



# MENTAL HEALTH & WELLBEING TOOLKIT

A GUIDE FOR SMALL BUSINESSES  
AND SOLE TRADERS









## ABOUT THIS TOOLKIT

**This concise, practical toolkit will guide SMEs and micro businesses within the York, North Yorkshire and East Riding Local Enterprise Partnership (YNYER LEP) SME community to encourage a positive wellbeing culture, identify potential mental health problems and know what to do and where to go for advice.**

A recent consultation by Hull and East Yorkshire Mind found almost 50% of the small/micro businesses surveyed in the York, North Yorkshire and East Riding Local Enterprise Partnership (YNYER LEP) area felt that they did not have ample experience in managing mental health issues in their organisation, and half of the businesses surveyed did not know what support was available in their local area.

**Do you know how to support your staff with their mental health? Or what your legal duties are for staff experiencing mental health problems? Or how to look after your staff and yourself to stay well?**

As a small business owner, or sole trader, it's easy to think that there are many other priorities before thinking about mental health at work. But with 1 in 4 people experiencing mental health problems in any one year, mental health is a topic we all need to think about. But the good news is, it doesn't need to be complicated, and there are lots of resources available to help.

This Mental Health and Wellbeing Toolkit is designed to help you as a small business or sole trader, answer your questions about workplace wellbeing and point you to practical resources that you can use for yourself and your employees. It's not designed to answer every single question, or to replace getting legal advice on HR issues when you need it. We hope it will help small businesses to gain a greater understanding of their responsibilities as well as offer easy and practical steps to promoting better mental health and wellbeing.

Positive mental health is important for everyone. It is an essential part of our overall health and wellbeing and adds to our level of resilience with the stresses of work and daily life.

We are all used to dealing with physical health problems in the workplace, but the stigma around mental health can mean we feel less able or prepared to deal with these issues. By applying the same principles to mental ill health as we do to physical illness then it is possible to 'do the right thing' and support employees in the best way possible for everyone. Remember it doesn't have to be complicated or something to fear.

The Mental Health & Wellbeing Toolkit aims to remove some of the fears that small organisations may have about how to deal effectively with mental health issues in the workplace and raise awareness of what is available to promote better mental health for yourself and your employees.

## SUMMARY OF SECTIONS

### SECTION 1

#### What do we mean by Mental Health?

Mental health covers a broad range of different conditions including common mental health problems such as Depression and Anxiety, as well as other conditions such as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder or Bi-Polar Disorder.

Often mental illnesses co-exist so that a person may experience more than one illness at a time.

The positive thing about mental illnesses is that they are all very treatable with the right medications, treatment and support and by looking after ourselves.

This section looks at what sort of illnesses could fall under the category of a diagnosable mental health condition ([p.8](#)), and what types of behaviour we might see if a member of our staff is experiencing mental health problems ([p.6](#)).

### SECTION 2

#### Do I have legal responsibilities around mental health as a business owner?

The law is very clear that an employer has a duty of care to ensure that they do not cause harm to an employee, whatever the size of the business. This includes physical and mental harm.

Even if you do not have any employees, it is still wise to be aware of mental health considerations for yourself and for your customers.

In this section, we give an overview of your legal duties ([p.10](#)), as well as answer common questions such as whether you can consider mental health as part of a recruitment process ([p.11](#)), what information you can disclose to others about a member of staff's mental health ([p.10](#)), and many more.

The law expects us to treat people fairly and make reasonable adjustments, so it's important to know about your legal duties. But there are some simple things you can consider to make sure you are doing the right thing.

### SECTION 3

#### What should I do if I am worried about a member of staff's mental health?

If you're worried about a member of your team, you will want to help them in the best way you can.

There are many resources available to help with this, including a flowchart to help plan workplace wellbeing ([p.32](#)), a step by step process to follow ([p.33](#)), ideas that will help with having a conversation about mental health ([p.18](#)), and templates and resources that you can work through with your staff ([sections 5, 7 and 8](#)).

You may be thinking about how often it is appropriate to have review meetings ([p.14](#)), what to do if your member of staff doesn't want to talk to you about their problems ([p.14](#)), or how to help them get the support they need ([p.15](#)).

There are no easy answers to any of these questions, and every case will be different, but this section will point you in the right direction.

# CONTENTS

## SUMMARY OF SECTIONS

### SECTION 4

#### What if I am worried about my own mental health?

As a small business or sole trader, your own health, both physical and mental health, is very important. Your business relies on it so you need to ensure you are following our tips and advice for positive wellbeing and resilience.

For some practical ideas on how to implement this see practical tools and ideas in sections six and seven and resources such as wellness action planning ([p.18](#)).

### SECTION 5

#### What can I do to avoid mental health problems in the workplace?

You will often see the term ‘positive wellbeing culture’ used in documents on this subject and the toolkit is no exception. This may conjure up visions of large corporate companies with HR departments and Occupational Health support but it is equally as relevant in a small business with a handful of employees or for a sole trader who is managing their workload or feeling isolated.

By encouraging employees in your own organisation to take responsibility for all aspects of their health, including mental health, then you are creating the right environment for them to talk to you at the earliest opportunity when they are struggling or stressed.

In the same way, if you are more self-aware of the impact that stress can have on you as a sole trader,

then you can take steps to create your own ‘positive wellbeing culture’ to increase resilience, deal with the inevitable challenges of working alone and even be a role model for colleagues, family and friends.

This section looks at some of the causes of workplace stress ([p.24](#)) and how we can manage these ([p.25](#)), and improve the workplace environment to promote positive wellbeing for everyone ([p.28](#)). This includes how to look after your own mental health, either for yourself as a small business owner, sole trader or manager. These ideas can be shared with the team and used by you to encourage everyone to look after themselves ([p.22](#)).

### SECTION 6

#### Ideas and best practice

Sometimes the best way to learn is to hear from others about what they have done. In this section, read about what other people have done to help their business ([p.30](#)), as well as more practical ideas that you might be able to implement in your own business ([p.33](#)).

### SECTION 7

#### Templates and resources

Look here for templates for conversations ([p.32](#)), stress management ([p.34](#)) and much, much more!

### SECTION 8

If you want more in-depth information about any of these topics, or you want to know more about where to get help locally, then take a look at this section ([p.36](#)).

# SECTION 1

## SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

**In an SME or micro business you are likely to know your staff fairly well but if you work alone then self-awareness is key to maintaining positive mental wellbeing.**

**Here is a list of the sort of behaviours that might indicate emerging or actual mental health problems:**

- Not meeting deadlines or getting things done
- Forgetting tasks
- Constantly checking in that things have been done correctly or how to do things
- Irritability and/or aggression
- Being withdrawn
- Change in personal care/appearance
- Loss of confidence
- Conflicts with colleagues/managers
- Complaints about workload
- Erratic/unacceptable behaviour
- Unplanned absences
- Increased errors or accidents
- Overworking – first in and last out and/or emailing out of hours or when on holiday
- Smoking/drinking more

**When people are experiencing mental health problems they may also show a number of physical signs such as:**

- Lowered immunity with frequent minor illnesses
- Headaches
- Tiredness
- Weight gain or loss
- Unexplained aches and pains
- Difficulty sleeping
- Skin problems such as eczema
- Stomach problems such as IBS or stomach ulcers

**At any time 1 in 6 working age adults have symptoms associated with mental ill health (e.g. sleep problems, fatigue etc.) which don't meet the criteria for a diagnosis.**

Mental Health First Aid England

**What does your stress bucket look like?**



Find the stress bucket exercise on [page 34](#)



**WATCH  
VIDEO**



# SECTION 1



## MENTAL HEALTH CONDITIONS OR DISORDERS

**There are a number of different mental health conditions or disorders and they will affect someone in different ways.**

Diagnosis of any mental health condition should always be made by the appropriate professional but it can be helpful to have a broad understanding when supporting a member of staff or indeed experiencing these illnesses yourself. The earlier a person seeks treatment for a mental health condition, the less likely it is to become more serious and the faster they can recover. This is the main reason that creating a positive wellbeing culture can encourage employees to speak up at the earliest opportunity and take steps to access treatment, which will benefit them individually and you as their employer.

