

**For your team's wellbeing.**  
**For Living**

A woman with voluminous, curly dark hair is the central focus of the image. She is smiling warmly at the camera, wearing a dark blue top over a maroon-colored garment. Her arms are crossed over her lap. The background is a soft, out-of-focus indoor setting.

**Open up  
at work.**  
**Managers guide.**

## Introduction

Work is a huge part of our lives so it's vital that while we're working, we're happy and healthy.

When we think about the phrase 'mental health', we often think about mental health problems. We think of symptoms like low mood and conditions such as depression or anxiety. In fact, everyone has mental health. You and your colleagues will have times when your mental health is good – and times when it is less good. Just like physical health.

As a manager, you have a really important role in supporting staff wellbeing and promoting good mental health in the workplace.

# 1/2

**Only half of people who struggle with mental health issues speak to their managers about it.**

1 Mind survey of 44,000 employees, 2018.



# Supporting team members

As a manager of a team, you can improve working practices, encourage your team to speak openly, and reassure them you will offer support.

**Here are just some of the reasons why it's important to think about your employees' mental health.**

- Work can cause mental health problems or make mental health problems worse. Issues like bullying, uncertainty, lack of control and a demanding role are all linked to the development of common mental health problems.
- Positive work and line management can help people with mental health problems, providing identity, income and purpose.

**It's good for everyone else too.**

- Employees who have high levels of wellbeing are likely to be more creative, loyal and productive.
- Stigma is reduced when people can talk openly about mental health. This leads to more understanding and a greater likelihood people will seek support earlier.

**It's good for business. If employees aren't given the right support, the costs can mount up.**

- Mental health problems are the leading cause of long-term sickness absence.
- Increased absence and reduced productivity can see workloads grow for other colleagues, which can exacerbate some of the root causes of poor mental health.

**And it helps you as a manager.**

- It's much easier to support employees at an earlier stage than wait until they reach crisis point.
- Effectively supporting employees with mental health problems means you can employ, retain and get the best from them.

## Heads up

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**This leads to more understanding and a greater likelihood people will seek support earlier.**



# Common mental health conditions

## Anxiety disorders

Anxiety is a feeling of unease. We all get anxious when faced with stressful situations, and it's normal to feel anxious when you face something difficult or dangerous. But if you have anxiety that has lasted a long time and it's severe, it can interfere with your everyday activities.

## Bipolar disorder

Bipolar affective disorder is characterised by extreme changes in mood. Your mood can vary from excitement and elation (known as mania) to depression and despair. You may also have mixed moods where you might feel depressed but at the same time restless and overactive. In between episodes of mood swings you might not have any symptoms at all.

## Depression

Everyone has ups and downs. It's common for people to say that they're 'depressed' when they're feeling down. But if the sadness becomes persistent and you lose interest in your life, affecting how you think or behave, it's possible you have depression.

## Obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD)

Obsessive-compulsive disorder is an anxiety disorder with two key parts: obsessions and compulsions. Obsessions are intrusive and unwelcome images, urges, thoughts or doubts that repeatedly appear in your mind. Compulsions are activities you feel you have to do to reduce the discomfort caused by the obsessive thoughts. If you don't act on the compulsions, your anxiety or mental discomfort becomes distressing and unmanageable.

## Personality disorders

If you have a personality disorder, certain ways you think, feel and behave have a significant and negative impact on different aspects of your daily life. You might have particular patterns of thoughts, feelings or beliefs that are difficult to change.

## Schizophrenia

Schizophrenia affects your mood and how you think, feel and behave. It doesn't mean you have a 'split personality'. There are lots of very different feelings, experiences and behaviours associated with schizophrenia. This means that some people think schizophrenia may not be one condition but actually different, overlapping conditions.

**1 in 6**

**people will experience a common mental health problem at any one time.**

2 Fundamental Facts About Mental Health, Mental Health Foundation. 2016.

**Heads up**

**By better understanding mental health conditions, you'll be more informed and it'll be easier to connect with those affected.**

## What to look out for

Everyone's experience of mental health is different and can change at different times. As a manager, it's important to get to know your team and understand what they need and when.

Understanding some of the signs of poor mental health doesn't mean you should make assumptions about what mental health problems your employees may have. Instead, use them as a way of noticing when you should check in and start a conversation about how your employee is coping right now.

