Why organisations need to take the lead on mental health

Leaders Newsletter February 2024

It has never been more important for organisations to prioritise the mental health and wellbeing of their employees. At any moment, one in six people in the UK and Ireland are suffering at work with symptoms of a mental health condition. One in six people. The consequences of poor mental health awareness at work mean countless more people could be struggling in silence.

As more resources, tools, advice, and recommendations become available, the opportunity and incentive to take action has never been greater. But where do you start? And how can you tell what will make a genuine long-term positive impact on your people's wellbeing?

What is mental health?

We all have mental health, just as we all have physical health. Both change throughout our lives, and like our bodies, our minds can become unwell. The World Health Organisation describes mental health as 'a state of wellbeing in which every individual realises their own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to their community'.

There is still a stigma and misunderstanding about mental health in society and the workplace. Increasing awareness of mental health can help break the taboo and start to build a more open and inclusive culture. Managers need to feel confident and competent to have sensitive conversations with staff about sensitive issues like mental health and signpost to specialist support services if necessary.

Supporting mental health at work

Employers should promote good mental health as well as provide support when a challenge emerges. The Mental Health at Work Commitment provides a framework to help organisations put in place the key actions needed to support better mental health outcomes. The framework builds on the Thriving at Work standards using the most up-to-date research from UK employers and mental health experts.

The 6 Mental Health Commitments

1. Prioritise mental health in the workplace by developing and delivering a systematic programme of activity - this can be achieved through implementing an Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) from Health Assured.

2. Proactively ensure work design and organisational culture drive positive mental health outcomes.

3. Promote an open culture around mental health – run wellbeing sessions and create spaces for your people to talk freely.

4. Increase organisational confidence and capability.

5. Provide mental health tools and support.

6. Increase transparency and accountability through internal and external reporting.

Better health and wellbeing with Health Assured

We want to build a community that feels healthy, happy, and productive. Balancing the pressures of work and home life can be challenging for all of us at times. A family break-up. Financial struggles. Dealing with anxiety and depression.

Many factors can affect your employees' mental health and wellbeing, and while some things they can manage, there may come a time when they need support to overcome those challenges – be they emotional, physical, or financial.

Our Employee Assistance Programme provides guidance and supports your employees with their mental health in the workplace and in life. We can help you create a safe, productive workspace that supports all.

We support employees mental wellbeing with any problems they might be facing in their professional or personal lives with our 24-hour counselling helpline.

Find out more about EAPs

How to encourage your colleagues to stay positive during Blue Monday

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With the cheery festive period behind us and cold January sets in, many people are feeling low and fed up.

The weather is still cold and dark without the glamour of Christmas, there is pressure to set New Year's resolutions and long stretches before payday. It can be almost impossible to stay positive, especially if your mental health is already suffering.

Blue Monday takes place on the third Monday in January. This year, Blue Monday will fall on Monday 15th January 2024 and is considered to be the most depressing day of the year. Introduced in 2004, the campaign behind the awareness day states that the combination of bad weather, post-Christmas debt and failed New Year's resolutions all contribute to Blue Monday being the most depressing day of the year.

5 ways to encourage positivity on Blue Monday

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5 ways to encourage positivity on Blue Monday

01 - Signpost mental health support

Effective signposting encourages your people to seek professional advice and support.

Consider an Employee Assistance Programme. An EAP provides the necessary support for personal or professional problems and takes steps to support and promote good mental health practices and behaviours.

Check out our EAP which offers vital counselling support, a 24/7 helpline, critical incident management, comprehensive guidance, and much more to prioritise your people's mental health and wellness.

02 - Encourage breaks from screens

It is not surprising that there is an unhealthy connection between mental health and extended screen time. According to DataReportal, the average screen time for users around the world is 6 hours 37 minutes, a large portion of the day.

While screen usage is unavoidable in our digital age, we can take steps to limit screen time to safeguard our mental health.

