



Supporting the mental health of our staff:

Managers' Guide to supporting individuals
experiencing stress and / or mental health issues

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Managing and supporting individuals experiencing stress and / or mental health issues.

1 Introduction

We recognise that our employees are our most valuable asset and are committed to providing an environment that supports their mental health and wellbeing. We aim to achieve this by promoting a culture where everyone feels able to have a conversation about their mental health and wellbeing without being judged, in the knowledge that they will be offered support. The *Leadership Excellence Behaviours Framework* seeks to create a healthy and inclusive environment which enables everyone to thrive and defines the behaviour required to support this aim.

The World Health Organisation defines good mental health as:

“A state of wellbeing in which the individual realises his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully and is able to make a contribution to his or her own community”.

Mental illness can be defined as a condition that impacts a person’s thinking and feeling or mood such that it affects their ability to relate to others and function on a daily basis. Mental health and wellbeing, like physical wellbeing is on a spectrum and can fluctuate, sometimes it is good and other times it is not. Everyone irrespective of age or background is on that spectrum and from time to time life events may impact to an extent where their mental health is affected. This does not necessarily mean the person has a medically diagnosed condition but may mean that they will need some support for a period of time to help them to cope with the situation.

Although the incidence of mental health problems is very common, there remains a stigma and a reluctance to talk about them. People are more likely to discuss a physical health issue but prefer to remain silent where the issue relates to their mental health, for fear of being judged or treated differently. This means that the individual may not receive the necessary support when they need it and is why managers have an important role to play.

This Guide aims to:

- Highlight the potential impact stress and mental ill health can have on individuals in the workplace.
- Raise awareness of the potential warning signs that may indicate there are concerns for an individual’s mental health and wellbeing.
- Clarify how, as a manager / leader you can respond to concerns about mental wellbeing and identify appropriate support.
- Provide guidance on what to do where aspects of work are cited as contributing to, or causing stress.
- Enable managers to support individuals with long-term mental health conditions, and to identify and consider reasonable adjustments as per the Equality Act 2010.

2 Scope

This guide applies to all University leaders and managers who may be required to support and manage team members who are experiencing difficulties, whether personal or professional, that are impacting on their mental health and wellbeing at work.

3. Recognising signs that a member of your team may be experiencing poor mental health.

The sooner you become aware of an issue the better, as early intervention will allow exploration of any support that may be necessary, and may prevent the situation from worsening. It is much easier to spot potential difficulties when you know your team well, as you will be more likely to recognise changes in behaviour or performance that may indicate they are having difficulties. For example you may notice changes in mood, level of engagement, interaction with colleagues, or changes in appearance, or level of attendance. Refer to the table in Appendix 3 for more details. Being approachable and having a good managerial relationship with your team also means that they will be more likely to approach you to discuss any difficulties.

There are a number of ways to build good working relationships with your team including through day to day interactions, regular catch ups and team meetings. Having regular communication is important particularly during periods of uncertainty, when changes are occurring at work, or where the individual may be dealing with changes in their personal circumstances. A colleague returning following a lengthy absence for instance may have lost confidence or be concerned about the impact of any changes on their role. In this case it may be helpful to consider whether a phased return to work would be a helpful way to re-integrate the individual back into the workplace. Further details about types of support can be found in Section 11.

It doesn't matter whether the issues are personal or professional or a combination of both; if they are affecting the individual's health and wellbeing to the point where it is impacting on them at work it will need to be explored.

It is important to remember that everyone's mental health fluctuates in response to day-to-day events and there will be occasions where specific events may impact and result in an occasional "off day".

Where the "off days" become frequent or there are other noticeable sustained changes in behaviour and / or performance, you should discuss your concerns privately with the individual as soon as possible. Similarly if a colleague has raised substantiated concerns about a team member you will need to follow up. Remember even where you consider you have a good relationship with team members the issues may be so sensitive that the individual may not wish to disclose details and if that is the case you will need to respect their wishes. You should however try to find out the impact the issue(s) is having in the workplace and whether there is anything you can reasonably do to support the individual.

4.0 Responding and Assessing Risk

4.1 Is there an immediate risk of harm?

Where the nature of the disclosure or concern is such that you believe there is an immediate risk that the individual may harm themselves or others you will need to determine the best course of action and ascertain whether the person has a support plan in place.

If the person has expressed suicidal thoughts or feelings please see separate guidance 'Guidance for Managers: staff expressing suicidal thoughts'. If you are able to, have a conversation with the individual that may help to establish whether there is a genuine risk of harm or whether comments were taken out of context. If that is not the case, it may be necessary to refer the person to their GP for an urgent appointment or alternatively to contact Social Services or attend the nearest Accident & Emergency Department as a matter of urgency.

