

# Mental Health



“What we achieve inwardly will change outer reality.”

Plutarch

“I can’t change the direction of the wind, but I can adjust my sails to always reach my destination.”

Jimmy Dean

“The curious paradox is that when I accept myself just as I am, then I can change.”

Carl Rogers

Mental health is a way of describing our psychological and emotional wellbeing; it affects the way we think, feel and behave. Good mental health is not just an absence of problems, it means having the capacity to live a full and creative life and the flexibility to deal with life’s inevitable challenges. Factors like our biology (genes or brain chemistry), our life experiences, our family history and our physical health have an influence on the way we feel and adapt. It is estimated that 1 in 4 people will experience a mental health issue each year. The most common mental health problems are depression or anxiety, or a mixture of the two, and other problems such as eating disorders, obsessive-compulsive disorder, panic disorder, phobias and PTSD (post traumatic stress disorder) are also common.

No matter what condition our mental health is in there are measures and habits that we can adopt to strengthen and support our wellbeing. Through building resilience, we develop the capacity to find a way through when times are tough. In this helpsheet we will offer guidance on the many ways that you can take care of your psychological wellbeing so that you can engage with life and relationships in a satisfying and meaningful way. If there is anything that you would like to discuss further you can speak to one of our experienced counsellors on the Adviceline.



## What is Good Mental Health?

One way to define mental health is by looking at how effectively and successfully a person functions. This includes:

- Feeling capable and competent and having a sense of achievement.
- Feeling resilient, flexible and able to manage normal levels of stress most of the time.
- Maintaining satisfying personal relationships, feeling loved and lovable.

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## Encouraging Good Mental Health

- Develop flexibility. Having too high expectations of yourself or others leads to disappointment. Similarly having very rigid opinions sets you up for stress. Be open to new ideas and alternative ways of thinking and doing things. Just because you have always approached a problem a particular way doesn't mean it is the only approach or the even best approach. Asking yourself how much something really matters can change your outlook and reduce your stress.
- Accept all your feelings. Pay attention to the feelings that you may be less inclined to acknowledge or share such as sadness and anger. Being able to express them can improve your mental health.
- Have fun and make time to do the things you enjoy. When life becomes busy the things that we enjoy are often the first casualties. Schedule time for them, the positive and life affirming boost that they offer will help you get through other life challenges.
- Find ways to relax. There are many books, online videos and apps with relaxation techniques available. Yoga, meditation and massage can help as well as activities that involve quiet concentration such as adult colouring books or gardening.
- Get enough sleep. Sleep requirements differ from person to person and by the time we are adult most of us will have a pretty good idea of what we need. Some people are naturally early risers whilst some are night owls, some need 8 hours per night and some will function very well on 6 hours per night. Things that encourage good sleep are having a regular bedtime and wake time, avoiding long daytime naps, being out in daylight for at least 20 minutes

- Being independent and feeling in control of your life. Being able to recover from difficulties such as bereavement and other losses.
- The ability to enjoy life and keep it balanced: balancing social time with time alone, balancing work and play, sleep and activity, and relaxation and exercise.

Few of us are ever perfectly balanced and the art of living is in shifting and adjusting to what is going on around us and what we feel within us. We are all human. Mental health becomes an issue when problems begin to affect daily functioning or leave you feeling overwhelmed.

each day, exercise and avoiding looking at screens for the hour before you go to sleep.

- Assertive communication. Being assertive is not about being stroppy and demanding but is more about respecting your own and others' rights to be listened to. It encompasses a range of skills to express yourself including saying how you feel and what you want honestly and appropriately without becoming aggressive or it's opposite – burying your feelings. Hiding how you feel can lead to a build up of feeling inside which can then lead to health problems or an inappropriate outburst. Assertiveness training classes and books can improve your ability to handle such situations.
- Review. Take time to review the direction of your life periodically. We can want to change but change is not easy because it involves facing the unknown. Start with small achievable changes that add up.
- Deal with problems. Being unsure or feeling overwhelmed can lead to procrastination. Although temporarily you get away from what is making you anxious it can create a feeling of dread and irritability because of what is not dealt with. If you find yourself in this situation try breaking a problem down and dealing with it bit by bit, or ask for some help.
- Develop relationships that nurture you and increase your sense of connection with others. Steer clear of those who criticise and undermine you or make unreasonable demands of you.
- Self-care. If there is a problem taking as much care of yourself as you do for others it may be useful to train yourself to think differently about this. Instead of thinking of it as selfish, self-indulgent or unnecessary reframe self-

care as essential for looking after yourself and building the capacity to cope with stress.

- Exercise has now been shown to have as much effect on mental health as taking antidepressant medication for some people. An advantage is that it is free from side effects, apart from potentially sore muscles when you begin! If you have not exercised for some time or have any underlying health issues talk to your GP about what might be suitable. Build up gradually with something gentle like walking, cycling or swimming before moving onto more demanding pursuits.
- Cut down on addictive substances. Consume less coffee, alcohol, nicotine and other addictive substances. Again this is about balance, if these are having a negative effect on your life and health assess whether reducing them changes the way you cope.
- Stay hydrated. Even minor dehydration can lead to tiredness and impede concentration.