Create a screen time policy and be open to suggestions and feedback from the team. For example, you could make a rule for colleagues to step away from the screens every two hours, even if this is to make a quick cup of tea.

03 - Promote self-care

Promoting self-care is a genuine way to show that you care about your colleague's mental wellbeing. Self-care alleviates signs of stress, feeling overwhelmed, and burnout.

Send email reminders to promote self-care, the benefits, and how to partake in self-care at home. Make the emails fun and engaging, ensuring that your people see self-care as something fun, beneficial to them, and relaxing.

Introduce self-care kits full of items and tools to help your people rewind, relax, and switch off from their work responsibilities and focus on themselves.

04 - Encourage going outside

Spending time outside is a great way to support mental health.

According to the Mental Health Foundation, 45% of people in the UK said that visiting green spaces, such as parks, helped them to cope throughout the pandemic. They also suggest that people who are more connected with nature are happier overall.

Encourage your people to go outside and leave any screens at their desks (another good way to promote less screen time).

Set up lunches where colleagues have to walk outside to attend and organise team walks throughout out the day, even if this is just around the block.

05 - Organise regular dress-down days

Wearing clothes that you feel comfortable, and a reflection of your identity is proven to produce dopamine in the brain and create feelings of happiness and comfort. This is called the wearer's psychology.

Dress-down days at the office create a relaxed atmosphere that can calm nerves and anxieties. Your people will feel that they have autonomy in their day by choosing what they wear.

People often feel stiff and uncomfortable in smart attire so implementing dress-down days is a great way for your people to feel comfortable and relaxed whilst working.

What are the benefits of an EAP?

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On average, a person will spend 3,507 days in work over their entire lifetime, a significant amount of time.

In addition to this, UK Parliament recorded that 1 in 6 people aged 16 plus had experienced symptoms of a common mental health problem, such as anxiety or depression.

Mental health issues do not have straightforward resolutions and going to work may not alleviate symptoms for everyone. In actuality, it can worsen mental wellbeing due to stress, unrealistic workloads, or occupational burnout, just to name a few.

What is an EAP?

Employee Assistance Programme (EAPs) is an employee benefit scheme that is free and confidential for your people when they need mental health support.

EAPs provide essential assistance and advice to colleagues of an organisation through a tailored service to address specific issues that your people may be struggling with.

Examples of support included in an EAP:

- Face-to-face counselling
- Mental health first aid courses
- 24/7 helpline
- Critical Incident advice
- Relationship management support
- Stress management
- Legal advice
- Crisis management

EAPs can support colleagues who are going through domestic violence, grief, addiction, stress, and a whole plethora of issues.

This can be focused on personal or work issues and just because EAP is managed through work does not mean that the support is solely work-focused.

Providing an EAP could be life-changing for your people and your organisation.

Why your organisation needs an EAP

If you support your people, your people will support your organisation. After all, it was Richard Branson who said, "Clients do not come first. Employees come first. If you take care of your employees, they will take care of the clients."

Here are three benefits of an EAP:

01 - Increased Productivity and Engagement

We can all agree that working with a distraction is difficult. You are unable to concentrate and more often than not the job becomes arduous and harder to complete.

Similarly, someone with poor mental health will feel the same when they are at work.

Providing an EAP for your organisation will support your people so they can work through their mental health issues with a professional counsellor, allowing them the headspace to focus on work and encouraging better productivity and engagement.

02 - Reduces Absenteeism

According to MHFA England, poor mental health accounts for more than half of all work-related illnesses and 51% of long-term sick leave is due to stress, depression, or anxiety.

It is no surprise that absenteeism can be extremely costly for organisations. Whether that be due to sickness pay, delays in work, or increased workloads for other colleagues.

Most people will need to take sick leave at some point in their working lives. However, adopting an EAP will alleviate some mental health issues your people could be facing.

Having a professional and qualified counsellor to talk to when they need leads to healthier and happier mental wellness for your colleagues, therefore, reducing the need for sick leave.