It is important to note that with the right support, treatment, medication and knowledge about how to stay well, someone with a mental health condition can manage effectively and continue to work productively. The vast majority of people who have a diagnosed mental health condition make a positive contribution to the organisation that they work for and bring with them valuable skills and experience.

If you want more information on any specific illness then this can be accessed via the [Mind website](#).

### Depression

Everyone can feel sad or blue from time to time but usually these feelings will pass and people can manage in work and cope with things. However, clinical depression is when these feelings last for at least two weeks and have an impact on work, relationships and how they feel. People can become very tearful or irritable and may find it difficult to concentrate at work.

### Anxiety

Anxiety is a natural response which can motivate us and keeps us safe in dangerous situations but when the anxiety begins to increase it can cause panic attacks and may develop into an anxiety disorder, which is more severe and long-lasting. There are a number of common anxiety disorders, which are described below:

#### Generalised Anxiety Disorder (GAD)

This is when someone has an overwhelming anxiety and worry about lots of different things, such as money, health, family and work, even when there are no signs of a problem.

#### Panic Disorder

This is when someone experiences a number of panic attacks and is constantly fearful that a panic attack may occur.

### Phobias

A person experiencing a phobia will avoid or restrict what they do because of a specific fear. This fear can often appear unreasonable and fear of animals, situations such as travelling on public transport or natural environments such as heights can be common.



# SECTION 1

## CONTINUED...

# MENTAL HEALTH CONDITIONS OR DISORDERS

## Obsessive-compulsive Disorder (OCD)

This disorder is less common but involves obsessional thoughts and compulsive behaviours which accompany the feelings of anxiety. Obsessive thoughts may be about contamination, harm or loved ones dying for example and the compulsive behaviours often involve counting or repeating tasks a set number of times.

## Psychosis

This is an umbrella term for specific illnesses where a person experiences changes in thinking, perception, mood and behaviour which can severely disrupt their life. They may have disordered thinking, confusion and hallucinations of some sort. Psychotic episodes can be brought about by physical illness as well as mental illness. People experiencing psychosis may be viewed by the public as a danger, however it is likely that they may be more of a danger to themselves and therefore they can be very vulnerable.

## Schizophrenia

This illness does not involve someone having a 'split personality' and refers to changes in brain function whereby thoughts and perceptions become confused. The person may be delusional, confused and experiencing hallucinations, which may include hearing or seeing things which do not exist. This can be very frightening for the person experiencing them.

## Bipolar Disorder

This is when someone can experience extreme mood swings between severe depression and periods of mania where they may have increased energy and hyperactivity, be thinking and speaking very fast and have grand plans and ideas, which are often unrealistic or unachievable.

## Personality Disorders

These are conditions in which the way someone thinks, feels and relates to others is at odds with what is commonly accepted as 'the norm'. These types of mental illness often stem from early life and early development. There is often a very rigid way of thinking which can cause conflict for that person and those around them. There are a number of different personality disorders and one of the most common is Borderline Personality Disorder.



A World Health Organisation video, '**I had a black dog, his name was depression**' illustrates the struggles of one man, Matthew Johnstone, to hide his illness from work and those around him.



**WATCH  
VIDEO**

# DO I HAVE LEGAL RESPONSIBILITIES AROUND MENTAL HEALTH AS A BUSINESS OWNER?



**Nathalie Stewart, Partner at Gosschalks Solicitors**, answers your questions about mental health and the law.

### **If I know a member of staff is experiencing mental health problems is there more I should do?**

If an employer is already on notice that an employee suffers from poor mental health (whether or not caused by work) then you should ensure regular one to ones and/or regular contact between the manager and employee take place to assist with ensuring injury is not caused or exacerbated for the employee even in circumstances where injury might not usually be expected.

### **What should be made known to an employee's family if they are under 18 years of age?**

Confidentiality is important for anyone experiencing mental illness, no matter what their age, so information should only be shared if you have concerns about keeping a young person safe. It may be appropriate to share information with an employee's parents but it is better to do so with their permission. If you are concerned about their welfare you can make a report to the local Safeguarding Children Board via their website. Each area has its own Safeguarding website and information on how to do this.

### **How do I know if someone is disabled as a result of their mental health?**

The test for disability under the Equality Act is whether an employee has a mental or physical condition that has lasted or will last a year and substantially adversely affects their day to day activities.

You must discount the positive effects of medication and where a condition is a recurring one then it can still meet the test of having lasted or will last for a year.

If an employee is stating they are suffering from a mental health condition such as anxiety or depression, all employers should assume that it is possible that this can be a disability.

Ultimately you will not know unless you get a medical expert's report but by ensuring you are not discriminating and assisting with adjustments you will be meeting your obligations if the condition is a disability.



# CONTINUED...

# DO I HAVE LEGAL RESPONSIBILITIES AROUND MENTAL HEALTH AS A BUSINESS OWNER?

## **What are my legal obligations to my employees regarding their mental health?**

All employers have a duty of care to their employees not to cause harm to them which includes mental harm. This is regardless of what size employer you are.

Common causes of poor mental health at work are bullying and an unreasonable workload therefore as a minimum you should have a) a grievance procedure to enable employees to report this b) a policy that makes it clear bullying and harassment are not tolerated and how it is dealt with and c) a one to one/appraisal on a regular basis to deal with issues like workload. For a small employer it would be reasonable to carry out an annual appraisal and regular one to ones or arrangements where employees and managers have regular contact.

## **If a member of staff says that adjustments have been recommended by their GP what evidence of this can be sought by the employer?**

Under these circumstances it would be reasonable for the employer to seek evidence of these recommendations so that they can support the employee to the best of their ability. These could then form part of the Wellness Action Plan for the employee.

If the employee's mental illness is a disability as defined under the Equality Act 2010 then reasonable adjustments must be made unless a small business can justify not doing so.

## **Can I ask someone about their mental health at a job interview?**

No, asking any sort of health question is prohibited (except in very specific circumstances) to make sure employees are not discriminated against.

If questions about health are asked they must directly relate to the suitability of the role involved. This is unlikely to be justified for poor mental health and is more relevant to physical or mobile jobs where questions about physical health are relevant.

## **As a small business, I do not have a Human Resources department. How can I navigate employment law?**

There are many sources of help for getting this right. If you are unsure then ACAS provide a free advice service and there are many online HR websites or companies where you can outsource your HR and employment law needs.

They will provide guidance on all aspects and your responsibilities. Most HR support companies, employment lawyers and other experts would prefer to work with you to ensure you don't encounter problems than to wait until a crisis occurs. Want to know more about how to support a member of your team and your legal duties to them? There are more Q & As on [p.14 to p.17](#).

# WHAT SHOULD I DO IF A MEMBER OF STAFF IS MENTALLY ILL?

## What sort of reasonable adjustments should I consider for employees with mental health difficulties?

The law says a reasonable adjustment is something that alleviates a disadvantage caused by an employee with a disability.

### A reasonable adjustment could include:

- Disregarding some sickness absence rather than disciplining an employee
- Allowing an employee to have a phased return to work after a period of sickness absence
- Allowing the employee a reduced workload
- Permitting a change of place of work including home working
- Allowing the employee a point of contact or more frequent supervisions
- Permitting extra breaks if they are feeling that they cannot cope
- Transferring them into another role

If you are concerned as a small business about the cost of making reasonable adjustments for an employee there is a government funded initiative, Access to Work, which could assist. [Visit website.](#)

The best thing to do is to have a conversation with the member of staff to see what could help them. There are ideas about how to have a good conversation on [p.18.](#)

## Do I have to put in place any adjustment that an employee wants?

No, legally you only need to do what is reasonable to the employer and only if it makes good the disadvantage that the disability causes the employee. What is reasonable to the employer will depend in part on your type of business, your time and your resources, so for small employers an adjustment that might be reasonable for somebody else would not necessarily be reasonable for you. Anything that puts a disproportionate burden on you or is impracticable will not be reasonable even if it would assist the employee.