### Some ideas of early signs might be:

- poor concentration
- being easily distracted
- worrying more
- finding it hard to make decisions
- low mood
- feeling overwhelmed by things
- tiredness and lack of energy
- talking less and avoiding social activities
- talking more or talking very fast, jumping between topics and ideas
- finding it difficult to control your emotions
- drinking more
- irritability and short temper
- aggression

# 1 in 5

Mental ill health is now the primary cause of long-term sickness absence for one in five UK organisations.

3 CIPD Health and Wellbeing at Work, Survey Report, May 2018.

## Heads up

When you recognise signs of poor mental health, check in and start a conversation about how your team member is coping right now.

# How to help your employees

If you're a line manager, you play an important role in supporting your team's mental health and wellbeing. But it can be hard to know where to start. The suggestions in this section should help.

## Look after your mental health

As a manager, your focus is on supporting your team in the workplace but remember, your own wellbeing is just as important. You have a duty to yourself to look after your own mental health at work. Looking after your mental health doesn't always mean you can avoid problems entirely. But we still need to look after our mental health in the same way that we look after our physical health.

## Ask for training

Most companies offer training on mental health and stress management. You should feel confident about dealing with disclosure and managing and supporting an employee with mental health problems. Talk to your own manager about your training needs.

## Familiarise yourself with policies

Make sure you understand any policies your organisation has relating to mental health and wellbeing. This may include sickness absence and health and safety. Make sure your team understand where to find these, what they include and what will happen if they ask for support.

## Make sure you have a good knowledge of common mental health problems and signs of poor mental health

Get to know your team so you notice any changes in their behaviour. Make sure you're prepared to have a conversation about their mental health. Bear in mind that mental health problems affect different people in different ways. You may have to adapt your approach to suit different individuals. If you feel you need more support and training from your company, talk to your manager.

## Show staff that their wellbeing matters to you

Encourage them to work sensible hours, take full lunch breaks and attend wellbeing initiatives in the organisation. Looking after their mental health is just as important as their physical health. This will lead to a more productive team in the long term.

## Make sure you're available

Prioritise regular one-to-ones and catch ups with your team. Make sure you use this time to check how they are and talk through any difficulties at home or work. Knowing your team's 'normal' outlook and activities will give you a frame of reference to spot changes in these early. This will make conversations easier if problems do arise.

# x7

Workers absent due to mental ill health are seven times more likely to have further absence than those with physical health-related sick leave.

2 Fundamental facts about mental health, Mental Health Foundation. 2016.

## Heads up

Looking after your team's mental health is just as important as their physical health. This will lead to a more productive team in the long term.

### Create a Wellness Action Plan

Wellness Action Plans can be a good way to start regular conversations about mental health and wellbeing with your team. They're a tool to help you and your employees share what keeps you well at work and when and why you might become unwell. It helps you improve wellbeing or support recovery. It's a personal document written by employees and shared with individual managers and works as an agreement and a tool to promote ongoing discussion.

### Keep asking questions and encourage open conversations

It might help to add staff wellbeing as a standing item on your agenda at team meetings. Give staff an opportunity to talk about how they've been doing and anything that might be affecting their wellbeing. Ask your team for feedback about your management and any additional support you could provide.

### Help your staff prioritise their workloads and feel confident to work effectively

While it may not be possible to offer staff complete control over their workload and hours, think together about areas where they could make their own decisions and manage their own time. Make sure your team are trained to do their jobs. Look for development opportunities and make sure you're available to offer support and suggestions too.

### Praise staff and show you appreciate their efforts

Employees who don't feel properly rewarded for their efforts are more at risk of common mental health problems and increased stress. It's also important to distribute praise and benefits fairly and make sure you don't show favouritism within the team.

### Make reasonable adjustments in the workplace

A reasonable adjustment is a change to how your employee works to help them overcome any disadvantages they might face. Effective reasonable adjustments can support employees with mental health problems to work to their full capacity. Whether an adjustment is 'reasonable' or not depends on its effectiveness, practicality, cost, your organisation's resources, and whether any additional financial help is available.

### Prepare for your employees to return to work

There may be times when employees need time off because of their mental health. Supporting return to work is about good people management. You need good communication skills and sensitivity to the individual and the context of their absence. Before they return, consider lighter duties and/or a phased return. It takes time to recover after a period of mental ill health. It may help your employee to come back to work slowly, especially if they've been off work for a long time.

