

# Emotional wellbeing.

## How can you have the right conversation to support an employee at work?

### Information for line managers

As a line manager, it's important that we recognise how to deal and manage with employees and their emotional wellbeing at work. There are five key steps to help staff move from emotionally barely surviving back to thriving.

**Set the right tone, keep it simple, notice and then REALLY listen, understand reasonable adjustments and always follow up.**

### Set the right tone

Words matter when talking about mental illness. Make sure that the workplace is an environment that would encourage people to come forward and talk about mental health problems. Would you be more willing to talk to your manager about your mental health in a workplace that talked about mental illness in a respectful, non-judgemental, clear and understandable way or one in which you heard people referring to individuals "playing the stress card" or stating that "John is bipolar...a little bit OCD...John is suffering with/a victim of" or worse as "mental". "You don't have to be mad to work here – but it helps" doesn't help at all.

### Keep it simple

This is key. Just remember you are not there to provide therapy. Your role isn't to spot cases of depression or anxiety in the workplace or to diagnose, but to notice changes in your staff and notice when they are distressed. Then you can find out more so you can suggest the right support that will help them.

As you are not a therapist, it's OK to admit that you don't know much about a condition or diagnosis. Which in many ways is better as it will make sure you ask sincere questions about how the problem affects them and what they think the implications are, if any, for their work.

As you're there to listen and signpost to support...It is advisable to make sure that you are fully aware of all your mental health policies and procedures and the support you have in place in the workplace. For example what does your Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) offer and how is it accessed?. Always double check if they have contacted their GP for advice – you'd be surprised how many people don't associate difficulties with their mood with their GP.

**It's also a good idea to have a contact list of outside agencies like The Samaritans, MIND etc.**

## Notice and REALLY listen

Don't set out to spot depression or anxiety in your employees, but keep vigilant for changes in the way an employee is at work. For example, an employee that was always punctual and smart starts being late every day and appears dishevelled, or a previously popular, relaxed and productive employee is less productive, slightly irritable and sits on their own at lunch.

Once you become aware of a change that might show distress, make sure you book in time with the employee in a confidential space. Try beginning the conversation by letting the person know you have noticed that they aren't their usual self.

Try not to make assumptions about what that person is experiencing. Everyone is different. And try not to guess how it will affect their work. If you avoid making assumptions, you ask better questions – those how, what, where, when questions – and by asking better questions, you show that you are actually interested in them as a person and have REALLY listened.

### Keep the questions based on showing your interest

What has been happening to you

How has it affected you?

What sense did you make of it?

What has been helpful to you in coping?

Have you asked anyone for support or talked to anyone else about this?

What kind of support do you think might help?

What would you like to happen now?

## Understand reasonable adjustments

A reasonable adjustment is a change or adjustment unique to a person's needs that will enable them to do their job. The term 'reasonable' just means effective for the employee without being too disruptive, costly or impractical for the employer. The worry is probably because reasonable adjustments are linked to employment law – that is a person is eligible for adjustments termed reasonable if they are legally defined as disabled by the Disability Act 2010.

### Adjustments could be:

- Working hours or patterns – allowing someone with low mood and disturbed sleep to start and finish later in the day
- Support with workload – providing increased frequency of supervision and support from others
- Physical environment – providing a quiet space to complete reports or allowing the individual the option to leave a public space for a private one if distressed
- Providing a buddy or mentor

Providing meaningful adjustments continues that theme of REALLY listening – the employer is hearing the difficulties the employee has had in the workplace and is providing support.