

Supporting the mental health of NHS staff

The role of mental health champions
and peer supporters



About this guide and this series

The Coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic has presented our NHS workforce with one of their greatest challenges to date and whilst it's unlikely that we'll understand the full impact of Covid-19 on the mental health and wellbeing of the NHS workforce for some time yet, what we do know is that compassionate leadership is needed now more than ever and staff wellbeing needs to be a priority.

This resource series has been funded by the British Medical Association, and developed by Mind. It aims to provide practical advice and tips to help NHS leaders, and line managers, reduce mental health stigma, create mentally healthy cultures and support better mental health. We have also created information about the role of champions and peer supporters, given the high level of informal support given by peers across the NHS to support the mental health and wellbeing of their colleagues.

In developing this guidance, it was clear from the evidence that the biggest barriers to staff accessing support is the stigma associated with mental health and lack of senior leadership in creating cultures where mental health and wellbeing is prioritised and talked about openly.

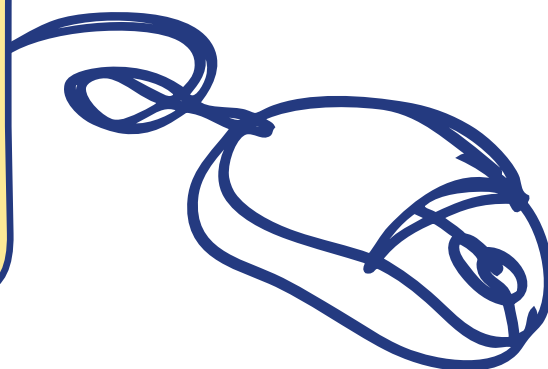
These barriers are not unique to Covid-19, they have existed in the NHS for a long time. And whilst providing individuals with information about self-care, support for their mental health and access to effective interventions is essential, this can only be done alongside tackling the work-related causes of poor mental health within the NHS workforce if true systemic change can take place.

Stigma, an unsupportive culture and lack of compassionate leadership are key root causes. This resource series is a starting point for NHS leaders and line managers, who want to tackle these and prioritise the mental health and wellbeing of their people. If now is not the time to do this, then when?

There are three resources in this series:

- 1 The role of NHS leaders in reducing mental health stigma and creating mentally healthy cultures.
- 2 The role of NHS line managers in supporting better mental health.
- 3 The role of champions and peer supporters.

The three resources can be found on the [Mental Health at Work website](#).



Helpful definitions

For the purpose of clarity, when we refer to ‘mental health’ in this guide we are using it in the broadest possible sense. Some useful definitions to terms used in this guide can be found below.

Mental health

We all have mental health, just as we all have physical health. How we feel can vary from good mental wellbeing to difficult feelings and emotions, to severe mental health problems.

Mental wellbeing

Mental wellbeing is the ability to cope with the day-to-day stresses of life, work productively, interact positively with others and realise our own potential. When we talk about well-being we are referring to mental well-being.

Poor mental health

Poor mental health is when we are struggling with low mood, stress or anxiety. This might mean we're also coping with feeling restless, confused, short tempered, upset or preoccupied.

We all go through periods of experiencing poor mental health – mental health is a spectrum of moods and experiences and we all have times when we feel better or worse.

Mental health problems

We all have times when we struggle with our mental health. A mental health problem is when difficult experiences or feelings go on for a long time and affect our ability to enjoy and live our lives in the way we want.

You might receive a specific diagnosis from your doctor, or just feel more generally that you are experiencing a prolonged period of poor mental health.

Common mental health problems

These include depression, anxiety, phobias and obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD). These make up the majority of the problems that lead to one in four people experiencing a mental health problem in any given year. Symptoms can range from the comparatively mild to very severe.

Severe mental health problems

These include conditions like schizophrenia and bipolar disorder which are less common. They can have very varied symptoms and affect your everyday life to different degrees, and may require more complex and/or long-term treatments.

Work-related stress

Work-related stress is defined by the Health and Safety Executive as the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressure or other types of demand placed on them at work. Stress, including work-related stress, can be a significant cause of illness. It is known to be linked with high levels of sickness absence, staff turnover and other issues such as increased capacity for error.

Stress is not a medical diagnosis, but severe stress that continues for a long time may lead to a diagnosis of depression or anxiety, or other mental health problems.

Burnout

Burnout isn't technically a diagnosis, but instead refers to a collection of symptoms. You may feel exhausted, have little motivation for your job, feel irritable or anxious and you may see a dip in your work performance.

Stigma

Stigma is the perception that a certain attribute makes a person unacceptably different from others, leading to prejudice and discrimination against them.

Self-stigma

Self stigma is where a person with a mental health problem becomes aware of public stigma, agrees with those stereotypes and internalises them by applying them to the self.

Compassionate leadership

Compassionate leadership in practice means leaders listening with fascination to those they lead, arriving at a shared (rather than imposed) understanding of the challenges they face, empathising with and caring for them, and then taking action to help or support them. (The King's Fund, 2019)

The role of champions and peer supporters in creating a safe environment

Many members of staff working across the NHS are already providing a level of informal support to one another; however, leaders need to make sure that the role of mental health champions and peer supporters are clearly understood. A strong peer and/or champion support network with defined boundaries, support for peers and buy in from NHS leaders can create a safe environment for champions and peer supporters to carry out these roles.

Thus, clarifying the role of mental health champions and peer supporters could play a key role in effectively promoting support pathways amongst the NHS workforce and creating a mentally healthy NHS. This resource sets out guidance on how leaders can support the establishment and growth of champion and peer support by demonstrating meaningful engagement with these initiatives.