If you are unsure of how to deal with the situation you can seek advice from Human Resources, Occupational Health or Staff Counselling and Psychological Support Service (SCPSS). Please refer to section 17 for further details.

4.2 No immediate risk of harm

Where you believe there is no immediate risk of harm but that the individual is facing some difficulties you should arrange to meet privately to discuss the issues with them.

Remember you are not expected to be an expert on mental health or to be able to solve the problem, but you should provide reassurance that you are there to listen and consider what support can be offered. You should avoid making assumptions about what the individual might need and allow them to explain how the issue is affecting them, for example is it affecting their relationships with colleagues or their ability to do any particular aspects of their role. They may need to speak to or make an appointment to see their GP. You may need to discuss potential options with Human Resources who may suggest you arrange a referral to Occupational Health, or that you direct the person to the Staff Counselling and Psychological Support service. Every situation will be different and will require careful consideration.

4.3 Potential routes of disclosure / discovery include but are not limited to:

- The individual may unexpectedly disclose information in a one to one discussion.
- You notice cumulative changes in the individual's behaviour and / or performance at work.
- Another member of the team raises a concern about their colleague.

Please refer to Appendix 2 which provides a reference point to the type of issues and symptoms that might be evident when an employee is struggling with mental health-related concerns.

5.0 Work-Related Stress

The University has a duty to prevent injury to health from work-related stress and it is important for managers to act quickly where work-related issues are identified as impacting on an individual's mental health. It is possible that work-related stress can trigger an episode of mental ill health in someone who has otherwise been successfully managing an underlying mental health condition.

Whether an individual experiencing stress develops a mental health problem or their existing mental health condition becomes exacerbated by stressful events at work, you as their manager will need to discuss the situation and arrange for appropriate support.

Where stress is one part of a wider mental health issue, you will need to address any work-related aspects alongside any longer term health issues and seek relevant advice from HR and Occupational Health.

You may need to arrange for a stress risk assessment to be undertaken or facilitate a referral to Occupational Health. You may also need to complete a stress management action plan which can be used to support other interventions such as staff counselling. [The Managing Work Related Stress Policy](#) and further information about managing work related stress can be found on the [Health and Safety Executive website](#).

6. Seeking support outside of normal working hours

If an issue is brought to your attention outside of normal office hours then it is important that you assess the situation carefully. The University does not endorse or encourage managers to provide mental health support/contact out of hours, as such arrangements could in fact leave the member of staff more at risk. Our guidance to staff makes it clear that outside of the normal hours of work, they should refer directly to external services that are provided by professionals equipped to do this.

If a member of your team has made contact with you outside of working hours then it is important that you raise this with them in an appropriate way when back in working hours. You can talk to them about talking to others (maybe a partner/relative or friend) and remind them of the support that is available in the Staff Guidance, which suggests that outside of work they can make contact with a number of external agencies including:

- GP service, Accident & Emergency
- NHS on 111 (England) or NHS Direct 0845 46 47 (Wales)
- The Samaritans on Freephone 116 123 service available 24 hours a day,

We recognise that this may have an impact on you and you may wish to seek support for yourself by contacting your line manager or Human Resources when you are back at work.

There are occasions where arrangements may need to be in place out of hours, or when individuals are working away from the campus. In these circumstances it is important that

arrangements are put in place as part of the planning process for such activities. For example if an individual is engaged in university business outside of the UK – then they should be signposted to contact the University Security team for support out of hours

If the incident is related to, or involves a student: Please contact the student counselling service (See section 17).

7. Managing and supporting individuals during periods of uncertainty and change

Managers play a key role in supporting the day-to-day wellbeing of team members particularly when dealing with uncertainty and or significant change(s). Whilst the circumstances impacting on the team may be outside of your control, how you manage and support your team to deal with them is within your control.

Arranging regular meetings and communications to update the team on any developments is key to ensuring team members understand what is happening, and the reasons why it is happening. Managers should be as clear as possible about the potential impacts and honest about any challenges they anticipate. They will need to observe how the team reacts and be vigilant to spot signs of anyone who may be struggling to accept / adapt to the changes, to ensure they are supported and the matter does not become a source of anxiety for them. Where concerns are raised they should be addressed as quickly as possible.

Remember that HR will normally be involved in supporting changes and they should be your first point of contact for advice and guidance. Details of other support sources- including Staff Counselling and Psychological Support Service and Organisational Development and Professional Learning - can be found in section 17 of this Guide.