Most small employers would be expected to be able to cope with a short phased return, allowing extra breaks, disregarding some sickness absence for disciplinary purposes or arranging further contact or supervision to assist. A small employer is far more likely to be able to justify a refusal to change the employee's job or reduce their workload on the grounds of lack of resources and cover. However, cost alone should not be the only factor.

If you do want to refuse an adjustment on the grounds it isn't reasonable then you would be expected to provide strong evidence to justify your decision. Most adjustments, unless they seriously impact on your business, are likely to be considered reasonable or should at least be considered on a temporary or trial basis.

If you talk to the member of staff involved, you may be surprised at how easy it is to make the adjustments they need. If it's not possible to make all of the adjustments requested, then you can have a conversation about what could be possible.



### CONTINUED...

# WHAT SHOULD I DO IF A MEMBER OF STAFF IS MENTALLY ILL?

## **What options should be considered to approach an employee when unusual patterns of behaviour have been noticed?**

Once you have noticed that an employee is behaving differently and suspect this may be related to their mental health then choose the time and place to speak to them carefully as this can impact on the outcome. For more information on 'How to have a conversation about mental health' see [p.18](#).

## **What if the employee becomes too unwell to do the job or is absent from work repeatedly?**

If someone is absent from work, it's important to keep in touch in the same way as you would if they were away from work with a physical health problem. This can often reduce sickness absence.

From a legal perspective, all employees can be fairly dismissed if they become incapable of doing their job regardless of fault or what the condition is. However, you must follow a fair procedure and in the event the employee has a disability you must ensure the dismissal is justified and only carried out when reasonable adjustments have also been considered. You should also consider making further allowances for a person who is absent with a disability related illness and consider whether to give them a longer time for their health to improve before instigating a capability process.

If an employer considers an employee's actual or potential length of absence to be likely to have a significantly adverse impact on the business then they can trigger the capability process. This applies if the potential or actual length of absence, as evidenced by a sick note, is one month or more.

The appropriate procedure is a) to invite the employee to an initial meeting to discuss the absence, the prognosis and any reasonable adjustments and b) then to get medical evidence/occupational health evidence about the prognosis, the likely date of their return to work and any reasonable adjustments that may need to be made. These procedures must be followed regardless of the size of the employer.

If the individual is unable to do their job, there is no evidence that they can do their job in the near future and the employer cannot be expected to wait any longer, the employer may be able to dismiss. The employee is entitled to a fair hearing (to which they may bring a colleague or a trade union representative for support) and the employer must take into account any evidence that the employee presents about being able to do their role before deciding whether dismissal is ultimately the right course of action. Again, this procedure must be followed regardless of the size of the employer.

# FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

### **How often should 1:1 reviews take place with regard to mental health issues?**

There are no hard and fast rules about how often a 1:1 review takes place but it is good practice to ensure that the employee has the opportunity to speak up if any adjustments are not working and also for the employer to monitor the situation. In a small business it would be considered reasonable to have a formal appraisal once a year but this doesn't allow for any issues to be picked up quickly. Good practice would suggest that less formal weekly reviews in the early stages of an issue will benefit everyone involved. You may want to consider using a template to record what is discussed and agreed by both parties. See [p.33](#).

### **When might it be appropriate for an employer to be accompanied in a meeting about an employee's mental health?**

It is good practice to offer an employee the option of being accompanied to a meeting so that they feel supported and can have a point of reference with someone they trust after the meeting. This could be another colleague from within the organisation. The employer may also find this helpful to have another person witness the conversation.

If you are concerned, you could also consider having someone with you when the conversation takes place. Bear in mind, however, that this may come across as being oppressive and make them think that they are being discussed behind their back. One option is to consider a more neutral venue away from the work environment. When choosing a venue, however, take into account the sensitive nature of the discussion and the employee's expectations regarding privacy.

### **What is good practice with regards to a discussion with an employee about their mental health? What sort of things should be covered and should this be recorded?**

When you decide to approach an employee to discuss your concerns or observations you may want to consider using a document to record it. There is a simple template on [p.33](#) or you could try using the Mind Wellness Action Plan ([WAP- link](#)). The WAP is a personalised tool which can be used by everyone to identify what keeps us well at work, what causes us to become unwell and what support we would like to help us back to recovery as swiftly as possible. This is a document you can implement with all employees as part of your mental health and wellbeing strategy.

### **What can an employer do if they are concerned an employee has a mental health issue but refuses to discuss it?**

An employer needs to be patient and not expect that an employee will initially be open to talk about their mental health. There is still a lot of stigma associated with mental ill-health and they may be experiencing feelings of guilt and shame. They may be fearful that they could lose their job or it could affect future promotions. There are many reasons why someone may be closed to having this conversation.

If the employer is reassuring and empathetic towards their employee and persists in wanting to offer support then at some point the employee may see that they are genuine in their concerns and not merely focused on the tasks in hand, i.e. the role that the employee undertakes. Follow the link to [p.21](#) to read more about looking after yourself.



# CONTINUED...

# FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

### **How can an employer support employees with mental health issues and what other organisations are available to help with this?**

An employer can support employees with existing mental health issues and prevent future mental ill health by following a few simple steps and making them an important part of daily business. You can find a helpful checklist to support you on [p.28](#).

There are a number of organisations that can support employees with mental health issues and provide treatments and self-help information. See page [p.36](#).

### **If I'm concerned about an employee's mental health, should I suggest they take time off work and come back when they're better?**

This will all depend on the individual person. It's always important to talk through the problems with someone and see what is right for them. Although work can be a cause of stress and other related mental health problems, it can also be a big factor in improving your mental health. In some circumstances, staying at home may make things worse.

Talk to the member of staff about anything that could help them, for example, reduced hours, help with managing their workload, flexibility in work such as some hours working from home, or improvements in the workplace environment if this is causing a problem.

### **If an employee continues to experience poor mental health what should other employees be told?**

An employee's disclosure and information about their mental health should be kept completely confidential if that is what the employee wants. If a person can be persuaded to share some information with colleagues, then this can be a very positive step and a wider support network can be helpful. However, this has to be their choice.

### **I run a small business and a member of staff being absent with mental health problems would mean my business could not run - what should I do?**

It's important to have contingency plans for any sort of absence from work - whether that's holidays that a member of staff is entitled to, compassionate leave, physical health problems or mental health problems. Try thinking about what your plans are for someone being off work, for example; communicating with customers, temporary staff who can cover and so on.

## SECTION 3



# CONTINUED...

# FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

### **My business is in a rural area, how can I access mental health support for me and my staff?**

Sometimes if you live in an isolated area it can take more effort to get the help you need. However, there are still things you can do yourself ([p.22](#)), as well as online tools that can help ([p.35](#)). It's even more important in this case to support each other, for example by checking in with each other as a staff team, or booking a regular appointment with other people working nearby, attending networking events and forging relationships with other small businesses in your locality.

### **What else can I do to help a member of staff who is experiencing mental health problems to be able to do their job?**

Just as we all have a responsibility to keep ourselves physically fit and well to come to work, there are things we can all do to keep ourselves fit and well mentally. [Section 4](#) has plenty of ideas about how to look after your own mental health, as well as how to encourage this within the workplace.

### **How can I help an employee return to work after a period away with mental illness?**

To help make sure that a return to work goes smoothly consider meeting up with the employee before they are due back to ask them what would be helpful to support their return. Maybe make the meeting away from the workplace in a more

relaxed environment. Schedule this meeting so that you have sufficient time to make any reasonable adjustments arising from the discussion.

Consider arranging a visit to the workplace before the official return date if this would help them. You might agree a phased return where they reduce their hours and/or days of work for a period of time before returning to their full contracted terms and conditions.

You could discuss whether for a period of time they take on fewer tasks, have more breaks or ensure that they can take time out if they begin to feel stressed. The documents provided in section 7 ([p.32](#)) provide a plan that both parties can sign up to which might prove useful.