Benefits of a mental health champion and peer supporter network to the NHS workforce

Mental health champions and peer supporters can make a real difference for their colleagues through supporting:

- increased self-esteem, confidence and empowerment
- greater acceptance and 'normalisation' of feelings
- support to return to work or remain in work
- greater feelings of being accepted and understood by colleagues
- more positive feelings about the future
- increased sense of hope and inspiration
- increased empathy and acceptance of others (camaraderie)
- increased engagement in self-care and wellness.

Benefits of a mental health champion and peer supporters network to your organisation

A champion and peer support network can also deliver a range of activities that benefit your organisation:

- They can **shape** your work. Your champions can provide valuable input and insight into your policies, procedures and mental health and wellbeing strategies based on their lived experience of poor mental health.
- They can **influence** your work. Your champions can provide useful feedback on your current activities, interventions and support to enable ongoing and continuous improvement.
- They might **participate** in your work. Your champions can deliver activities on your behalf: hosting an informational stall; sharing their lived experience as expertise with people on behalf your organisation at events; providing peer support as a group and helping you problem solve by participating in working groups.
- They can **support** you in embedding a mental health strategy within the workplace and provide continued support as you evaluate outcomes and refresh your strategy accordingly.

Champions and peer supporters

What is a mental health champion?

A mental health champion in the workplace can be an employee or volunteer who takes action in the workplace to raise awareness of mental health problems. They challenge the way people think and act about mental health to break down stigma and help create a mentally healthy workplace that supports every staff member struggling with poor mental health the choice to be able to say they are not ok and be supported accordingly.

What is a peer supporter?

A peer supporter is someone with lived experience of a mental health problem who provides support to others experiencing similar challenges, by providing an empathic, listening ear and can help facilitate pathways to professional help.

A peer supporter might do this by sharing their lived experiences (if they wish to) with their colleagues, inspiring them to recognise their experiences and knowing that they can approach the peer supporter to talk about their feelings without feeling judged or compromised in any way.

There are many ways to deliver peer support, including:

- one-to-one (face to face or telephone)
- drop-in
- groups (peer support or other activity e.g. walking group)
- establish a network of peer supporters
- online peer support
- peer mentoring.

It is worth noting that people choose the peer supporter they wish to engage with on the basis that they believe the peer supporter is likely to understand their experience. This might be for a number of reasons which might include:

- similar experience of mental health problems
- experiences of supporting loved ones with mental health problems
- working similar shifts, having similar roles or working in the same team and therefore being more likely to understand work pressures or work life balance issues
- being on a similar pay grade or level of seniority and being more likely to understand the pressures connected with their position
- sharing similarities in their home life, for example around parenting and/or caring responsibilities
- sharing similar diversity characteristics and therefore more likely to understand and relate to their experience.

Helpful Tip

The role of a peer supporter can be incorporated into the role of being a mental health champion. Staff can then be encouraged to deliver the role according to their strengths, for example, some may lean towards providing peer support whilst others might lean towards delivering activities to raise awareness. By combining these roles staff also have the flexibility to deliver what they feel comfortable to deliver at any given point, which can change according to how they feel mentally, their workload or indeed personal circumstances.

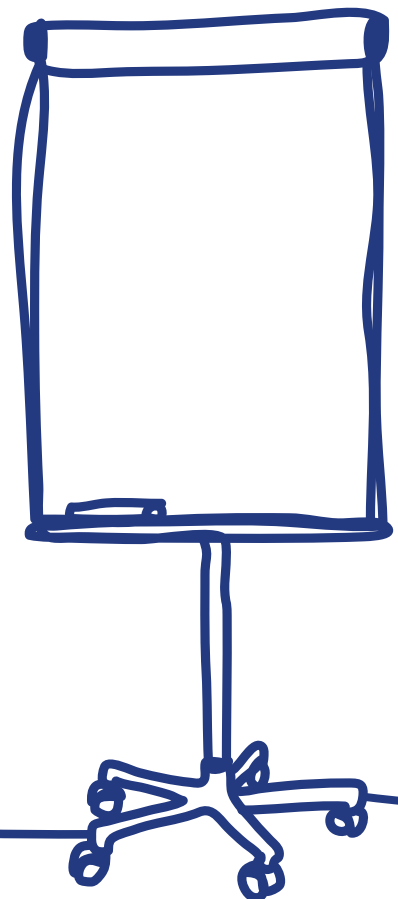
What activities do mental health champions and peer supporters deliver?

Mental health champions

- ✓ Raise awareness of mental health.
- ✓ Help to deliver internal mental health campaigns and amplify mentally healthy workplace messages with colleagues.
- ✓ Support delivery of an organisation's mental health and wellbeing strategy / action plan.
- ✓ Have a leading role in helping to overcome a culture of silence and non-discussion of mental health problems.
- ✓ Be a point of contact to colleagues, helping them to constructively and positively tackle mental health stigma.
- ✓ Assist colleagues who want to help run events and activities in the workplace to breakdown stigma and discrimination.
- ✓ Tackle the stereotypes, stigma and discrimination associated with people who experience mental health problems within the workplace.
- ✓ Encourage and inspire others to tackle stigma and discrimination in their local area.
- ✓ Make links with existing groups and networks that may want to be involved including professional organisations.
- ✓ Help others in the workplace identify issues related to mental health stigma and discrimination.

Peer supporters

- ✓ Inspire hope that people can and do recover.
- ✓ Walk with people on their recovery journeys.
- ✓ Dispel myths about what it means to have a mental health condition.
- ✓ Help colleagues in recognising signs and symptoms alluding to poor mental health, stress or burnout.
- ✓ Provide information on how to access support and guidance and link people to tools and resources.
- ✓ Empower colleagues to share their experiences of mental health issues in the workplace.
- ✓ Support people in identifying their goals, hopes, and dreams, and creating a road map to get there.



