



For better mental health



Federation of Small Businesses
The UK's Leading Business Organisation

'Taking care of business'

Businesses rely on having a healthy and productive workforce. Conditions like anxiety, depression and unmanageable stress are experienced by one in six British workers each year. In the past five years, employers have cited stress as the number one reason given by employees who take time off work. Work-related mental ill-health is costing businesses up to £26 billion every year, including:

- £2.4 billion wasted on staff turnover due to poor mental wellbeing
- £15.1 billion lost by unproductive staff at work who are unable to cope due to mental health issues
- 70 million lost working days due to mental health problems

Small businesses often have good relationships with their staff and FSB research suggests that they have a lower than average sickness absence rate. Many small businesses are already taking actions that improve the mental wellbeing of their staff without considering it within the context of mental health. The tips in this guide will often simply add to what a business is already doing; it aims to raise awareness. It suggests ways to help you increase productivity, improve staff performance and save money.

The facts about mental ill health

What does mental distress look like?

Although it is still a taboo subject, mental distress is very common, with one in four people experiencing a mental health problem in any one year. Mental distress can affect how people think, feel and act and as a result, people may behave, communicate or respond in ways that seem very different to what is happening around them.

In some cases individuals may not disclose a mental health condition, but something in their behaviour may indicate they are experiencing distress.

- Does the individual appear overly stressed, disturbed or distracted?
- Do they appear dazed, withdrawn or shutdown?
- Are they fidgety, restless or jumpy?
- Are they talking incoherently or laughing incongruously?
- Do they seem over-excited, euphoric, irritable or aggressive?
- Do they appear to be having illogical or irrational thought processes?
- Do they keep repeating themselves or obsessing?
- Do they appear to be taking information in?
- Do they seem to be responding to experiences, sensations or people not observable by others?

If you suspect an employee may be experiencing mental distress, it's important not to make assumptions, but to consult them first about any impact this may or may not have.

What are the treatments?

Common treatments that may be prescribed by GPs or psychiatrists include medication and talking therapies. Many people find complementary therapies, exercise, support groups and following a good diet helpful.

Can people ever really recover from experiencing an episode of mental distress?

Yes, but it is different for everyone. Some people only have one episode of mental distress during their lifetime. Others may have several episodes or find their mental health can fluctuate. Additionally, people may learn to adapt to living with an ongoing mental health problem. Many people manage a mental health problem alongside a successful career.

Below is a list of low cost, common sense actions a small business like yours can take to manage mental health in the workplace, with benefits for both your employees and your business. Supporting staff members to cope with mental ill health doesn't need to be bureaucratic or require lots of paperwork, and in many cases it is simply about being aware.

Tackle the causes

- ▶ Make sure that work environments are suitable for the task. Noise, temperature and light levels can all have an impact on wellbeing. Where possible and suitable to the business consider space dividers and quiet spaces to help improve the work environment
 - ▶ For staff working in isolation, ensure there are clear and regular lines of communication. This can mean simply a regular phone catch-up
 - ▶ Consider introducing an informal mentoring scheme where suitable to help new staff members understand your business faster and to support them in their role
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The job

- ▶ Set reasonable and agreed deadlines for work completion
 - ▶ Provide a suitable working environment
 - ▶ Define the work role and responsibilities as much as is possible
 - ▶ Involve the employee in the planning of their workload where possible
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The business

- ▶ Encourage and promote an open environment at work. Employees need to feel confident and supported if they choose to be open about their mental health issues. And remember, it is their choice whether to disclose and sensitive personal information should remain confidential
- ▶ Keep records of sickness absence and use them to analyse the causes of absence
- ▶ Promote a supportive working environment with regular catch-ups

Career and personal development

- ▶ Create clear supervisory and appraisal structures involving the employee
 - ▶ Take into account the views of employees with respect to job satisfaction and career development
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Support staff

- ▶ If you become aware of a staff member experiencing mental distress the first step is to establish an honest, open communication with them.
 - *Focus on the person not the problem. Talk to the employee and ask if they need any short-term adjustments to their working environment*
 - *They are the expert on their mental health, so they are best placed to know what they need*
 - ▶ Sometimes staff may need to take some time off as sick leave due to mental ill health. If this becomes the case remember to:
 - *Keep in contact*
 - *Explore adjustments to working conditions or to the working environment to aid their return such as flexible hours or changes to their responsibilities*
 - *Develop a recovery action plan with them to identify the signs of mental distress, who you may need to contact, and what support would help*
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Personal issues affecting staff

- ▶ It is good to be aware of relevant personal issues affecting staff such as illness, bereavement and other stress related factors that may contribute to an employee struggling to cope in the workplace. This can be done very informally such as a catch-up over lunch
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Further Information

- Contact the FSB legal helpline 0808 20 20 888
- More advice and resources from Mind are available at www.mind.org.uk/work
- Mind also operates through a network of local Mind associations. Each local Mind association is an independent charity, run by local people for local people Find your local Mind at www.mind.org.uk/help/mind_in_your_area
- For help and information on the Access to Work scheme go to the Department of Work and Pensions website www.dwp.gov.uk
- The Health and Safety Executive have also provided help on this issue go to www.hse.gov.uk/stress/standards

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