It is always helpful to review this return to work plan regularly in the beginning to ensure that it's working and make any other adjustments as required. Good communication is key and the longer someone has been away from work the harder it can be for them to return. The support you give an employee at this time can be crucial.



## SECTION 4

# HAVING A CONVERSATION ABOUT MENTAL HEALTH



**Ensure you have enough time – be patient.**



**Turn off your phone** or put it on silent.



**Use ‘I’ not ‘we’** as that gives the impression everyone is talking about them.



**Be prepared for ‘I’m fine’** and have specific examples of what you’ve noticed.



**Reassure them that you want to help.** This is not a disciplinary meeting.



**Listen in an empathetic and non-judgmental way.**



**Expect the person may become tearful and emotional.**



**Don’t rush into action.** Take time to reflect on what they say and arrange another meeting.



**A time and place where you will both be comfortable** and not be interrupted. Consider somewhere away from the workplace.



**Make sure the conversation is about their wellbeing and not work performance.** Ensure your body language is open, and think about your tone of voice, facial expressions. Use open questions and listen without interrupting.



**WATCH VIDEO**

## SECTION 4

# WHAT IF I AM WORRIED ABOUT MY OWN MENTAL HEALTH?

**Looking after your own mental health and wellbeing is also essential because, as well as its personal importance to you, it also sends out a valuable message to your employees that you understand the value of positive mental health.**

By acting as a good role model you can show others that good mental health matters and demonstrate practical steps that they can take to deal with stress in the workplace.

You might find it useful to take the online stress quiz or [complete the stress bucket](#) to see how you are doing at the moment. This can be particularly important if you are a sole trader where isolation and lack of support can be an issue.

Try out some of the ideas in the toolkit and create your own toolkit of things that work best for you. By adopting a variety of positive coping strategies, you will be increasing the size of your own personal 'stress bucket'. Sometimes it can be trial and error to see what works best for you but don't give up. The long-term benefits are huge and if you are at your best then that can only be good for business.

There are lots of practical tips on how to improve your resilience and adopt positive coping strategies in section 4.



## SECTION 4





# LOOKING AFTER YOURSELF

## Relaxation

- **Take a break** away from something stressful. Reading a book or magazine for a few minutes can help you to refocus.
- **Listen to music** or a relaxation app e.g. Headspace. This can connect you with your emotions and distract from stressful thoughts and feelings.
- **Focus on breathing.** This can help you feel calmer and give an increased sense of control and wellbeing.
- **Visualise** that you are somewhere serene and calming.
- **Take a tech break;** even a short time away from phones and gadgets can help you relax.
- **Spend some time in a natural environment,** such as a walk to the nearest green space.

## Mindfulness

Mindfulness is a form of meditation which can help you manage your mental health and encourages more enjoyment from life. It increases awareness of what is taking place around you and encourages a more caring, less critical way of looking at yourself.

Mindfulness exercises vary in length, from 3 minutes to 20 minutes or so, and can be done in a variety of ways or locations. There are lots of apps which can be downloaded onto your phone. Some will have a cost attached to them but a recommended free app is from Headspace. It gives 10 short mindfulness exercises you can do to experience the feeling of calm and relaxation it can bring to your day.

## Sleep

Make your bedroom a calm and relaxing space, ensuring the temperature, light and sound levels are suitable for you.

- **Turn off TVs, smart devices, phones and computers** at least an hour before bedtime.
- **Avoid caffeine, alcohol or fizzy drinks** close to bedtime.
- **Avoid a heavy meal** or sugary foods before bedtime.
- **Some exercise will improve sleep** but allow a couple of hours between that and bedtime to allow the body to relax.

- **Try to avoid worrying tasks** later in the day by getting them done early.
- **Do something relaxing** before bedtime such as taking a bath, reading, listening to music or meditation.
- **Keep a sleep diary** to help you identify what might be preventing you from sleeping.

## Food and Nutrition

- **Eat at regular intervals** and choose slow release energy foods like protein foods, nuts and seeds, oats and wholegrain.
- **Avoid sugary snacks and drinks** which make blood sugar levels rise and fall rapidly.
- **Vegetables and fruit** contain the vitamins and minerals that we need to stay mentally healthy.
- **Keep hydrated** by drinking at least two pints of water a day. Protein is important and can be found in lean meat, fish, eggs, cheese, legumes, soya products, nuts and seeds.
- **Caffeine is a stimulant and can make you feel anxious** and depressed, disturb sleep and it is contained in many things, not just tea and coffee.
- **Alcohol is a depressant** and should be drunk in moderation.

## Physical Activity

There are many added advantages to exercise, particularly exercise or physical activities which bring us together with other people.

This can help combat feelings of loneliness and isolation. The exercise people take doesn't have to be hard core marathon running or spending hours in the gym. A brisk walk can be just as effective or taking the stairs more often than the lift. Ideally, it needs to be something we enjoy as we are more likely to sustain it.

## SECTION 4

# CONTINUED... LOOKING AFTER YOURSELF

**We are all aware of the positive changes we can make to improve our physical health and wellbeing, but few people make the connection between these practical steps and our mental health and wellbeing. We can all make changes that build resilience to deal with stress and improve our overall health.**

“As a small business owner I was working all hours and mega stressed. My mind was in 100 places all at once and my productivity was suffering.

I found out about mindfulness through my mates and it helped...massively. It's been the key to growing my business and enjoying the process!”

**Jack, 27 owner of LIGHTBOX, Scarborough**

“Without question ... what has proved useful for me is developing ‘mindful thinking’ through the meditations – I use these daily.

The new ways of thinking I have developed have helped me to deal with my ‘workplace issue’ ... and long-standing problem with anxiety. Mindfulness has enabled me to derive greater joy from life.

This is not to say that the ‘techniques’ work 100% of the time, but I have noticed that the more I practice the more powerful they are.”

**Daniel, Town Planning Specialist aged 35**



**“Mindfulness can serve as an emergency parachute. It needs weaving every day, so that it’s ready and waiting should you encounter an emergency.”**

Mark Williams & Danny Penman, 2011



## SECTION 4





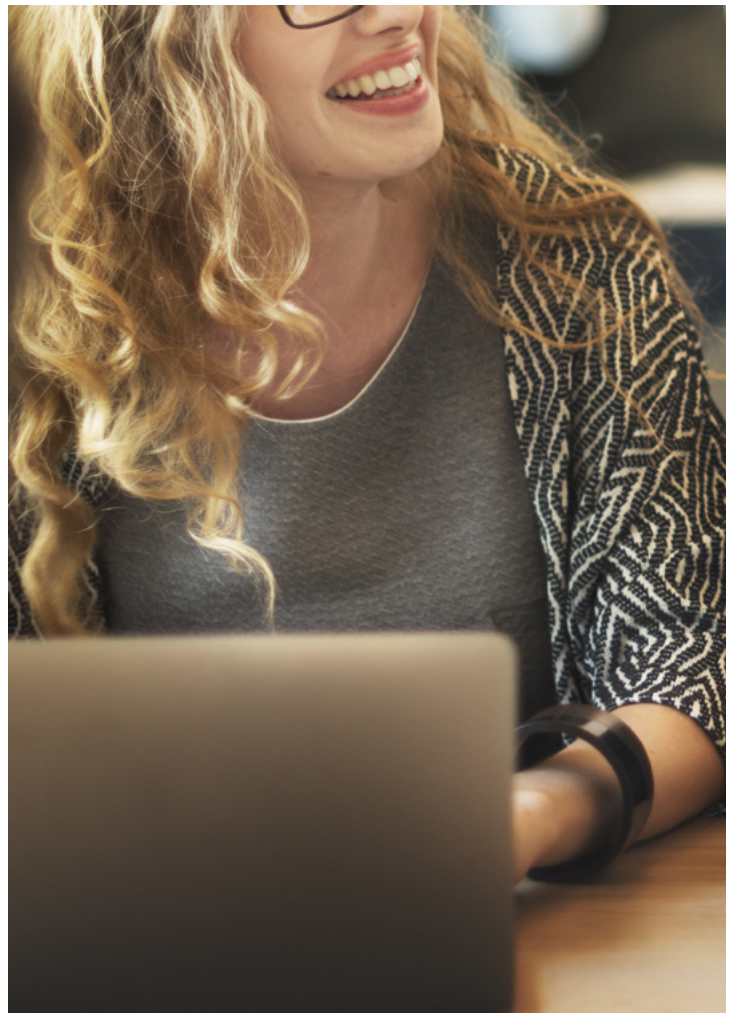
## SECTION 5

# WHAT CAUSES MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS IN THE WORKPLACE AND HOW TO CREATE A POSITIVE ENVIRONMENT AT WORK