Who is a mental health champion and peer supporter?

A mental health champion and peer supporter is often someone who wants to make a difference because they are:

- passionate about helping people to understand that every has mental health by getting everyone to talk about mental health
- able to give time and resources to undertake meaningful activities that help people to change the way they think and act about mental health
- willing to engage colleagues constructively and positively when taking action to tackle mental health stigma encouraging others to do so too
- keen to spread the word about campaigns and key dates relating to mental health
- able to empower colleagues to share their experiences of mental health problems in the workplace and encourage them to become Champions / peer supporters too
- able to empower colleagues to seek support by signposting them to resources, information as well as emotional and / or practical support.

Through participation in a mental health champion or peer supporter network, an employee will personally benefit through:

- the knowledge that they are part of a movement / campaign or strategy to create positive change within their workplace and making a difference
- being part of an internally recognised group of people with common aims where they can learn and share knowledge
- increasing their understanding around wellbeing and helping to address mental health in the workplace
- developing and sharing skills outside of their role
- helping them become more confident in addressing mental health issues.

How NHS leaders and line managers can support mental health champions and peer supporters

Mental health champions and peer supporters need to know that they are supported by NHS leaders and line managers in order to be able to deliver their roles and look after themselves whilst they do so. NHS leaders and line managers need to demonstrate their support, the following section highlights how this can be done through the following principles.

Share your vision

It is important that your organisation's vision for mental health and wellbeing is shared with champions and peer supporters. We recommend that you include their input in building this vision because champions and peer supporters can contribute a wealth of expertise from their experiences, the needs of their colleagues and the work pressures they experience on different levels.

Helpful Tips

1. Share any action plans and strategies developed around mental health and wellbeing with champions so that they know what your organisation wants to achieve in this space.
2. Take the time to know what your champions want to achieve and see how this fits with your vision and plans.

Support your champions' wellbeing

Mental health champions and peer supporters will be taking on this role on a voluntary basis whilst continuing to undertake their job role. This can potentially lead to pressure, symptoms of stress and challenges with time management, which in turn could have a negative impact on their mental health.

You can ensure champion wellbeing by providing them with the right support and resources in order to achieve the outcomes they are working towards. When you support your champions' wellbeing it demonstrates the value of a champion's contribution and encourages others to take on the role.

Helpful Tips

1. Encourage champions and peer supporters to complete a Wellness Action Plan. You can find templates and guidance on Mind's website [here](#).
2. Support champions and peer supporters where viable by ringfencing time for them to undertake the role. This will benefit the wellbeing of the champion and the outcomes of the activity for your organisation. This allocation of time needn't be a fixed constant, but might depend on the activities that champions and peer supporters wish to undertake. For example, they may need more time to prepare for activities to support your work around key dates such as Time to Talk Day or World Mental Health Day.
3. Encourage peer support amongst champions and peer supporters themselves by enabling them to meet up as a group regularly, consistently and as frequently and practically as they need to.
4. Always encourage champions and peer supporters to prioritise their wellbeing as well as supporting them to develop key skills such as managing their workload.

Consider how you include people with experience of mental health problems in your processes associated with mental health

Sharing people's stories has been shown to play a significant role in changing workplace culture around mental health. It is a way to get employees talking about mental health as people start to recognise symptoms that they or people they know may be experiencing when they hear about someone else's experience.

Often people do not realise that their colleagues, friends or family might need help. Your champions are a great way to reach people you may otherwise not and can generate these much needed conversations about mental health. You can also demonstrate your commitment towards using personal experience of mental health problems as a driver to shape and inform your work by consulting champions with personal experience to feedback on how your plans and policies may affect them with consideration to their mental health problem.

Helpful Tips

1. Find out if champions and peer supporters would feel comfortable sharing their stories and ask them how you can support them to do so.
2. Have you as an NHS leader or line manager experienced mental health problems before? Would you feel comfortable to share your story?
3. Identify work that could benefit from input from a person with experience of a mental health problem. For example: review of relevant policies; guiding how different teams and departments can introduce mental health related activities.
4. Consider how you might obtain representation of champions for each team / department.
5. Identify which teams / departments will find it challenging to use the experience of mental health problems within their work and work with champions to make the conversation more equitable between teams / departments. For example, consider how a finance team might struggle to take part in the same way that a health and wellbeing team might and identify how you and your champions may be able to solve this problem.

Show champions and peer supporters you value them

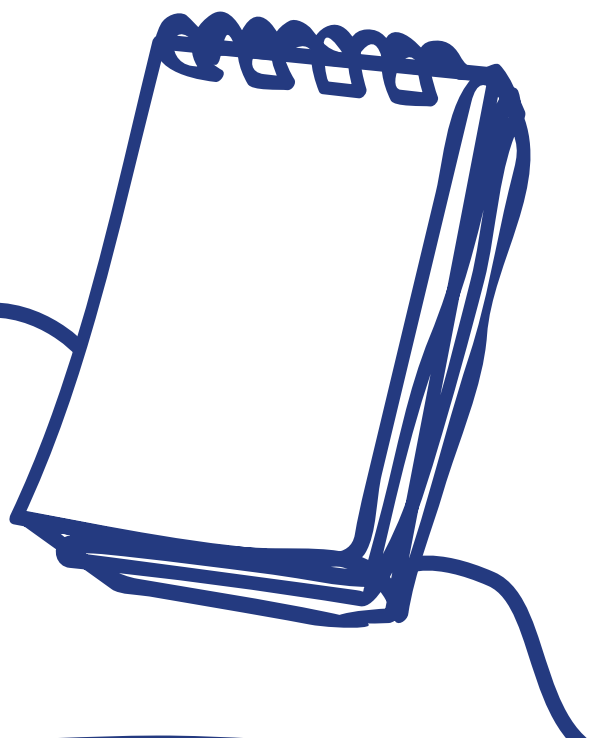
We all like to feel that we are needed, important and significant and that we are making a difference. Feeling this way keeps us motivated, enthusiastic and passionate, because it provides us with a sense of purpose and belonging.

