

Talking About Mental Health as a Line Manager Guide

Quick Tips and a Conversation Plan Template



A simple guide for having mental health and wellbeing conversations:

Plan



Planning ahead can make you feel more confident and help to address possible difficulties before they arise.

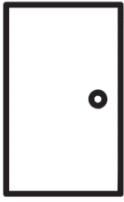
- Ask yourself, **why do I want or need to have this conversation?** Are there any objectives or potential assumptions and preconceptions I am going into this process with? What are healthy boundaries for me? **What am I NOT going to do or say, even if it is tempting?**
- **What do you want to say?** How might you open the conversation? Are there any specific points you want or need to make, or issues to raise? Would it help to have these written down as a prompt?
- Ask yourself, **what tools or paperwork might help me when I am having this conversation?** Would the Wellbeing Action Plan questions be a good tool for structuring the conversation for example? Do you need return to work forms? How will you ensure you both have a copy of these or other documents?

- What will you need access to during the conversation or to read before you have the conversation? Do you know where to find company policies?
- Do you need to be able to take notes or to have a note taker present, or might a note taker be unneeded and possibly intimidating? **How formal is this conversation going to be or do you want it to be?**
- **Think about where you might signpost for further support** or so you are not the only person who is supporting (The NHS, the Samaritans 24/7 helpline number, Mental Health First Aiders, Occupational Health, specialist or local charities). Try not to direct them to search online but to have some information to hand you can give them. Having this ready ahead of time could be helpful.



Time

- Ask yourself, **is this a good time to talk?** Would the start of a shift, middle or end be better? What about before a break?
- Try to **avoid times when you might both be tired or where the person you are speaking to might feel unprepared or have greater difficulty if they become emotional.**
- **What about you?** Will you be able to give the conversation your full attention and will you have time to recover if it turns out to be a difficult conversation?
- Sometimes it can help to give the person you are planning to talk to advance warning, so they can mentally prepare to have a conversation about mental health. However, if they are visibly distressed or struggling, it might be better to have the conversation right away. Ask yourself what the specific situation is and think about what would be best.
- **Who else will be available to follow up or to offer support** if this is required after or during the conversation?
- **Sometimes there is not a perfect time to have a conversation about mental health**, but thinking about the different options and the challenges of timing can help you to anticipate and plan for different eventualities.



Place

- **Talking about mental health or wellbeing challenges might be difficult for the person you are speaking to.** They might not want others to know or talk as freely around them. Alternatively, they might find it easier to speak to you if they have a colleague with them.
- Try to **choose a quiet comfortable place where you cannot be overheard.**
- If it is practical, or if it is a meeting where they have a 'right to be accompanied', you could **ask if they would like a colleague with them.** A family member or friend who does not work in the business is less likely to be appropriate, but you might consider it under special circumstances, after consulting with HR.



Questions & Observations

- **Use "I have noticed..." or "I'm curious about..."** – Saying what you have noticed or observed and using examples of behavior can be a good way to start a conversation about mental health or wellbeing. "I have noticed you seem a bit more irritable lately..."
- **Use open questions** – Open questions can be very helpful when discussing mental health and wellbeing, as these are questions which encourage an answer which is not a *yes* or *no*. It encourages the person responding to give a longer answer and to have a broader conversation.



Listen & Respond

- **Try not to interrupt** too much and to really listen to what you are being told before speaking.
- **Don't be afraid of silences**, you can use these to provide space for the other person to speak and to elaborate on what they have already said.