**Whether you are a sole trader or a small or medium enterprise, it is important to promote positive mental health for everyone, including yourself.**

Promoting a culture where mental health is viewed as everyone's responsibility is integral to how employees feel about their work, their performance and how they interact with colleagues and customers. All employers can lead by example, acting as positive role models for good mental health and wellbeing. If you are a sole trader, where the organisation depends on your wellbeing, then knowing how to support yourself in times of need is important. Self-care is a necessity and should not be viewed as a luxury by anyone.

Making sure the workplace environment takes account of the causes of stress can help to prevent members of the team feeling stressed and potentially developing poor mental health. See the tools in this section and section 6 to think about your work environment and ways you might be able to help employees and prevent mental health problems occurring in the future.



Setting an example is sometimes easier said than done, as stated by one SME respondent.

**“...I think setting an example from the top is crucial, although as CEO I do find it difficult to take my own advice on this.”**

## SECTION 5

### CONTINUED...

## WHAT CAUSES MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS IN THE WORKPLACE AND HOW TO CREATE A POSITIVE ENVIRONMENT AT WORK

**There are simple steps an employer can take to promote a positive mental health and wellbeing culture for themselves and all their staff:**

- **Improving mental health awareness across the business** via training, information leaflets, books, resources;
- **Creating a culture** where staff feel able to talk about their mental health at the earliest opportunity;
- **Tackling the causes of work related mental ill health;**
- **Supporting staff** who are experiencing mental ill health;
- **Encouraging positive behaviours** such as taking water or fruit breaks or going for a short walk outside;
- **In rural areas consider outdoor activities at lunchtime or after work.** Maybe a walking group or running for example.

However big or small a business is, it can promote positive mental health and wellbeing and educate its staff to tackle the stigma and encourage conversations about mental health to take place.

This has been the driving message behind the government backed 'Time to Change' campaign. Individuals and organisations can pledge to tackle the stigma associated with mental health problems and the website is a good source of resources to make this happen.

Tackle stigma and discrimination in the workplace by being a good role model. You don't need to be an expert to talk about mental health and wellbeing.

Remember to reward good work at every opportunity. Just a 'thank you' is sometimes enough. When a complaint is made against an employee, their mental health is often affected. Don't forget to check in with them to ensure they are not becoming unwell whilst the matter is being investigated. They may need your support under these difficult circumstances. You don't need to be an expert to have a conversation about mental health.

### Common causes of workplace stress

- Lack of defined job role and responsibilities;
- Lack of control over work;
- Unmanageable workloads and demands;
- Poor relationships with manager/and or work colleagues;
- Lack of variety in work;
- Lack of career progression opportunities;
- Poor work life balance;
- Organisational change or job insecurity.

**You don't have to be an expert to have a conversation about mental health.**



A black and white printable version can be found at the end of this toolkit on [Page 40](#).

# HOW ARE YOU FEELING?

**Evidence suggests there are five 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 work and life.

### **CONNECT**

Connect with your colleagues. Why not have a cuppa and a chat in your break?

### **BE ACTIVE**

Try a walk or a run with a colleague during your breaks.

### **TAKE NOTICE**

Be curious and notice the world around you; savour the moment.

### **LEARN**

Try something new. Take on a new challenge at work.

### **GIVE**

Do something nice for a friend or colleague. Smile, say thank you or make them a brew.



## SECTION 5

A black and white printable version can be found at the end of this toolkit on [Page 41](#).

# HOW ARE YOU FEELING?

Use this template either as an individual or for a workplace to think about how to apply the 5 ways to wellbeing to you or your work.

Fill in the circles with ideas that will work for you.

**CONNECT**

**BE ACTIVE**

**TAKE NOTICE**

**LEARN**

**GIVE**

# GOOD IDEAS FOR WORKPLACE WELLBEING



Consider setting up a Facebook or WhatsApp group to keep everyone in touch and share information



Be a good role model when it comes to healthy eating, exercise and the importance of hydration on mental wellbeing



Ensure you communicate regularly with employees by meeting up for coffee, phoning or holding informal chats



Get involved in any local business events to share good practice and gain peer support from other employers



Encourage employees to get involved in activities together such as sport, hobbies



Break the stigma about mental health by talking openly and encouraging others to do so



Encourage everyone, including yourself, to take breaks and holidays



Help staff make adjustments to working patterns to reduce stress, for example flexible working or changing break arrangements

## SECTION 5

**“I always make time to ring my staff about their wellbeing. This gives me a chance to offer support at the earliest opportunity.”**

**Small Business Owner and employer of four members of staff who all work out in the community**





## SECTION 6

# CASE STUDY 1

**One of my team, Joe, is a single parent working part-time in retail, who experiences depression and sometimes struggles to manage that alongside family responsibilities.**

This affects his motivation and occasionally his ability to attend work. Joe is receiving support from a Work Wellness project, which operates in his GP surgery and this is helping his personal development and building resilience for the future.

Joe enjoys his job and is very proud of delivering excellent customer service. To help him maintain his job and continue this, we have made two significant 'reasonable adjustments':

We have changed his hours to allow him to work an early shift on a Saturday, which gives him some respite with childcare when his child is with their Mum. This is really important in helping to manage stress and depression.

Flexibility in working days, so that if he is sick on one day he can work another day in lieu. Although he rarely needs to use this it is a really important safety net which he appreciates.

In addition to this, links have been built between the Work Wellness Adviser and the business, which is helping to raise awareness around mental health and support other members of staff and managers to improve workplace wellbeing.



## SECTION 6

# CASE STUDY 2

**I have a training organisation, which necessitates me travelling around the country to deliver the training and staying away from home for a couple of nights at a time.**

The training itself is tiring as you are always thinking about what comes next in the session and sometimes the individuals or groups can be challenging.

When you work alone it is sometimes hard to access peer support. There's no-one alongside you who understands how it can be and that can be a very lonely place. To add to the stress you often don't get a proper lunch break in the day as you are dealing with other enquiries and quotes and trying to keep things afloat so this adds to how you are feeling. It can be very isolating and can really affect your mood.