03 - Reduces Presenteeism

Suffering with mental health issues can be difficult and many people feel as though they have to suffer in silence. This could encourage presenteeism.

Presenteeism is the act of a colleague choosing work over their mental health and self-care, which can lead to burnout and worsening mental health.

Providing an EAP offers a safe space for your colleagues to speak to a qualified counsellor to improve any mental health struggles they are coping with.

Without the ability to gain that support, colleagues could become overwhelmed and feel as though they cannot appropriately complete or focus on their work.

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Download and register today

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Teaching and Mental Health

Leaders Newsletter February 2024

Research has revealed that over a third of education professionals are expected to leave their jobs by 2025, highlighting the importance of teacher mental health and the need to address this crisis.

The tragic death of headteacher Ruth Perry in 2023 brought the mental health crisis in teaching into clear focus. The coroner's report confirmed that she took her own life partly because of the stress caused by Ofsted downgrading her school from outstanding to inadequate.

But where does this leave the teachers, lecturers, and leaders? And does poor teacher mental health affect students and their educational progression?

How does teacher wellbeing affect students?

Regardless of the age group, students are conscious of their educator's mental health and recognise when they are struggling. This can affect their own mental health and grades as they are not receiving quality teaching time or the correct educational support.

Another risk is if an educator is unable to come to work due to mental health issues. Often, there are cover teachers that step in, impacting pupil learning with inconsistencies in teaching styles and understanding of students.

Teachers with good mental health can inspire, inform, and care. Teachers with poor mental health risk inadequate performance, safeguarding issues, and negatively impacted grades.

In a study carried out by Leeds Beckett University, most teachers agreed that a teacher's wellbeing affects their performance as an educational professional, especially their ability to teach in the classroom.

How can schools and higher education institutions safeguard their colleague's mental health?

01 - Adopt a wellbeing strategy

Education institutions are no strangers to wellbeing strategies and many of them have one already implemented. However, it is not a legal requirement, but policies should be consistent with the Equality Act 2010 which recognises many mental health conditions.

Wellbeing strategies allow leaders to plan mental health activities, implement ways to better support teacher and student mental health, and signpost to mental health support. Wellbeing strategies can consist of wellbeing weeks, celebrating awareness days, creating interactive activities to support coping with mental health issues, and setting up regular check-in meetings.
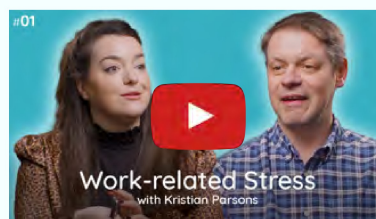
02 - Regular check-in meetings

Regular mental health check-ins increase the ability to monitor teacher's mental health and wellbeing for the betterment of educators and students.

Tracking teachers' mental wellbeing will allow senior individuals to assess if teachers need extra support with their mental health, prevent mental health crises, and protect pupils' mental wellness. Points to consider for wellbeing performance targets:

- Teacher satisfaction
- Teacher motivation
- Teacher Retention
- Peer Satisfaction
- Work environment

03 - Wellbeing Ambassadors

Wellbeing ambassadors are necessary for upholding mental health wellness in schools and higher education institutions. They support mental health by leading and applying ways to support teachers, lecturers, and students who cope with and manage mental health issues.

Ambassadors will uphold expectations of mental health care, and safeguard teachers' and pupils' mental health through investigating, signposting, and setting up regular mental wellness meetings that assess if there is additional support needed.

04 - Wellbeing room

Wellbeing rooms are dedicated quiet, calm, and relaxing rooms for teachers to drop in if they are feeling overwhelmed with their mental wellbeing and work commitments.

Wellbeing rooms provide a safe space for teachers to have somewhere to rest, unwind, and relax.

Some wellbeing rooms have features that assist with calming and mindfulness, such as blackout blinds, yoga mats, and furniture that promotes relaxation.