8. Managing and supporting your team

There may be occasions where you are required to support team members and manage your own feelings following a traumatic, distressing incident related to work. In some cases you may be the person giving the news to your team. This will hopefully be very rare but in the event of a tragic accident involving a colleague, or where a colleague dies either unexpectedly or after a period of ill health, it will have an impact on the wider team.

Whilst you can plan for practical work implications you cannot easily anticipate the impact an incident like this will have on the team members or indeed on yourself. It is important to ensure you and your team have time to digest and reflect on the news and to ensure where appropriate support from Staff Counselling and Psychological Support Service is available.

Individual reactions will differ and will depend on a number of factors including how well they knew their colleague, and how shocking the incident. You may need to allow some time for the team to reflect and digest what has happened, either as a collective or as individuals. Some may prefer to quietly contemplate the news, others may prefer an opportunity to discuss what has happened with their colleagues.

9. Managing and supporting individuals with long-term mental health conditions

Where the mental health condition has a long-term (typically lasting or expected to last for more than 12 months) adverse effect on the individual's ability to carry out normal day to day activities the provisions of the Equality Act 2010 are likely to apply. Where this is the case you will need to consider reasonable adjustments (see glossary at Appendix 1 for the definition). The type of adjustment will vary depending on the health issue and the impact on the individual's role. Please refer to Section 13 for further details.

10. Absence relating to mental ill health

Sometimes individuals experiencing mental health issues may need to be absent from work. This may be because they are too ill to be at work or be because their medication means that they cannot carry out their duties safely. Their absence should be managed supportively in accordance with University policy (See [HR Website](#) for details). Your role as manager will be to consider and agree appropriate level of contact during a long-term absence to ensure the individual feels adequately informed and supported. You should also agree how much information (if any) the individual wishes you to share with their colleagues. Depending on the health issue and the length of the absence you may also need to liaise with HR to discuss the value of arranging a referral to Occupational Health or to explore potential adjustments that may facilitate the individual's return, for example a phased return. For more information visit the [HR website](#).

11. Supporting the Wider Team

You will need to consider the impact if any that the situation has had on the wider team, for example if they have witnessed the person in distress and this has affected them. You may not be at liberty to share much information with the team, as what you do share will need to have been agreed with the individual. If the person has consented to disclosure of the health issue and if the condition is complex and not widely understood, team members may also benefit from support and / or training to equip them with the information they need to be able to effectively support their colleague in the future.

12. Conducting return to work interviews

You should arrange to conduct a 'return to work' interview to discuss the individual's health and any support that may be required. You should also explore whether any physical health issues may be having a negative impact on an employee's mental health and wellbeing. Where the individual is managing a long-term health issue it may be useful to agree an action plan which can be used to support the individual in the future. Please speak to your HR contact for further details.

13. Providing support and making adjustments

Should you require any advice or support then please contact your HR Team who will be able to provide guidance on the type of adjustments and support that are possible. Some cases may require input from Occupational Health but others may require simple practical steps that are relatively quick to implement for example:

- Flexible working hours, such as different start / finish time.
- A temporary change to work location.
- An option to work from home occasionally where business requirements allow.
- Providing equipment - for example a light box.
- Phasing an individual's return following a long -term absence.
- Adopt a flexible approach in relation to attendance at medical appointments.

In some circumstances it may be necessary to consider temporary or in some cases permanent changes to an individual's role. In both cases this should only be done in consultation with HR as the resulting change may have an impact on contractual arrangements, including the grading of the post:

- Reallocation of certain tasks.
- Change to job description.
- Change to objectives.
- Change aspects of role that may trigger / exacerbate mental health condition.

There may be occasions where specific support is necessary for a specific period of time- for example following a return from lengthy absence the individual may find it helpful to have:

- More regular supervision / additional management support.
- Additional training, coaching.
- Support from a buddy or mentor.
- Mediation.
- Professional support e.g. support from the Staff Counselling and Psychological Support service.

The combination of support required will vary depending on the individual, their role and the issue they are dealing with. You should not make assumptions about what they may or may not need and should be guided by the individual as they are best placed to know how the condition is affecting them and what support would be most beneficial. In the case of a long-term absence you will need to consider whether the person has a disability and whether it is necessary to consider reasonable adjustments. You should seek advice and guidance from Human Resources before deciding on the best course of action.