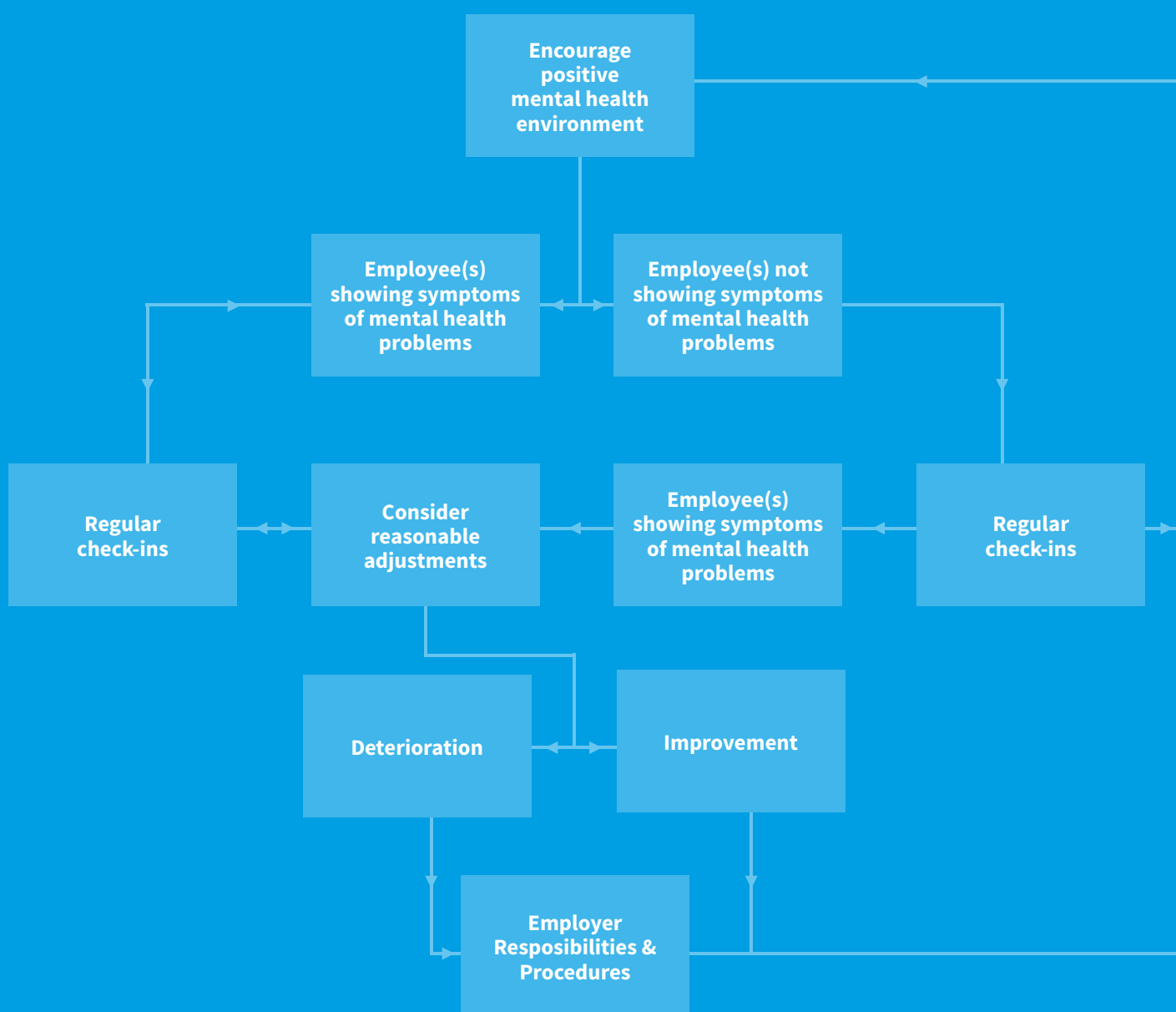
At first I found it hard to relax in my own time after the training day had finished and the temptation to carry on working is always there. Don't get me wrong, there are times when I might have something urgent to deal with and will do so but I now have a rule that each evening that I'm away from home I need to make sure I do something to improve my own wellbeing and help me to de-stress.

I do a bit of research to see what might be happening in the location I'm travelling to and have made the effort in the past to visit the theatre, exhibitions and famous landmarks that I wouldn't otherwise get the chance to visit. I practise Mindfulness most days and find it helps me to focus, ready for the day ahead. I use an app on my phone to help me with this and find it easy now I've practised it for a while. It's a great tool to have in your virtual back pocket. I'd really recommend it.

If there's leisure facilities in the hotel I'll go to the gym or for a swim and I always use my time away now to catch up with friends and family over the phone. I don't think of these things as a luxury anymore, but vital things I need to have positive mental wellbeing. I also try to think about what I eat and drink so that I'm hopefully looking after my health as a whole. The business relies on me so I need to be as resilient as possible to the inevitable stress that goes with lone working and trying to juggle a few things at once.



# PLANNING YOUR WORKPLACE WELLBEING





## SECTION 7

A black and white printable version can be found at the end of this toolkit on [Page 42](#).

# PLANNING YOUR WORKPLACE WELLBEING

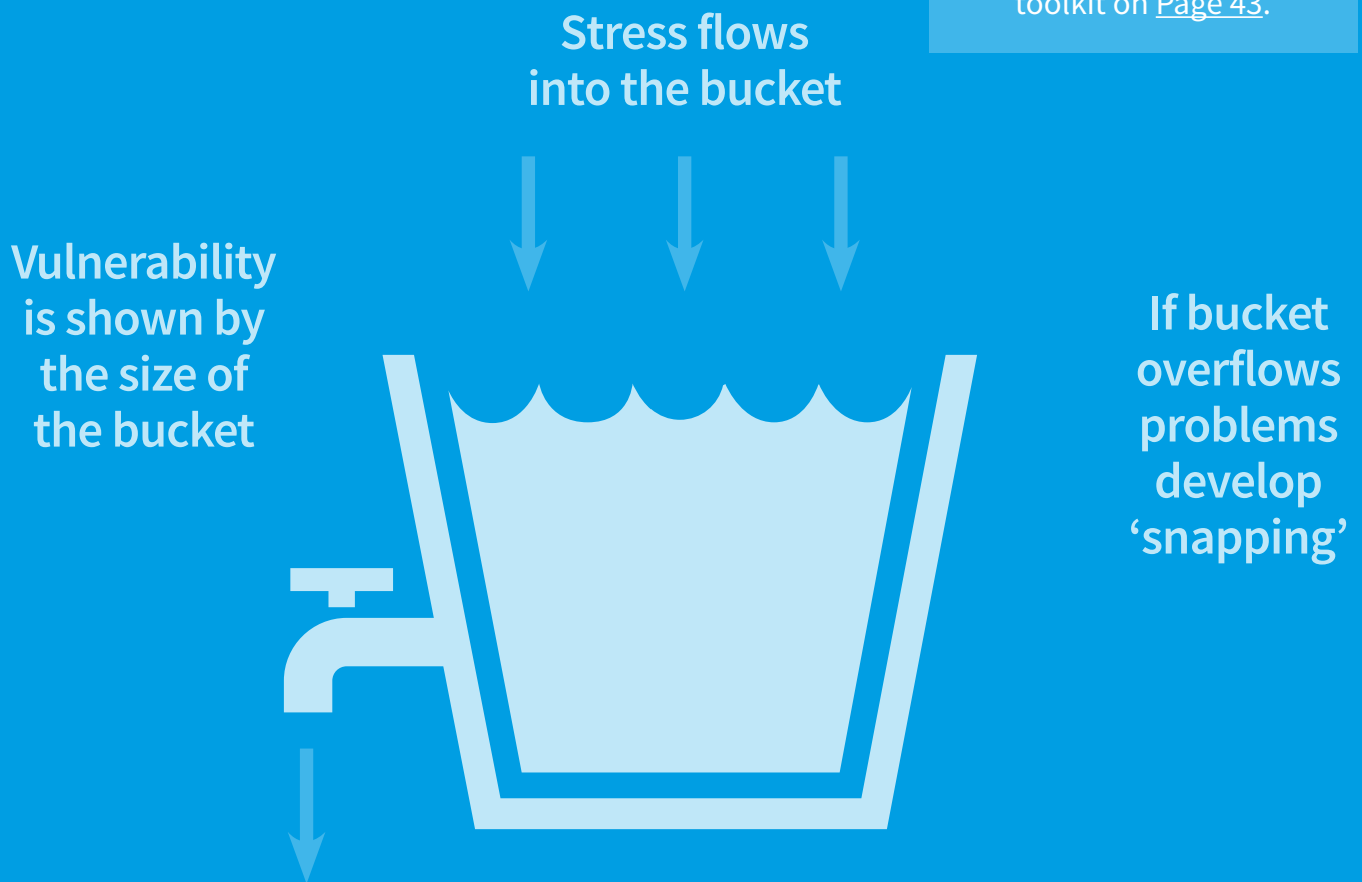
Employee showing signs of stress/distress	Effects this is having at work	Suggested action for a solution	Actions that have been agreed	Review of actions and how things are going
Discuss what may be happening for the employee which is affecting their mental wellbeing.	How is this affecting the employee at work?	Discuss what could help to solve the issues.	What actions have been agreed between the employer and employee?	Date and time of review.