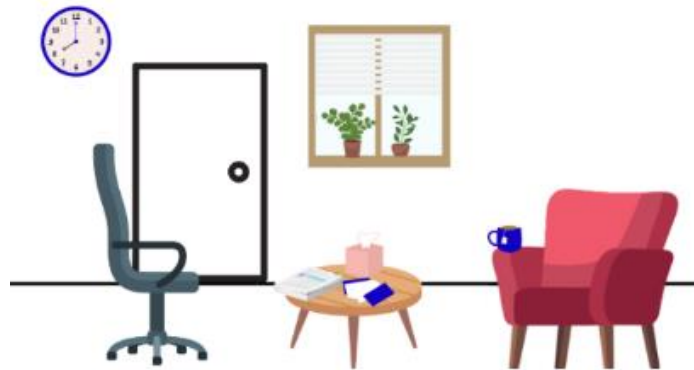
- **Summarize** what you have been told to let the person know you are listening and to help them feel heard.
- **You do not have to agree with them, but acknowledgment of the other person's feelings or their perspective, can go a long way.** Sensitive challenging can actually be helpful when it comes to mental health, but the other person's feelings and version of reality needs to be acknowledged too.
- **You don't necessarily have to give advice or fix anything** when it comes to how another person is feeling. Sometimes, just talking and being asked open questions can help the other person to feel better or to find their own solutions.
- **Again, think about where you might signpost** this person to for further support or so you are not the only person who is supporting them. Try not to direct them to search online but to have some information to hand you can give them.
- **It is better if solutions come from the other person, but that doesn't mean you cannot make suggestions.** Just be mindful you are not putting too much pressure on them to seek mental health or wellbeing support, as this could actually put them off doing so, and you cannot make someone seek support for their mental health.
- **Avoid the phrasing, "I need you to..." or "you should/must..." unless it relates to company policy and procedure.** So, replacing "you must go to the GP," with "have you considered speaking to your GP?" Whereas, "it sounds as if you are going through a difficult time right now, but you must call me before your shift starts if you are too unwell for work, as this is company policy," is less likely to be problematic. You are making a company policy clear, which might be essential.

Next Steps



- Ask yourself, **is there anything I need to or should do after this conversation?**
- Are you worried about this person or others immediate safety, or are you unsure?** Do you need to call the emergency services, or NHS 111 for advice?
- **Is there anything you need to tell, give to, suggest, or ask the person to do** after this conversation?

- **Is there anyone else within your organisation you need to involve or make aware** of the outcome of the conversation and that it has taken place? Do you need to book another meeting or is it a case of waiting and seeing before considering this?
- **How are you feeling?** Do you need time for self care?



Discussion Plan Template

Goal or purpose of discussion:

My boundaries ("I will not..."):

Time:

Place:

Documents I will need:

(stress risk assessment or return to work forms, policy documents, signposting)

My questions & observations:

("I have noticed...")

What I been told:**What I have said:****Next steps for them:****Next steps for me:**

E-Learning Courses: On Demand Mental Health and Wellbeing Training

Manager Training



Talking About Mental Health as a Line Manager

Improve the mental health and wellbeing conversations you have as a line manager. Whether it's a chat about stress, a return to work meeting, or a more challenging conversation about mental health and performance, this course provides the essential employment law knowledge and conversation skills needed.



Mental Health Tools for Line Managers

Learn how to use a range of mental health tools to support employee mental health and wellbeing as a line manager. Tools covered include wellbeing action plans, stress risk assessments, personal user manuals, quick signposting sheets, posters and support leaflets.

Training for Everyone



Mental Health Awareness: Supporting Yourself and Others

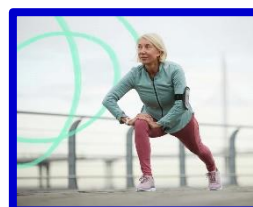
Develop your understanding of depression, anxiety, stress, and the possible impacts of mental health stigma. Build your confidence in having supportive conversations with others and learn when and where to get support, including for yourself.



Resilience: A Personal Toolkit for Mental Wellbeing

Grow your confidence in managing your stress response and create your own person-centred toolkit to support your mental wellbeing. Explore resilience theories, reflect and build your personal resilience.

Training for Professionals



Promoting Change in Physical and Mental Health: A Behavioural Change Toolkit

Learn strategies for supporting yourself and others with behavioural change. Explore the connections between physical and mental health and the range of factors that can affect an individual's wellbeing or readiness for change, including neurodiversity.