Helpful Tips

1. Demonstrate you value your champions' contributions by celebrating their achievements across the organisation.
2. Include celebrating their achievements during one to ones and appraisals. We recommend adding associated objectives to a champion / peer supporter's personal development plan.
3. Take note of what champions and peer supporters tell you and learn from their experience. Demonstrate how you have utilised that gained experience for the benefit of the team and you're your organisation's workforce overall.
4. Champions and peer supporters want to see they are making a difference, and you can help them to see this by being transparent about data, surveys, and demonstrate how champions have contributed to positive outcomes.

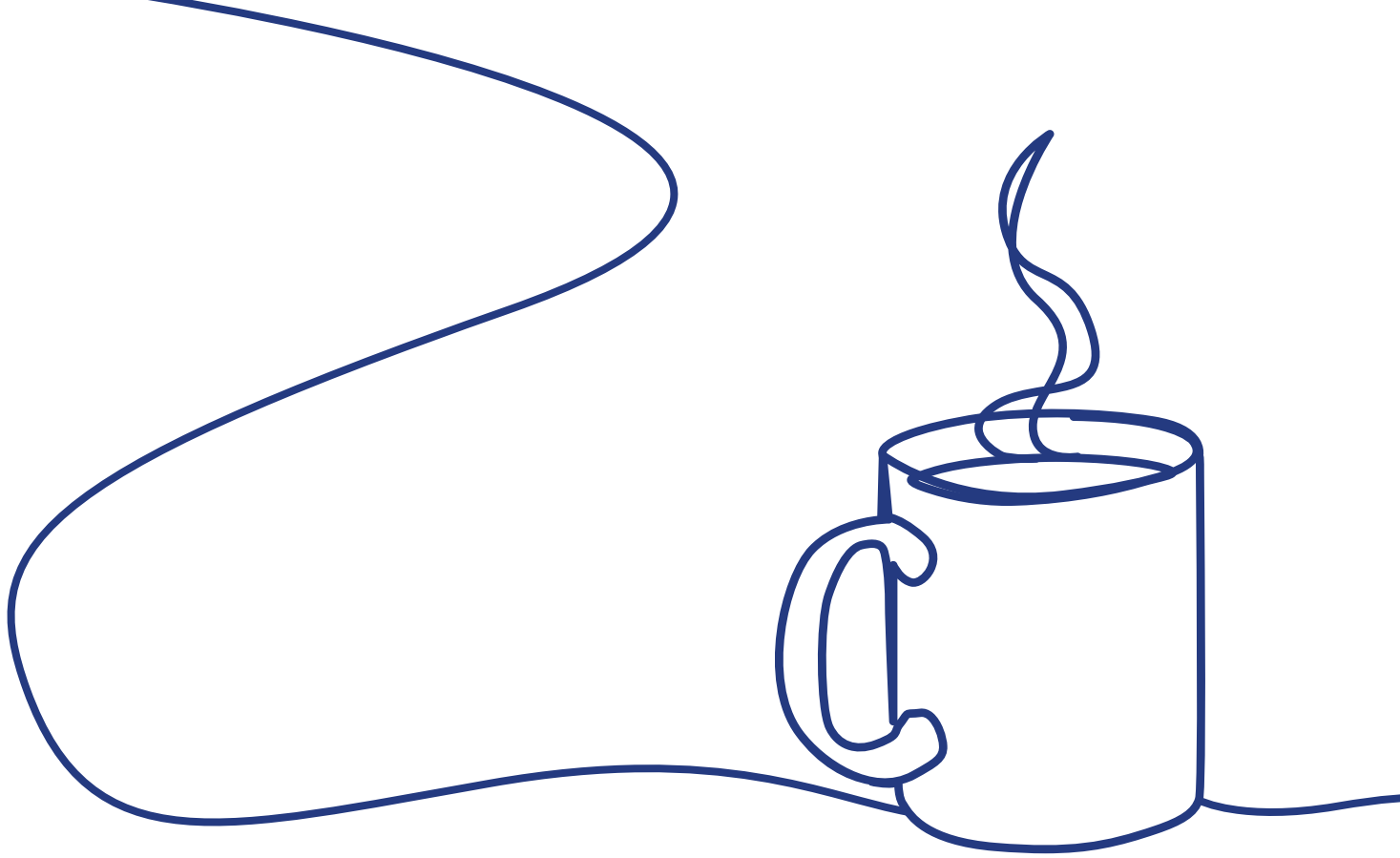
Empower champions and peer supporters to leverage their strengths

Empower your champions and peer supporters by gauging what skills, abilities and strengths they have and then ask them how they could be empowered to put their strengths forward in delivering activity they feel confident in. This can result in an innovative set of activities delivered by champions, which generate some great conversations about mental health within the NHS.



Suggested actions

- 1 Gauge what skills and abilities and strengths champions have and would like to use to start conversations.
- 2 Encourage champions to be creative and innovative in terms of the activities that they wish to undertake.
- 3 Encourage champions to think about the momentum of the year and to streamline activity accordingly. For example; ask champions to think about what they would like to deliver over key periods in the work calendar and how they will maintain momentum by delivering on a smaller scale in between key dates.