Employee..... Signature..... Date.....

Manager..... Signature..... Date.....

## SECTION 7

A black and white printable version can be found at the end of this toolkit on [Page 43](#).



### Good Coping

Tap working to let the stress out



### Bad Coping

Tap not working so water fills the bucket

## Reflection

- 1 Empty everything that is currently concerning you into the bucket.
- 2 Do I have any evidence to support my feelings about these things?
- 3 What can I change?
- 4 What can't I change and need to accept?
- 5 What are my unhelpful coping strategies?
- 6 What are some of my helpful coping strategies?

## SECTION 7

# ONLINE TOOLS TO HELP

### Apps

**Mindshift** is aimed at teens and young people, helping them to cope with anxiety.

**Care monkey** helps young people with issues like bullying, mental health problems and sexting. It looks like a game when you download it on your phone and was developed in East Yorkshire.

**What's Up?** Uses CBT (cognitive behavioural therapy) and ACT (Acceptance Commitment Therapy) to help you cope with depression, anxiety, anger, stress and more.

**Intellicare** is a suite of apps developed by researchers at Northwestern University for depression and anxiety.

**SAM** stands for Self-help for Anxiety Management.

**Calm Harm** provides tasks that help you resist the urge to self-harm.

**Breathe2Relax** gives you breathing exercises to relieve stress.

If you have a Fitbit or similar device, you may well find you have a breathing app on this too.



### Websites

**[www.livinglifetothefull.com](http://www.livinglifetothefull.com)**

Cognitive-behavioural self-help for depression and anxiety.

**[www.stepsforstress.org](http://www.stepsforstress.org)**

Take the stress quiz or join the online community.

**[www.getselfhelp.co.uk](http://www.getselfhelp.co.uk)**

Wide range of information and help for common problems.

Using an app or online tool is no alternative to seeking help if you need it. We would always recommend you visit your GP if you are experiencing mental health problems to seek professional advice. Other sources of support are listed on [p.36](#) and [p.37](#).



## SECTION 8

# LOCAL SIGNPOSTING

**There are a number of local organisations, that can offer advice, support, mindfulness signposting and services in your area. Here are their details:**

### **The York Directory for Mental Health**

An online directory of all mental health services in York and the surrounding area, including the Crisis Service.  
[www.yorkmhdirectory.co.uk](http://www.yorkmhdirectory.co.uk)

### **North Yorkshire County Council Mental Health services**

Mental health services available across North Yorkshire  
<https://www.northyorks.gov.uk/>

### **York Mind**

Promotes the views and needs of people with mental health problems.  
01904 643364 | [office@yorkmind.org.uk](mailto:office@yorkmind.org.uk)  
<https://www.yorkmind.org.uk/>

### **Scarborough, Whitby & Ryedale Mind**

01723 356562 | [info@swrmind.org.uk](mailto:info@swrmind.org.uk)  
<https://www.swrmind.org.uk/>

### **East Riding Partnerships**

Supports anyone with substance misuse issues  
01482 320606 | [info@ads-uk.org](mailto:info@ads-uk.org)

### **Hull and East Riding Adult Mental Health Service**

Mental Health Response Service. A 24/7 triage centre based at Miranda House, Hull for referrals and advice for Hull and East Riding.  
01482 301701 | [TR.RapidResponseService@nhs.net](mailto:TR.RapidResponseService@nhs.net)

### **Hull & East Yorkshire Mind**

Promotes the views and needs of people with mental health problems.  
01482 240200 (Mon-Fri, 9am-5pm) | 01482 240133 (Information Line)  
[www.heyhound.org.uk](http://www.heyhound.org.uk) | [info@heyhound.org.uk](mailto:info@heyhound.org.uk)



# IN TIMES OF CRISIS

**Mental health crises don't always happen during office hours but if you find yourself needing support then there are services who can help. See below for details you may find useful.**

### **East Riding Mental Health Response Services**

01482 301701

### **Vale of York**

NHS 111

### **Samaritans**

116123 or Textphone 08457 90 91 92

### **Mental Health Helpline**

0333 0000 309 (Residents of Easingwold, Selby, Tadcaster, Helmsley, Kirbymoorside, Pickering)

### **Papyrus HOPEline (under 35 yrs)**

0800 068 4141

### **CALM (men only)**

0800 585858

# NATIONAL MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

**The Health for Work Adviceline in England can be accessed on 0800 077 88 44 and [www.health4work.nhs.uk](http://www.health4work.nhs.uk).**

**The blog is designed to support employers and employees in small and medium sized businesses, by providing free-to-use early and easy access to professional occupational health and well-being advice to help employees remain in or return to work after a period of ill health.**

**National Mind**  
<https://www.mind.org.uk>

**Mental Health Foundation**  
The Mental Health Foundation provides information and support for anyone with mental health problems or learning disabilities.  
<https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk>

**NHS Mood Choices**  
<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression>

**NHS Calling for NHS advice**  
Use the 111 service  
If you are feeling unwell and need a telephone health assessment, please call the NHS 111 service free of charge from any phone by dialling “1 1 1”

**Rethink Mental Illness**  
Support and advice for people living with mental illness.  
0300 5000 927 (Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm)  
<https://www.rethink.org>

**Samaritans**  
Confidential support for people experiencing feelings of distress or despair.  
116 123 (24-hour helpline)  
01482 240200 (Mon-Fri, 9am-5pm)  
01482 240133 (Information Line)  
<https://www.samaritans.org/>

**Campaign Against Living Miserably CALM**  
0800 585 858 (for men in distress or wanting advice)  
[www.thecalmzone.net](http://www.thecalmzone.net)

**Papyrus HOPELine**  
0800 068 4141 (anyone under 35 years)  
[pat@papyrus-uk.org](mailto:pat@papyrus-uk.org)  
<https://papyrus-uk.org/>

**Depression Alliance**  
Charity for sufferers of depression. Has a network of self-help groups.  
[www.depressionalliance.org](http://www.depressionalliance.org)

**Anxiety UK**  
National charity offering information and support to everyone affected by anxiety.  
[www.anxietyuk.org.uk](http://www.anxietyuk.org.uk)



## SECTION 8





## SECTION 8

# MORE READING

**There are many resources available to increase your knowledge about the importance of mental health and wellbeing in the workplace.**

By creating an open culture where employees are confident to talk about mental health and understand the steps they can take to stay well then you are helping your employees and indeed yourself to thrive and not just survive.

Below are the resources we have used to develop this toolkit and which you may find useful further reading.

[Federation of Small Businesses - Small Business Statistics](#)

[Global Banking and Finance Review - SME Owners Admit to Feeling Lonely](#)

[MHFA England](#)

[Stevenson and Farmer Review - Thriving at Work](#)

[Mind - Useful Resources](#)

[Wellbeing Enterprises](#)

[Together to Live - Mental Health Continuum](#)

[Health and Safety Executive - Work Related Stress](#)

[Mental Health Foundation - Stigma and Discrimination](#)

[Time to Change - Violence and Mental Health](#)

[IOD - Policy Publications](#)

[NICE - Depression in Adults](#)

[Mind - Taking Care of Your Staff](#)

# EXERCISE & ACTIVITY

Encouraging the use of exercise and activity to maintain positive mental health and wellbeing can promote a culture in any business or organisation where everyone takes responsibility for their own work life balance.

If you are looking for ideas of what is happening in your area access the websites below and find something you can enjoy.

