

Mental Health Toolbox Talks

What is Mental Health?

Mental health concerns how we think, feel and behave. Anxiety and depression are the most common mental health problems. They are often a reaction to a difficult life event, such as bereavement, but can also be caused by work-related issues.

What does the law say?

Whether work is causing a mental health issue or aggravating it, employers have a legal responsibility to help their employees. Work-related mental health issues must be assessed to measure the levels of risk to staff. Where a risk is identified, steps must be taken to remove it or reduce it as far as reasonably practicable.

The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 require employers to assess the risk of stress-related ill health arising from work activities, as with any other hazard. The Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974 requires an employer to take measures to control that risk. The Management standards approach is considered suitable and sufficient and free tools and guidance has been provided by the HSE to help any workplace.

Mental health and stress – what's the difference?

Work-related stress can aggravate an existing mental health problem, making it more difficult to control. If work-related stress reaches a point where it has triggered an existing mental health problem, it becomes hard to separate one from the other. Common mental health problems and stress can exist independently – people can experience work-related stress and physical changes such as high blood pressure – without having anxiety, depression or other mental health problems.

They can also have anxiety and depression without experiencing stress. The key differences between them are their cause(s) and the way(s) they are treated. Stress is a reaction to events or experiences in someone's home life, work life or a combination of both. Common mental health problems can have a single cause outside work, for example bereavement, divorce, postnatal depression, a medical condition or a family history of the problem. But people can have these sorts of problems with no obvious causes

Sources of Stress

Life Changes: Leaving home, getting married or having children; divorce or relationship breakdown; health scares or physical illness; accidents or bereavement; legal issues, arrest.

Emotional: Peer pressure; conflicting cultural values or beliefs; coping with uncertainty.

Physical: Late nights or lack of routine; poor diet; misuse of alcohol or drugs.

Environmental: Poor housing or accommodation problems; social isolation; unemployment; adjusting to new environments such as moving house or travel; financial pressures such as gambling.

Changes at work: Starting a new job; coping with an increased workload or promotion; poor relationships with work colleagues or managers; redundancy or the fear of it.

Signs of stress

- Poor time keeping
- A disregard for safety or taking extra risks
- Misuse of alcohol or drugs
- A lack of cooperation
- Constantly feeling tired
- Unexplained aches and pains in the body
- Being quiet and withdrawn
- Extremes of emotion, such as being angry or aggressive or upset and tearful.

Examples of mental health issues

- Depression
- Panic attacks
- Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)
- Bipolar disorder
- Obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD)

Stopping the stigma

Get treatment: You may be reluctant to admit you need treatment. Don't let the fear of being labelled with a mental illness prevent you from seeking help. Treatment can provide relief by identifying what's wrong and reducing symptoms that interfere with your work and personal life.

Don't let stigma create self-doubt and shame: Stigma doesn't just come from others. You may mistakenly believe that your condition is a sign of personal weakness or that you should be able to control it without help. Seeking counselling, educating yourself about your condition and connecting with others who have mental illness can help you gain self-esteem and overcome destructive self-judgment.

Don't isolate yourself: If you have a mental illness, you may be reluctant to tell anyone about it. Your family, friends, work colleagues can offer you support if they know about your mental illness. Reach out to people you trust for the compassion, support and understanding you need.

Get help at work: If you suffer from mental illness that affects your work, find out what work plans and programs are available and that might help.

Speak out against stigma: Talking about mental health and ensuring people are aware of the issues involved helps reduce the stigma currently surrounding mental health.

If someone reaches out to you

- Find a good place to talk - take them somewhere comfortable, where others can't overhear
- Listen - listen to what they're saying, don't jump to conclusions, let them talk
- Reassure them- let them know that support is available
- Just be there - it's difficult for people to express their feelings and fears, take the time and don't rush them
- Sign post them to help - you can't and are not expected to fix their problems. Point them in the direction of the organisations that can help
- Encourage them to seek support

Looking after yourself

- Reach out to a close friend or relative for a meaningful chat
- Get outdoors for some exercise or fresh air
- Take part in a hobby you already enjoy or trying something new.
- Keep a journal to keep track of how you're feeling and what makes you feel better or worse.
- Eat well, consider what you are eating, how much water you drink and your alcohol consumption
- Contact your GP if you think you might need more support with your mental health.

Help and Support

We can all make a difference in the lives of those who might be struggling by having regular, meaningful conversations about life's ups and downs. If you feel like something's not quite the same with someone you know – there's something going on in their life or notice a change in what they're doing or saying - trust that gut instinct and take the time to ask them "Are you OK?" By acting as eyes and ears and reaching out to anyone who's going through a tough time, you can show them that they're supported and encourage them to access help sooner.

If you, or someone you know is suffering with mental health problems or experiencing depression, then you can reach out to any of the following organisations for more information and support:

Mind: <https://www.mind.org.uk> or call 0300 123 3393

Samaritans: <https://www.samaritans.org/> or call 116 123 free

CALM: <https://www.thecalmzone.net/> or call 0800 58 58 58

After workers have received the Toolbox Talk information, the following questions should be asked to ensure that they have listened and understood. The questions can be posed to a group or an individual. If the incorrect answer, is given the trainer should repeat the relevant section of the Toolbox Talk.

Question 1. Are employers legally required to reduce stress in the work place?

Answer. Yes

Question 2. Where in your life can stress occur?

Answer. Work, Home, Relationships, Finance,

Question 3. What are some signs that someone is stressed?

Answer. Poor time keeping, a disregard for safety or taking extra risks, misuse of alcohol or drugs, a lack of cooperation, constantly feeling tired, unexplained aches and pains in the body, being quiet and withdrawn, extremes of emotion, such as being angry or aggressive or upset and tearful

Question 4. If someone talks to you how can you help them?

Answer. Find a good place to talk, listen, reassure them, just be there, sign post them to help, encourage them to seek support

Question 5. How do we improve our own mental health?

Answer. Talk to friends or family, exercise, eat well, take time for yourself, seek medical help

Question 6. What organisations are there to help?

Answer. Calm, Samaritans, Mind