14. Seeking support whilst managing mental health issues in team members

We recognise that managing and supporting staff dealing with very sensitive, complex issues can be challenging and potentially upsetting or emotive, particularly if it is a subject that is personally

sensitive. If this is the case, you should in the first instance talk matters through with your own manager. You may choose to seek confidential advice from HR or from your wider support network without breaching confidence. You may also wish to contact the Staff Counselling and Psychological Support service as they are available to help managers and staff in dealing with any psychological and interpersonal challenges associated with their role.

15. Record Keeping and General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR)

Information relating to health and potentially disability is personal sensitive data and will be processed in accordance with GDPR. Refer to the staff privacy notice for further details ([Staff Privacy Policy](#))

16. Confidentiality

Whilst you should endeavour to maintain confidentiality as far as possible you cannot provide a blanket guarantee that information will not be shared at all as it may be necessary in the interests of supporting the employee's health and wellbeing to refer to Human Resources or a senior manager. For example where you believe significant role changes are required, there is a risk the individual may harm themselves or others, or has committed a crime.

17. Other Considerations

17.1 Involvement in Conduct, Capability or Grievance processes

Where a member of your team is the subject of an investigation or is required as a witness in an investigation process you should ensure they understand what is involved and that they are prepared and able to cope with the situation. If the individual is finding it particularly difficult, you may need to encourage them to seek support from the Staff Counselling and Psychological Support service.

17.2 Other Health-Threatening Behaviours

Where it becomes apparent that the individual may be behaving in a health-threatening way, such as alcohol or substance abuse, diet / eating disorders, self-harm that is affecting their performance and overall health and safety in the workplace, you may need to signpost to other professional services and or seek further advice from HR (for example, regarding how to broach the conversation with the individual if they have not made any disclosure). Details of internal and external support can be found in the appendices.

Where it is apparent that the individual may be using drugs or alcohol to manage their situation you should refer to the relevant policy and if necessary contact HR for further advice.

18. Sources of information and support

Useful contact details / How do I access help

Name	Email	Telephone	Link
Human Resources	hr@leeds.ac.uk	0113 343 4146	HR Contacts
Staff Counselling & Psychological Support Service	staffcounselling@leeds.ac.uk	0113 34 33694	staff counselling website.
Occupational Health	occupationalhealth@leeds.ac.uk	0113 343 2997	Occupational Health website.
Health and Safety Services	safety@leeds.ac.uk	0113 34 34201	Health and safety website.
Equality Policy Unit	equality@leeds.ac.uk		Equality website
Organisational Development Professional Learning	peopledev@leeds.ac.uk	0113 3434012	ODPL website
Security	security@leeds.ac.uk	0113 343 5494/5 (non-emergencies) or (0113) 343 2222 (emergencies only)	Security website
Student Support Services	scc@leeds.ac.uk	0113 343 4107	General Support for Students (this includes a range of support options) Specialist Support for Students
Leeds University Union	helpandsupport@luu.leeds.ac.uk	0113 3801 400	Leeds University Union Help & Support

18.1 Human Resources

Your HR Team will be able to advise you on procedural, legal or policy considerations. They can assist in arranging occupational health referrals and can advise on potential reasonable

adjustments that may be applicable in the circumstances. For more information visit the [HR website](#).

18.2 Staff Counselling and Psychological Support Service

The Staff Counselling and Psychological Support Service can provide personal consultation counselling and coaching to individuals who are experiencing stress, distress or psychological challenges, enabling them to function more effectively. They can also provide specific professional support and tools to enable those in leadership and management roles to deal with any particular psychological and professional challenges associated with their roles. For further details visit the [staff counselling website](#).

18.3 Occupational Health

The Occupational Health team can provide specialist advice about an employee's fitness for work and advice on potential adjustments to the workplace and or working arrangements that will enable a member of staff to return to, or remain in, the workplace. Managers requiring this information should discuss arrangements for an Occupational Health referral with HR. For further details about our services visit the [Occupational Health website](#).

18.4 Health and Safety Services

Health and Safety colleagues are able to provide general advice and guidance to line managers in relation to risk assessments, but where issues at work have been identified as potentially contributing to mental ill health, colleagues in HR and Occupational Health will also need to be involved when considering relevant support. Further information is available on the [Health and Safety website](#).

18.5 Equality Policy Unit

The Equality Policy Unit can provide advice, guidance and support to managers on a wide range of equality related matters or signpost colleagues or managers to relevant organisations.

The University also has a range of staff networks and these can help colleagues raise issues in a safe environment. Staff Networks exist for LGBT, BME, Muslim, Women, and / or Staff Disability and Mental Health.

Contact details for EPU support or the Staff Networks are available on the [Equality website](#).

18.6 Trade Unions

The Trade Union representatives can provide advice and support on procedural issues and can accompany staff to formal meetings.