[Visit York](#)

[Visit Yorkshire](#)

[Visit Harrogate](#)

[Visit Scarborough](#)

[Welcome to Yorkshire](#)

[Visit Hull and East Yorkshire](#)

# USEFUL LINKS TO LEP E-BOOKS

[How to Manage Bereavement in the Workplace](#)

[Managing Sickness in the Workplace](#)

[Managing an Ageing Workforce in the Workplace](#)

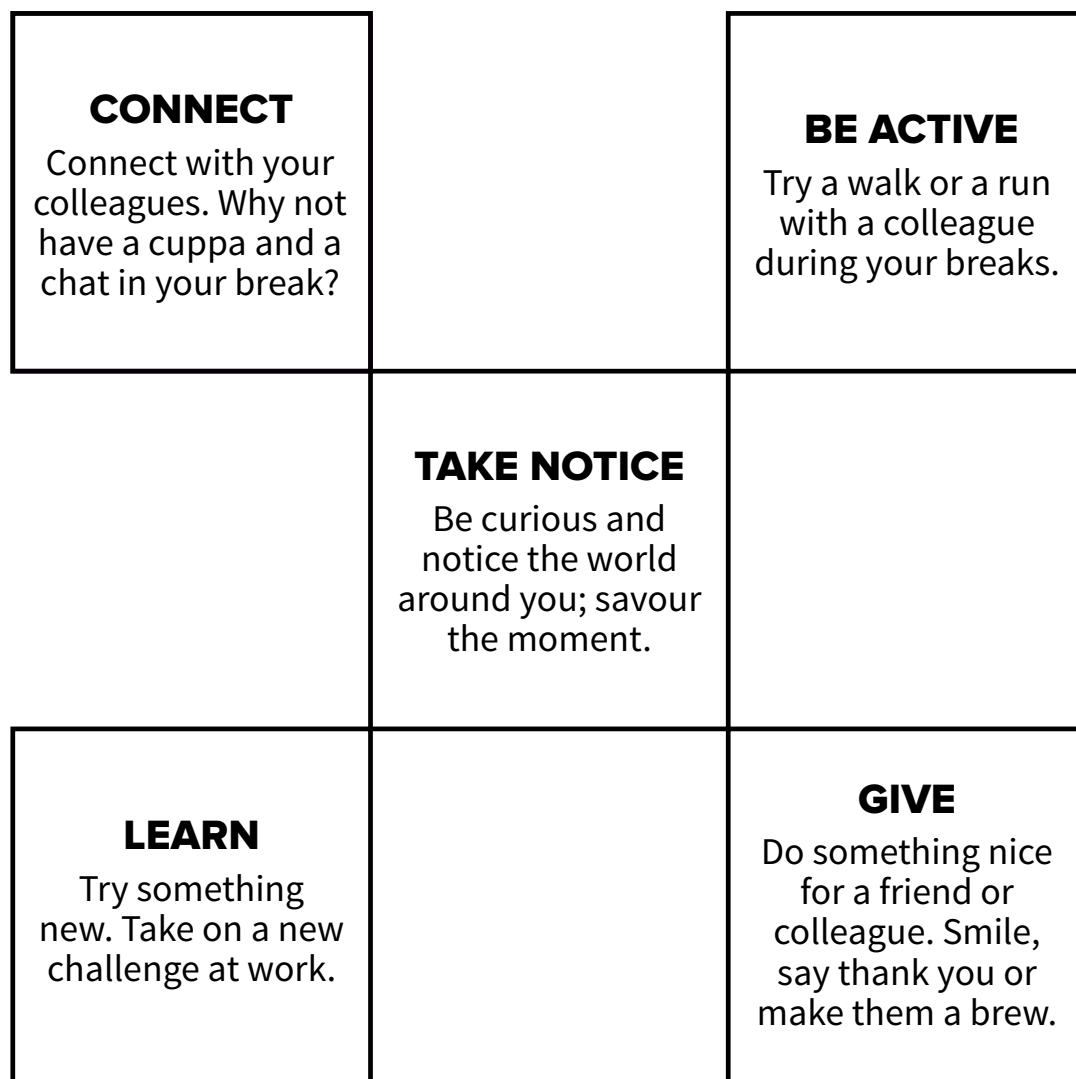
[How to Deal with an Underperforming Employee](#)

[Dismissing an Employee](#)

# HOW ARE YOU FEELING?

**Evidence suggests there are five 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 work and life.



# HOW ARE YOU FEELING?

Use this template either as an individual or for a workplace to think about how to apply the 5 ways to wellbeing to you or your work.

Fill in the circles with ideas that will work for you.

**CONNECT**

**BE ACTIVE**

**TAKE NOTICE**

**LEARN**

**GIVE**

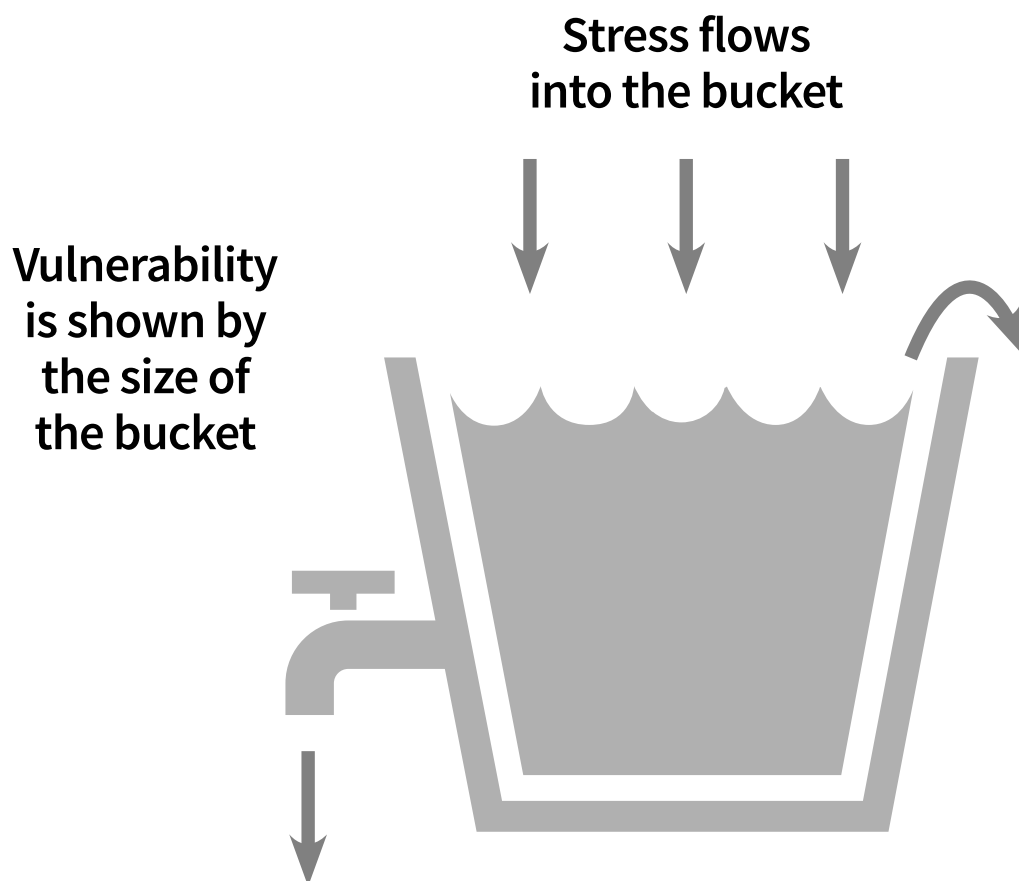


# PLANNING YOUR WORKPLACE WELLBEING

Employee showing signs of stress/distress	Effects this is having at work	Suggested action for a solution	Actions that have been agreed	Review of actions and how things are going
Discuss what may be happening for the employee which is effecting their mental wellbeing.	How is this effecting the employee at work?	Discuss what could help to solve the issues.	What actions have been agreed between the employer and employee?	Date and time of review.

Employee..... Signature..... Date.....

Manager..... Signature..... Date.....



## Good Coping

Tap working to let the stress out



## Bad Coping

Tap not working so water fills the bucket

## Reflection

- 1 Empty everything that is currently concerning you into the bucket.
- 2 Do I have any evidence to support my feelings about these things?
- 3 What can I change?
- 4 What can't I change and need to accept?
- 5 What are my unhelpful coping strategies?
- 6 What are some of my helpful coping strategies?