Keep in mind what truly motivates your champions and peer supporters

Staff members who express an interest for the role are usually motivated from the outset. This is because they tend to be driven by either their personal experience, or have cared for someone with a mental health problem.

Showing that you understand what motivates your champions is a great way to mirror that you as the organisation are also motivated. This can demonstrate that your organisation not only values speaking about mental health but also values their champions and peer supporters who speak out about their personal experiences.

Helpful Tips

1. Champions will remain motivated if they continue to enjoy **WHAT** they do and **WHY** they do it.
2. Champions who are empowered to deliver the role to the best of their skills and abilities, tend to also stay motivated and committed to making that difference to the organisation and its employees.

Activities, sharing stories and key dates

Activities and starting conversations

Starting conversations about mental health can feel very difficult. However it is important to talk about mental health as it's the only way to change how we all think and act. Even today too many people are struggling with poor mental health and don't feel comfortable to talk about it or seek help. However, talking about mental health does not need to be difficult.

It can be as simple as making time to have a cup of tea or go for a walk, and listening to someone talk about how they feel. Being open about mental health and ready to listen can make a positive difference to someone's life.

Mental health champions / peer supporters have many ways they can start conversations whether face to face or online, such as:

- asking someone how they are and really listening to their response
- talking about what helps them to maintain their wellbeing, relax or de-stress and then asking their colleagues what helps them
- talking about why they became a mental health champion / peer supporter
- sharing news stories related to mental health to start a discussion
- arranging sessions with external speakers
- organising a digital or physical wellbeing board on the intranet / communal area
- organise social activities such as coffee mornings etc. quizzes.
- arranging sessions to discuss things that can impact on mental health such as financial wellbeing
- running wellbeing sessions such as yoga / mindfulness / colouring / crafts etc
- being present in relevant meetings and then cascading information out
- putting up posters in the physical space or encouraging people to use their digital tools to raise awareness such as email signatures
- getting together to come up with really creative ideas
- using key dates and big events to signpost colleagues to smaller events / support.

Helpful Tip

Time to Change have developed – **Six Degrees of being in a Colleagues Corner** – this pack can help mental health champions and peer supporters think about how they can support and or start conversations with colleagues who mental health champions / peer supporters may work closely to reaching those don't. This activity pack also includes tips for line managers.

Case study

Where's your #wobbleroom – an initiative created by Bradford Teaching Hospitals for staff to support themselves at the start of the pandemic. The full blog by Rachel Pilling on what the #wobbleroom is about can be found [here](#).

Sharing stories

Stories are important. Stories get people to understand the real impact of poor mental health and see things from a different perspective. Stories give people courage to seek help and speak up. Stories create an environment for change.

Mental health champions and peer supporters sharing their own experience of stress, anxiety, low mood or other mental health problems can be a powerful weapon in breaking down stereotypes and changing how people think and act about mental health. However, it's important that mental health champions and peer supporters are encouraged to do this safely.

Sharing stories of lived experience of mental health problems can:

- demonstrate that people can continue to work and manage anxiety, depression or other mental health problems effectively
- encourage others to speak openly about their experience with mental health problems. You may be surprised by how many colleagues have also experienced a mental health problem at some point in their life, or supported a loved one
- help others experiencing a mental health problem to take action
- encourage senior managers to make workplace mental health a priority.

Ways mental health champions / peer supporters can share stories:

- blogs and video blogs (Vlogs)
- sharing lived experience as a speaker at an event / presentation
- through a one to one conversation
- in lunch and learn events to encourage conversation
- within a training setting
- sharing on any internal social media channels such as Yammer
- sharing stories through pictures or poems.

There is absolutely no requirement for mental health champions or peer supporters to share their story. We recognise this is a big and very personal decision. Mental health champions and peer supporters should never feel pressured to step out of their comfort zone just because they think they should.



Case study

Lancashire Teaching Hospitals got creative and produced a podcast with a senior consultant, in which the consultant speaks openly about their lived experience with mental health. The fact that the consultant featured in the podcast, is male and of a senior-level is particularly significant, as these are workplace audiences that all too often do not speak out about mental health, but whose input is vital for tackling stigma against mental health.

You can listen to the podcast [here](#).

Key dates

Key dates such as World Mental Health Day or Mental Health Awareness Week are great opportunities to speak to people, challenge myths about mental health, have discussions and answer questions. Events can take a variety of forms.

Champions can either organise an event themselves, ask for time to talk about wellbeing at a team meeting, or have an information stand with relevant materials.

However, you choose to get mental health on to the agenda, you can use an event as an opportunity to:

- get people talking about mental health and thinking about any stereotypes they hold about mental health problems and people who experience them
- bring people with different experiences of mental health together in an environment of mutual respect.
- provide information about looking after your wellbeing and how to access support
- get people to talk about what has helped them
- inspire people to work together to end the stigma and discrimination surrounding mental health.



Mental health calendar

Time to Talk Day

4 February 2021

Mental health problems affect one in four of us, yet too many people are made to feel isolated, ashamed and worthless because of this. Time to Talk Day encourages everyone to be more open about mental health – to talk, to listen, to change lives. This time, Time to Change's theme is 'the power of small' – because a small conversation about mental health has the power to make a big difference.

Children's Mental Health Week

1-7 February 2021

Children's Mental Health Week aims to raise awareness of the benefits of getting children support at the earliest possible opportunity, and to encourage parents to talk openly with children about their feelings and getting help.