# 71%

still consider  
mental health to be  
a taboo subject in  
the workplace.

4 Michael Page study of 1,000 employees, 2018.

## #OpenUp

Find out what we're  
doing at Bupa to get the  
conversation started.

[bupa.co.uk/open-up](https://bupa.co.uk/open-up)

## Conversation tips and advice

Something as simple as *'How are you?'* is a good place to begin. Choose honest and open questions rather than avoiding the issue completely or referring to it indirectly. This is especially useful if there's a particular issue to address, such as underperformance or absence.

### Examples for starting the conversation:

- You seem a bit down lately. Is everything OK?
- I've noticed you've been late with a few pieces of work recently. I wanted to check whether everything is OK and if there is anything I can do to help?
- I saw you were quite upset yesterday [when you were talking to...], [on the phone]. Is everything OK?
- I've noticed that you've had more days off than usual recently – I just wanted to check in to make sure everything was ok and whether there was anything I could do to help?

### Keeping the conversation going:

The way you listen and respond could affect how much your colleague tells you and how comfortable they feel about further disclosure. These tips could help.

- Ask simple, open questions – let them explain in their own words. Give them time and be prepared for some silences.
- Don't interrupt or impose your opinions or ideas.
- Show empathy and understanding. Don't make assumptions about what they're experiencing or try and guess how it will affect their work.

- Remember that lots of people are still able to work effectively, despite managing a mental health problem.
- It's OK to admit that you don't know much about a condition or diagnosis. Ask questions about how it affects them and what they think the implications are, if any, for their work.

### Example phrases and questions

- I'm really sorry to hear that things have been so hard.
- It sounds like you've been having a difficult time lately.
- I'm really pleased you've chosen to speak to me about this.
- How do you feel this has been affecting your work?
- Is there anything you do at the moment that helps you manage how you feel/your condition?
- Have you asked anyone for support or talked to anyone else about this?
- What kind of support do you think might help?
- What would you like to happen now?

## What if a colleague becomes upset?

If your colleague is very upset, they might prefer to continue the discussion another time. Check what they need and whether they would like to take a break before going back to work.

- Would you like to talk about how we can help you now, or would you prefer to talk more another time?
- Are you feeling OK to return to work or would it help to have a break and a walk or a cup of tea? Would it help to ask someone to go with you?

## Outlining support options

You should check how aware the person is of support options offered by your organisation. Make sure your own knowledge is up to date too.

- Have you had a look at our mental health and wellbeing policy? Would it help to talk it through so you can understand how we can help you?
- Have you been in touch with our Employee Assistance Programme?
- It's common to feel like you have to handle things on your own – but it's always OK to seek help. Have you spoken to your GP about how you are feeling?

