullying

Workload

Promotion

There can also be internal triggers including our own thoughts such as worries, uncertainties, self doubt or judgement, thoughts about the past.

For more information on the symptoms and treatments for Mental Health conditions visit:

www.mind.org.uk

Barriers to doing something

Spotting the signs that one of your colleagues may be experiencing mental health problems is important but then you need to do something about it, and it is precisely at this point that the barriers present themselves. Firstly, in the form of the objective pressures of work and the thought that you simply don't have time to deal with this. You need to train yourself to replace this nagging voice in your head with an even louder and more persistent voice:



Three common internal barriers:

- **Lack of Confidence**

Someone experiencing mental health difficulties may lack confidence in their own strength to speak openly about the issues and/or lack confidence in those around them to treat an issue seriously and without prejudice.

Colleagues can lack confidence in their own ability to deal with the issue in such a way that will help, rather than make matters worse.

- **Stigma**

Mental ill-health, even today, carries a great deal of stigma. This is because mental ill health is often attributed to some kind of personal or moral weakness – just as it was in Victorian times. If a person breaks a leg or is diagnosed with cancer other people are generally very sympathetic. The fact that you have a physical ailment is not seen as any indication of the strength or quality of your personality. However, if someone experiences mental ill-health, it can be attributed as a sign of psychological or moral weakness.

- **Bystander effect & diffusion of responsibility**

A cognitive bias that allows people to absolve themselves of responsibility because ‘somebody else will do it’. You need to be the one who does take action and then others will tend to follow you.

Skill 2

Engage – open up communication

- **Where and when?**

You need to use your discretion when deciding where and when to talk to the person - ask them where they would prefer to talk. Some will prefer a private meeting room. Others will prefer a more informal situation, like going for a walk. Be guided by the person and use your judgment. Ensure that you allow enough time for a proper discussion.

Where to have the conversation?

A private room

Go for a walk



Formal

Informal

When to have the conversation?

- **Plan your approach**

It is important to be clear about your aim for the discussion. Don't think that you are going to 'get it all sorted out'. You should be pleased just to make a start on opening-up the issue – if you push too hard, they are likely to shut down. Plan for different possibilities but **don't script the conversation** – it rarely turns out just as you imagined it would.

- **Just get them talking**

Allow them to feel at ease and gain confidence in talking about a relatively 'safe' subject and then listen for clues to what may be going on 'behind the mask'.

- **Actively Listen**

Without doubt, the most useful skill you can use in helping a person with a mental health issue is active listening. Try to really listen to the person and avoid formulating your response before they have finished speaking. Aim for a discussion rather than an interview. Remember that you may need to allow 'space' for the person to express themselves.

- **To express your concern**

It's all very well getting them talking, but what if they are talking about what they did at the weekend and you really want to bring it round to the point? You need to describe behaviours, and don't offer a diagnosis: "I've noticed that you" rather than "I'm worried you might be a bit depressed"!

- **Don't jump to solutions**

It is very easy to slip into 'manager' mode and start trying to find solutions. You will need to come to how to offer practical support but if you do it straight away, you may not have the conversation you really need.

- **Allow silence**

Don't let your own anxiety disrupt their process – allow them time to reflect. If they are really stuck, you can try 'Naming what you see': "I can see that you are worried about this", "I can tell that you're anxious".

- **What if they cry?**

Be aware of your own instinctive response to tears – are you a runner or a hugger? – and make sure that your response is helpful.

- **What if they ask for confidentiality?**

You need to gently explain that you will not talk to anybody about this unless they want you to but if you are concerned about their wellbeing then you will have no choice but to share your concerns.

Skill 3

Move forward – find practical ways to help

Begin to find practical ways in which to support them:

- **Reasonable workplace adjustments**

You suggest that they consider adjustments to working patterns, workload, etc. that will enable them to manage the impact on their mental wellbeing. They will need to talk to their manager or HR about this.

- **Signpost them to support within the organisation**

Begin to find practical ways in which to help them and present the support that is available. You need to have this information at your fingertips as this will help build trust that you really can support them.