Self-Injury Awareness Day

1 March 2021

Self-Injury Awareness Day takes place every year on 1 March. It aims to raise awareness, understanding and empathy around self-harm, and reduce the number of people struggling in silence.

Eating Disorders Awareness Week:

1 – 7 March 2021

Eating Disorders Awareness Week is an international awareness event, fighting the myths and misunderstandings that surround eating disorders.

University Mental Health Day

4 March 2021

A day where Student Minds and the University Mental Health Advisers Network bring universities together to focus efforts on promoting the mental health of people who live, work and study in Higher Education settings.

World Bipolar Day

30 March 2021

The purpose of the day is to raise awareness of bipolar disorders and to improve sensitivity towards the illness. It is promoted by the International Bipolar Foundation and partners.

Stress Awareness Month

April 2021

Stress Awareness Month has been held every April since 1992 to increase public awareness of the causes, signs and coping strategies for stress.

Maternal Mental Health Matters Awareness Week

3 – 9 May 2021

A week-long campaign dedicated to talking about mental illness while pregnant or after having a baby. This is a chance to highlight the support and information available to mums.

Mental Health Awareness Week

10 – 15 May 2021

Organised by the Mental Health Foundation, Mental Health Awareness Week is a national week to raise awareness of mental health problems and promote the message of good mental health for all.

International Fathers' Mental Health Day

19 June 2021

Held on the day following Father's Day, this campaign looks to highlight key aspects of fathers' mental health, with particular attention on paternal postpartum depression.

World Suicide Prevention Day

10 September 2021

Hosted by International Association for Suicide Prevention and the World Health Organisation, the purpose of the day is to promote worldwide commitment and action to prevent suicides.

World Mental Health Day

10 October 2021

World Mental Health Day is a great opportunity to raise awareness of mental health problems and start conversations. Each year a theme is set by the World Federation for Mental Health.

National Stress Awareness Day

3 November 2021

Promoted by the International Stress Management Association, this day aims to raising awareness of the effects of psychological distress in the workplace and strategies to address it.

International Survivors of Suicide Loss Day

20 November 2021

A day for those affected by suicide loss to gather and come together at events around the world – to find comfort, gain understanding and share stories of healing and hope.

Boundaries for your champions and peer supporters

Boundaries exist to protect everyone. Establishing boundaries can help to clarify the role of a mental health champion and peer supporter and the relationship they have with their colleagues when in that role. Being clear about what a mental health champion or peer supporter can and cannot do will help them to grow into the role whilst simultaneously managing other people's expectations.

This section will detail things you may want to think about when looking to set up clear boundaries. These are suggestions of things for you to consider, not an exhaustive list or a guide to be followed.

Our suggestions are not intended to take the place of the NHS policies and guidelines, and you should always seek out and be guided by the information the NHS and your specific organisation provides.



Key considerations

Time

Equipping a mental health champion or peer supporter to make informed decisions around how much time they can offer up to deliver the role and provide support to colleagues.

Abilities

Being clear about what professional skills, knowledge and abilities they need to deliver the champion role

Confidentiality

Mental health champions and peer supporters being clear on what they can and cannot keep confidential and the circumstances when things that have been shared with them may need to be shared elsewhere.

Look for this information in the NHS data protection, confidentiality and safeguarding policies.

Tips for maintaining boundaries

- 1 Maintaining clear boundaries starts with champions and peer supporters understanding their role clearly. It may be helpful for you to consider a role description and identify the kind of activities they will be delivering. By making a clear agreed decision about the activities your champions and peer supporters will undertake, they can create and maintain their boundaries, and avoid feeling overburdened or pressured to act outside of what they are comfortable doing.
- 2 By all means encourage your champions and peer supporters to use any skills they may have gained from training such as counselling courses, but remind them that they are acting in the capacity of a mental health champion or peer supporter, not as a counsellor or mental health nurse. It is important the employees in these roles are able to separate their professional role and their role as a mental health champion or peer supporter. The mental health champion and peer supporter role is to listen and signpost, and not to make a professional judgement.
- 3 A key part of the mental health champion and peer supporter role is to signpost individuals to further information and support. Help mental health champions and peer supporters to empower colleagues they may work with to actively seek support. Champions could ask questions that encourage this such as "What would you like to happen in this situation?" This will help to empower colleagues and encourage them to take the course of action that seems right to them. Champions need to be clear about what they can do, as well as what they can't.
- 4 NHS Leaders and line managers should be able to explain the role of a mental health champion and peer supporter and its limits to colleagues clearly so that expectations can be managed accordingly. Mental health champions and peer supporters could also clarify what activities they will be doing as part of the role. For example, they could say "My role as a mental health champion / peer supporter is to share information that promotes awareness of how to keep yourself mentally well."
- 5 Encourage mental health champions and peer supporter to communicate the reasons for any boundary. If someone is asking for direct advice or help beyond the remit of the mental health champion or peer supporter role, they could say: "Sorry, I am not the best person to advise you on that and do not have the knowledge, skills or experience to help you with this. I am not a mental health professional and stepping outside of my abilities as a mental health champion / peer supporter might be unhelpful to you. But I can suggest other sources of help and support you may wish to access." Such an explanation demonstrates that the mental health champion or peer supporter has understood the reasons for the boundary and is able to communicate that effectively to their colleagues.
- 6 Mental health champions and peer supporters should never make promises they may not be able to keep. For example, do not tell someone everything they tell you is completely confidential if there is a chance what they may say means you need to alert someone else in your organisation.
- 7 Ensuring champion wellbeing by encouraging mental health champions and peer supporter to look after themselves. Being a point of contact to have conversations about mental health with colleagues can be very rewarding, but it can also be time consuming and emotionally overwhelming. Mental health champions and peer supporter might also find that discussing subjects or traumatic events close to their own experiences, or that of others close to them, may be triggering – especially if they are feeling unwell. Encourage mental health champions and peer supporters to think carefully about how they will look after their wellbeing whilst delivering the role, and make sure they have appropriate support in place if they start to feel stressed.