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## When to Seek Help

From time to time everyone experiences emotional pain but sometimes the distress is particularly severe or long-lasting and interferes with your ability to function in daily life. If you are experiencing sadness, grief, anxiety or anger that is persistent professional help can be useful. If you, or someone you care about, is struggling with their mental health here are some signs to look out for:

- Unable to cope with common problems and normal daily activities.
- No longer finding any joy in the things that used to bring pleasure
- Changes in eating patterns and difficulty sleeping.
- Thinking about suicide, lacking hope, feeling despair.
- Feelings of low self worth, low confidence.
- Irritability or anger.
- Frequent changes in mood.

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## Concerned friends and relatives

When someone you care about becomes mentally distressed it is likely to create strong reactions amongst their friends and relatives. It can be frightening to be with them and frightening not knowing when they will recover. You may

- Your diet can boost your mental health. A lack of vitamins, minerals and fatty acids can affect mental health, where mental health is concerned sufficient vitamin D (which is often added to foods or you can get from exposure to sunlight), Omega 3 oils and certain B vitamins have been shown to be particularly important. Foods that are good for the brain include:
  - Vegetables such as Beetroot, as well as leafy greens like Spinach
  - Seeds and nuts such as Flax seed and Walnuts
  - Fresh fruit
  - Whole grains, especially Oats
  - Wheat germ
  - Mushrooms for Vitamin D, especially Shiitake Mushrooms
  - Legumes, especially Lentils

- Noticeable changes in personality.
- Increased use of alcohol, drugs or vices such as online gaming or pornography.
- Withdrawing, avoiding personal contact.
- Strange ideas or delusions (beliefs that are not rational).
- Having persistent thoughts that you can't shake off.
- Hearing voice or things that aren't true.



feel helpless and it is important to seek out resources such as information and support, even just finding someone to talk to about the situation can be very helpful. It is possible to take action to improve mental health before serious problems arise.

## What managers can do to help

If you are concerned about an employee who seems to be struggling there are ways you can help. Build trust and approachability with your team through informal meetings and catch-ups. You can use these times to have a private and, most importantly, confidential check-in.

Ask the employee how they are and be prepared to listen without judging, making assumptions or giving advice. If you have specific concerns such as persistent lateness or not meeting deadlines be honest about them so that you can deal with them.

Be aware that conflict in the workplace, especially things like perceived/actual bullying and harassment can greatly exacerbate existing issues with Anxiety and Depression,

you will need to watch out for signs of this and be as supportive as possible.

You can negotiate an action plan together by understanding what the triggers are at work and finding ways of managing them – flexible hours, shifting duties to more lightweight ones temporarily or more regular check-ins can all help. If your organization has an occupational health department you could recommend that they meet with them for an assessment.

If your organisation has an Employee Assistance Programme they too can be a great source of help and support, not only for the employee but for you as a manager in discussing ideas to further support employees showing signs of difficulty with mental health issues.

## What help is available

There is a variety of help available depending on what your needs are:

- Friends and family can be an important source of support and for some people, the ability to talk with them and know that they are there for them, will be enough.
- GP – Your GP can discuss suitable treatment options, whether that might be medication, talking therapies or group therapy, and if appropriate be able to refer to a psychiatrist or psychologist for assessment.

- Talking therapies:

- CBT – cognitive behavioural therapy examines the ways we think, feel and behave and treatment often includes tasks and exercises aimed at bringing about positive changes.
- FBT – Focal Brief Therapy is a space where you can talk about whatever is troubling you with a trained professional. It tends to be more short term and focus on current issues.
- Psychotherapy – Psychotherapy is similar to FBT therapy and may focus on current issues or longer term ones such as experiences from childhood that continue to be troubling.

## Further Resources

The Foundation for Positive Mental Health:  
[www.foundationforpositivementalhealth.com](http://www.foundationforpositivementalhealth.com)

Mind, the mental health charity:  
[www.mind.org.uk](http://www.mind.org.uk)

BABCP, British Association for Behavioural & Cognitive Psychotherapies: [www.babcp.com](http://www.babcp.com)

BACP, The British Association for Therapy and Psychotherapy: [www.bacp.co.uk](http://www.bacp.co.uk)

UKCP, The United Kingdom Council for Psychotherapy:  
[www.ukcp.org.uk](http://www.ukcp.org.uk)

## Further help and information

CiC – Employee Assistance

**W:** [www.cic-eap.co.uk](http://www.cic-eap.co.uk)

**T:** +44 (0)20 7938 0923

**E:** [jparedes@cic-eap.co.uk](mailto:jparedes@cic-eap.co.uk)

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