You can familiarise yourself with the support available by visiting:

<https://gp.gllm.ac.uk/docviewHealthHub.aspx>

- **Signpost them to support outside the organisation:**

If they would prefer to go outside the organisation completely, you can recommend:

- Their own **GP**
- **Time to Change** - the UK's biggest programme to challenge mental health stigma and discrimination - www.time-to-change.org.uk
- **Big White Wall** - an online early intervention service for people in psychological distress. It combines social networking principles with a choice of clinically informed interventions to improve mental wellbeing - www.bigwhitewall.com
- **Mind** - a mental health charity that offers general support and advice on all mental health conditions - www.mind.org.uk
- **Mental Health Foundation** – a charity dedicated to finding and addressing the sources of mental health problems – www.mentalhealth.org.uk

- **Keep re-enforcing the message 'I will support you':**

- Arrange follow up meetings
- Do informal check-ins
- Make sure you carry out any actions you have promised

Remember... you do have a duty of care for your colleagues but you are not a trained counsellor or mental health specialist. Your responsibility is to help them find the professional support they need. Know your limits and know when you need to seek support for yourself in dealing with a problem.

... and a piece of advice



Look after yourself – put your own oxygen mask on first

- **5 steps to mental wellbeing**

Evidence suggests there are 5 steps we can all take to improve our mental wellbeing.

If you give them a try, you may feel happier, more positive and able to get the most from life.

- **Take Notice** – be more aware of the present moment, including your thoughts and feelings, your body and the world around you. Some people call this awareness "mindfulness". It can positively change the way you feel about life and how you approach challenges.
- **Connect** – connect with the people around you: your family, friends, colleagues and neighbours. Spend time developing these relationships.
- **Be active** – you don't have to go to the gym. Take a walk, go cycling or play a game of football. Find an activity that you enjoy and make it a part of your life.
- **Keep learning** – learning new skills can give you a sense of achievement and a new confidence. So why not sign up for that cooking course, start learning to play a musical instrument, or figure out how to fix your bike?
- **Give** – even the smallest act can count, whether it's a smile, a thank you or a kind word. Larger acts, such as volunteering at your local community centre, can improve your mental wellbeing and help you build new social networks.

- **Mindfulness**

There is a vast range of books which will support your ongoing explorations in the use of mindfulness, which has been shown to reduce stress and promote mental wellbeing. We particularly recommend:

- *Full Catastrophe Living: Using the Wisdom of Your Body and Mind to Face Stress, Pain and Illness* by Jon Kabat-Zinn, published by Piatkus. This book very helpfully details the use of mindfulness meditation to deal with the physical and mental effects of stress and illness.
- *Finding Peace in a Frantic World* by Mark Williams and Danny Penman, published by Piatkus. This is a beautifully accessible book which talks you through an eight-week course, and is specifically designed for people in the midst of full lives. The book includes a CD with brief practices.
- Mindfulness Audio Tracks of guided practices are available for free to download from Bangor University's Centre for Mindfulness Research and Practice website: <http://www.bangor.ac.uk/mindfulness/audio/index.php.en>
- The Headspace App

In putting these ideas into practice in your work, remember ...

- **A two-minute distraction can stop rumination**

Find your own ways of distracting yourself from negative thoughts:

- Talk to someone about something else
- Make a drink
- Do some exercise
- Do a mindfulness exercise

- **You can help ‘inoculate’ yourself and your team against mental ill health:**

- Keep a gratitude list – it helps ‘re-tune’ the brain to the positives
- Do a ‘What went well ... and why’ exercise at the start of each team meeting – it helps put the team into a much more positive, creative and resilient frame of mind when it comes to dealing with problems. Don’t let discussion slip into ‘what could have gone better’!
- Consider how you can help raise the ratio of positive to negative interactions in your team. From a simple smile, remembering to praise as well as criticise people, to organised team activities such as a quiz or themed day with food and dressing up!

And one final thought...

Even if you are feeling uncertain about how to help a member of your team, you don’t know what to say, you worry about making things worse – the **worst** thing you can do is to ignore it and hope that it goes away.



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