Safeguarding staff, mental health champions and peer supporters

Whilst the NHS is extremely familiar with safeguarding the public, it is worth considering what mechanisms are in place for raising safeguarding concerns for staff.

Safeguarding employees is a key part of supporting employees with their mental health and that is because suicide and/or self-harming leading to injury or death are both common risk factors amongst people struggling with poor mental health.

Within the mental health context, safeguarding can be considered as meaning:

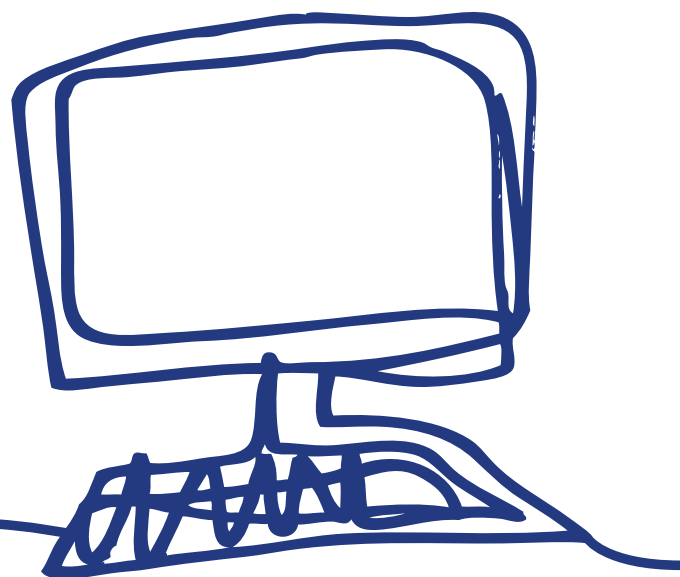
- To ensure that employees struggling with poor mental health are supported appropriately, especially when they might be at risk of harming themselves or their lives through suicide for example.
- To ensure that employees know where they can get appropriate support to address any mental health needs.
- To ensure that both employer and employees are equipped to recognise signs when someone maybe struggling with poor mental and ensure they are responded to and supported appropriately.

Helpful Tip

Mental health champions and peer supporters can often find asking their colleagues if they are thinking of taking their lives daunting because they fear it can be distressing or triggering for them. However if people have had thoughts about suicide then they are already distressed and triggered.

You can empower mental health champions and peer supporters to have those conversations confidently by engaging in Zero Suicide Alliances – Suicide Awareness Course.

It's a digital course that is free and packed with information, stories, statistics and a walk through a conversation about suicide with a colleague, family member and stranger. You can take the course from [here](#).



Signposting to support

It's great to start the conversation in your workplace and we hope that this resource and those we have referenced in this guide help you to do this. Sometimes this can mean that people currently experiencing mental health problems will need some support as sensitive conversations may bring up difficult things.

We would encourage you to highlight the support tools that you currently offer employees within your organisation, but you may also wish to direct staff to some of the support services available below.

Equally It is important for a mental health champion to know where they can signpost people for support. Creating a signposting document, which they can complete with relevant information, is a good starting point. It can include information about the following:

- Helplines
- Internal support services
- Employee Assistance Programme
- Peer Support platforms
- Practitioner and Therapist directories.

Below are some examples of where mental health champions / peer supporters can signpost colleagues to for peer support:

Peer support via NHS virtual staff common room

Virtual Staff Common Rooms for available for colleagues across the NHS. This is an opportunity for NHS people to come together virtually and support each other during this difficult time. Open to absolutely anyone working within the NHS across England, regardless of job role, organisational context or hierarchy and includes all final year students who have been working on the Covid-19 pandemic.

The Common Rooms are a safe and supportive environment hosted by an approved practitioner. They are one-off meetings for one hour with a maximum of 10 NHS staff. Discussion in the room is guided by the participants and focus on present and future coping and support.

They are an opportunity to share experiences and learning with hosts also guiding people to additional support and resources. You can find out more here: people.nhs.uk/help.

Peer support via Mind's Side by Side platform

Side by Side is a supportive online community where you can feel at home talking about your mental health and connect with others who understand what you are going through.

It's a safe place to listen, share and be heard. Whether colleagues are feeling good right now, or having a hard time, it's a safe place to share experiences and listen to others.

The community is available to all, 24/7. **Side by Side** is moderated daily from 8.30am to midnight.

Signposting to support

It's great to start the conversation in your workplace and we hope that this resource and those we have referenced in this guide help you to do this. Sometimes this can mean that people currently experiencing mental health problems will need some support as sensitive conversations may bring up difficult things.

We would encourage you to highlight the support tools that you currently offer employees within your organisation, but you may also wish to direct staff to some of the support services available below.



Our Frontline

Right now, healthcare workers are facing an extremely challenging situation, doing important and difficult work. Taking care of your mental health and managing feelings might be taking a back seat.

Our Frontline offers round-the-clock one-to-one support, by call or text, from trained volunteers, plus resources, tips and ideas to look after your mental health.

Wellbeing support by text for health and social care staff

All NHS staff can access free support by text 24/7. **Text FRONTLINE to 85258** to talk by text with a trained volunteer.

Wellbeing support by telephone for health and social care staff

NHS staff in England can call 0800 069 6222 and NHS staff in Wales can call **0800 484 0555**, daily from 7am–11pm.