18.7 Organisational Development Professional Learning

The Organisational Development Professional Learning team deliver a suite of personal resilience training further details are available on the [ODPL website](#):

19. Reference / related documents

- [Health and Safety Policy](#)
- [Managing Work Related Stress Policy](#)
- [Leadership Excellence Behaviours](#)
- [Policy on alcohol and substance abuse](#)
- [Policy on support staff sickness absence](#)
- [Policy on sickness absence Academic and Academic related staff.](#)
- [Health and Safety Executive Stress Management Standards](#)
- [Policy on Dignity and Mutual Respect](#)
- Crisis Support Information document

20. External sources of information and support

- [NHS](#)
- [NHS Choices](#)
- [Mood zone](#)
- [Mental Health Foundation](#)
- [Mind](#)
- [Rethink](#)
- [Sane](#)
- [Time to Change](#)
- [Mood zone](#)
- [Remploy](#)
- [Access to work](#)
- [The International Stress Management Association](#)
- [Health and Safety Executive website](#)

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Glossary - Appendix 1

The following definitions are used in this guidance:

Mental Ill Health

The term “mental ill health” covers a range of conditions and symptoms, ranging from a mild condition, for example mild depression and anxiety to more serious and enduring conditions such as bi-polar disorder, psychosis and schizophrenia.

Work Related Stress

The Health and Safety Executive defines stress as the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressure or other types of demands placed on them at work. For further details about the management standards visit the [HSE website](#)

Disability

A physical or mental impairment that has a substantial and long term adverse effect on a person’s ability to carry out normal day to day activities as per Equality Act 2010.

Reasonable Adjustments

Reasonable adjustments are changes to the work environment that allow people with a disability to work safely and productively. Under the Equality Act 2010 ‘disability’ includes physical, psychological or neurological disease or disorder illness, whether temporary or permanent.

Long term adverse effect.

In the context of disability, long term is typically a condition that lasts or is expected to last 12 months or more.

Managers Do's and Don'ts - Appendix 2

Managers are expected to	Managers are not expected to
To observe confidentiality within certain boundaries explaining that it may be necessary to share some information with HR/OH.	Have all the answers or be able to solve the problem if the issues are outside of their remit e.g. relate to personal/non work related matters.
Make a judgement as to the level of risk and decide whether they are able to deal with the issue effectively. Should sign post employees needing support to out of hours options/services where appropriate. Please refer to section 17.	Be available outside of their normal working hours.
If you are the best person to deal with the matter make time to meet and discuss the issue and explore support that may be needed as soon as possible.	Disclose their personal email, mobile or home phone numbers.
Listen and involve the individual in discussions regarding support that may be required. Be approachable and create an environment that encourages open and honest discussion. Include the individual where possible in decisions about the support that will be required.	Be experts on mental health conditions or treatments.
Establish how the issue is impacting on the individual when at work and identify what would help them and if there are any specific triggers.	Ignore the issue as matters may deteriorate if no support is required.
Find out if this is an underlying clinically diagnosed condition	Meet with the member of staff's GP
Undertake return to work interviews following an absence and ascertain if support is required.	Disclose details to others without appropriate consent.
Seek advice from Human Resources and Occupational Health and make appropriate adjustments.	
Observe any actions agreed as part of stress management action plan. Signpost to other professional services or sources of support.	

If you notice an employee displaying any of the following signs or behaviours then this does not necessarily mean that a mental health issue exists. However you may wish to meet with and talk to the employee to offer support or advice. Please note this list is not exhaustive

Physical	Psychological	Behavioural
Fatigue	Anxiety/Distress	Increased smoking/drinking
Indigestion or upset stomach	Tearfulness	Use of recreational drugs
Lack of energy	Feeling low	Poor concentration
Changing sleep patterns	Less interested	Worrying more
Headaches	Difficult controlling emotions	Resigned attitude
Appetite and weight change	Indecision	Feeling overwhelmed
Joint/back pain	Loss of motivation	Angry Irritable and short tempered
Visible tension/trembling	Loss of sense of humour	Aggressive behaviour
Nervous speech	Difficulty relaxing	Repetitive speech/activity
Chest/throat pain	Memory lapses	Withdrawal
Sweating	Irrational/illogical thought process	Restlessness
Constantly feeling cold	Difficulty taking information in	Overreaction to problems
	Increase in suicidal thoughts	Lateness/leaving early
		Working excessively long hours
		Obsessive activity
		Disruptive behaviour
		Impaired/inconsistent performance
		Uncharacteristic errors
		Increased sickness absence