**9 in 10**

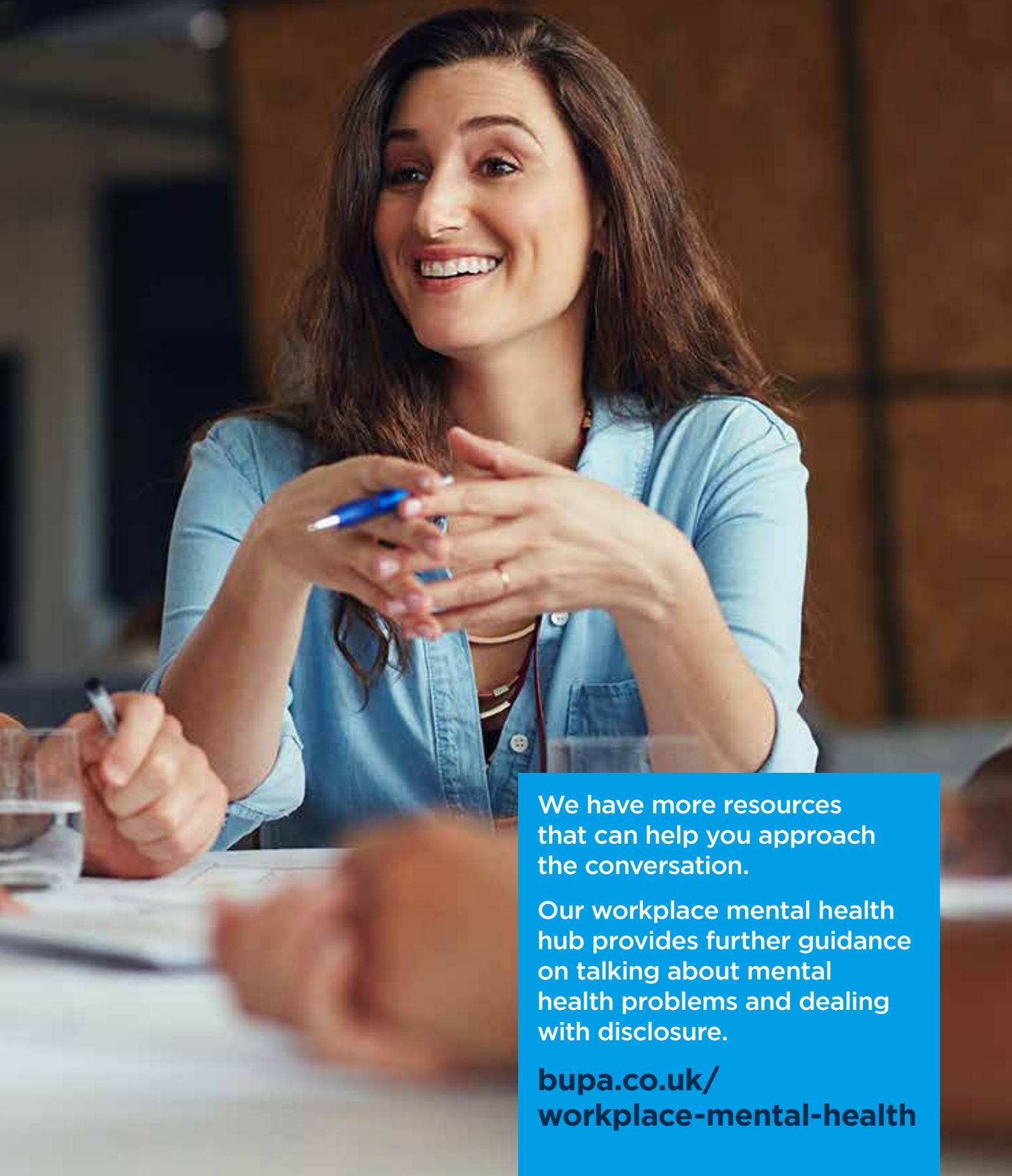
**have experienced a mental health challenge ourselves or known someone in that situation.**

5 Accenture. It's not 1 in 4; it's all of us: why mental health touches everyone. Published 2018.

## Heads up

The thought of talking to an employee about their mental health might feel daunting; especially if you are worried about saying the wrong thing. These useful prompts will hopefully help you feel confident when approaching the conversation.

## More information from Bupa



We have more resources that can help you approach the conversation.

Our workplace mental health hub provides further guidance on talking about mental health problems and dealing with disclosure.

[bupa.co.uk/  
workplace-mental-health](https://bupa.co.uk/workplace-mental-health)

## Legal obligation

As a manager, it's important to understand any policies your organisation has relating to mental health and wellbeing. It's also important to understand any legal obligations on you as an individual, or on your organisation, which protect people with a disability – either physical or mental.



## References

- 1 Mind Survey of 1,000 employees, 2018. [www.mind.org.uk/news-campaigns/news/half-of-workers-have-experienced-poor-mental-health-in-current-job/](http://www.mind.org.uk/news-campaigns/news/half-of-workers-have-experienced-poor-mental-health-in-current-job/)
- 2 Fundamental facts about mental health, Mental Health Foundation. 2016. [www.mentalhealth.org.uk/file/2518/download?token=RUGlzcSK](http://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/file/2518/download?token=RUGlzcSK)
- 3 CIPD Health and Wellbeing at Work, Survey Report, May 2018. [www.cipd.co.uk/Images/health-and-well-being-at-work\\_tcm18-40863.pdf](http://www.cipd.co.uk/Images/health-and-well-being-at-work_tcm18-40863.pdf)
- 4 Michael Page study of 1,000 employees, 2018. [/advice/management-advice/development-and-retention/mental-health-all-managers](http://advice/management-advice/development-and-retention/mental-health-all-managers). May 2018.
- 5 Accenture. It's not 1 in 4; it's all of us: why mental health touches everyone. Published 2018.

## #OpenUp

Head over to [bupa.co.uk/open-up](http://bupa.co.uk/open-up) to listen to our leaders and employees opening up the conversation.



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