To speak with a listening volunteer in Welsh call **0800 164 2777**, every evening 7pm–11pm. For UK-wide support call 116 123.

Counselling and trauma phone helpline

You can also talk to trained staff and counsellors who are experts in bereavement, grief and trauma, providing support for health, care and emergency workers during the pandemic.

Call **0300 303 4434**, free and in confidence, 8am to 8pm 7 days a week.

Online resources tailored to NHS Staff

No matter what your role is in the NHS, you can access resources tailored to NHS staff at ourfrontline.org.

Mind Infoline

Telephone: 0300 123 3393

Email: info@mind.org.uk

www.mind.org.uk/information-support/helplines/

Mind provides confidential mental health information services. With support and understanding, Mind enables people to make informed choices.

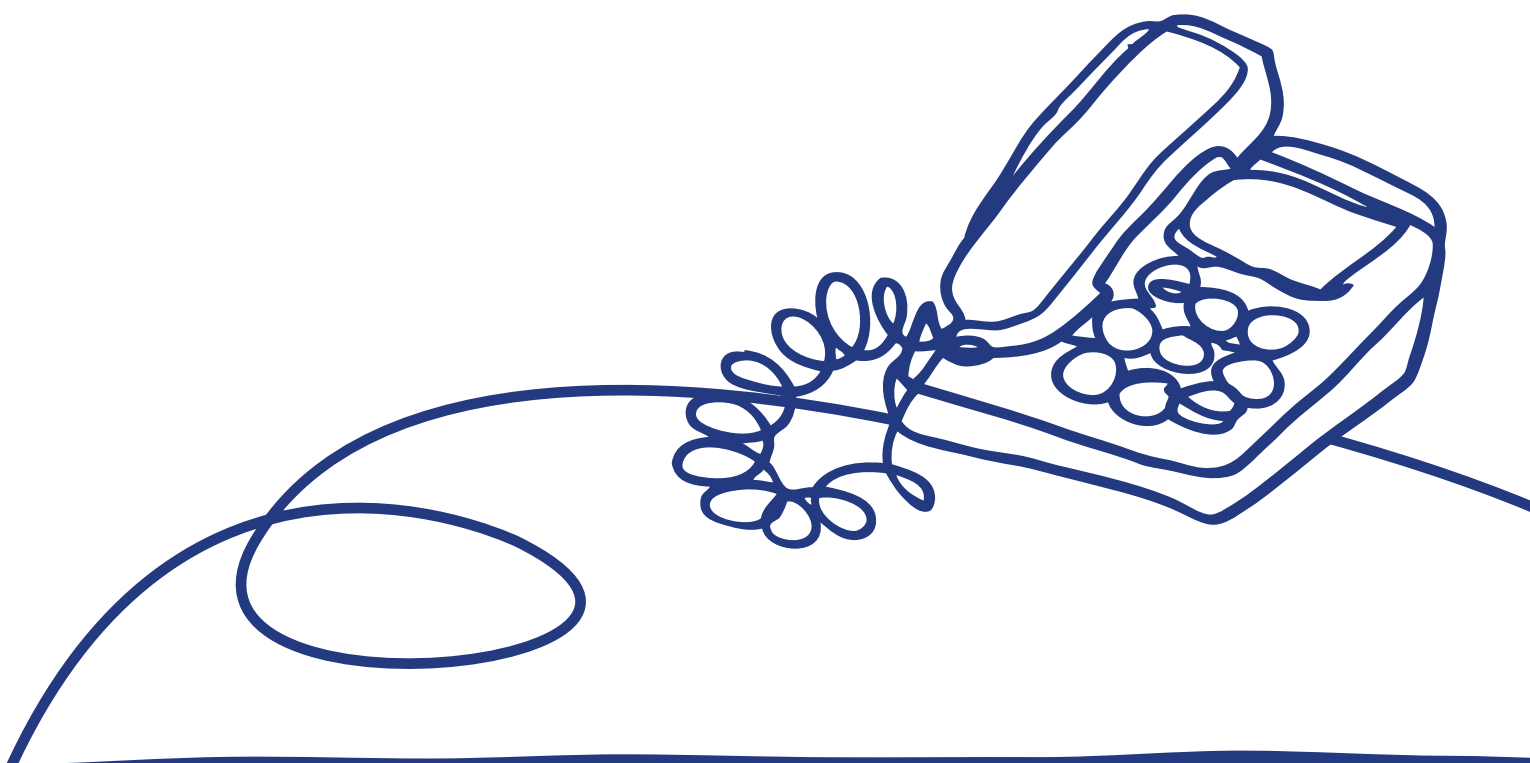
The Infoline gives information on types of mental distress, where to get help, drug treatments, alternative therapies and advocacy. Mind also has a network of nearly 200 local Mind associations providing local services.

Side by Side, Mind's online community

Side by Side, is a supportive online community where you can feel at home talking about your mental health and connect with others who understand what you are going through.

We all know what it's like to struggle sometimes, but now there's a safe place to listen, share and be heard. Whether you're feeling good right now, or having a hard time, it's a safe place to share experiences and listen to others. The community is available to all, 24/7.

Side by Side is moderated daily from 8.30am to midnight.



We're Mind, the mental health charity. We want to support a million people to stay well and have good mental health at work by 2021.

Be part of our movement for change in workplace mental health.

work@mind.org.uk

mind.org.uk/work

 @MindCharity

 [Facebook.com/mindforbettermentalhealth](https://www.facebook.com/mindforbettermentalhealth)

 Follow us on LinkedIn

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Mind's registered charity number: 219830

