



## MODULE 3:

# IMPROVING

# MENTAL HEALTH



# Improving Mental Health

By the end of this module you will: →

- 👍 Know what can cause mental health issues in the workplace
- 👍 Understand the impact mental health issues can have on both the employees and the organisation
- 👍 Discover ways to combat mental health issues and the stigma that surrounds it

## What can cause mental health issues and why is it so important?

The leading cause of sickness absence is mental health. This includes everything from anxiety to bipolar disorder, and in particular stress-related illness, which has seen a 42% increase since 2013. Poor mental health is one of the biggest issues in the workplace today, so catering for this in a wellbeing strategy is integral. The majority of the time, when it comes to creating a wellbeing strategy, senior management put a lot of emphasis on physical health and safety. Whilst that is an important aspect of wellbeing, employees are more concerned with their mental/emotional health and happiness. They value their psychosocial needs much more, and so a comprehensive wellbeing strategy will address this.

Poor mental health can often become worse in the workplace if it is not properly cared for. **There are a number of ways in which the workplace can negatively impact mental health, including:**

- Workplace stress
- Poor relations with colleagues
- The nature of the work
- Experiencing stigma, or being treated unfairly because of mental health problems

- Employees being unsure whether to tell their boss and colleagues about their mental health problem
- Worrying about returning to work after a period of poor mental health

As well as having a huge impact on individual employees, poor mental health has severe repercussions for employers. These repercussions include increased staff turnover, increased sickness absence, burnout, decreased motivation and productivity.

According to [mentalhealth.org.uk](https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk) 12.7% of all sickness days in the UK can be attributed to mental health conditions.

A fundamental way to tackle the issue of poor mental health is to increase awareness. It is not necessary for people to become experts in mental health but it is important to help them spot the signs that something might be wrong and train them in how to deal with it sensitively and effectively before it becomes a larger problem.

# What to look for?

When looking for mental ill health within the workforce, it is important to consider if some of these common symptoms are present:

<b>Cognitive:</b>	Unusual lapses in performance such as making more mistakes, struggling with decision-making, or unable to concentrate.
<b>Emotional:</b>	Poor mental health tends to result in behaviour that is not usual for them. Look out for: poor punctuality, not taking breaks, unofficial absence, poor relations with colleagues, or not turning work in on time.
<b>Behavioural:</b>	If an employee is bad-tempered, responding negatively to criticism, uncharacteristically withdrawn, or lacking their usual sense of humour it can be indicative of poor mental health.
<b>Physical:</b>	Consistently ill, being fatigued and lethargic, putting little effort into their appearance, or sudden changes in weight can indicate poor mental health.
<b>Business:</b>	From an organisational stand-point, increased absence, diminished productivity, or employee turnover may indicate poor mental health within the workforce.

Spotting one or two of these symptoms does not always mean that there may be a mental health issue, but it is important to see if the employee is alright. If they are indeed suffering from poor mental health then the next step is to help and support them.

One of the biggest ways that we can help is through reducing the stigma and taboo that is often associated with mental health. It is important to emphasise that there is no judgement or prejudice should anyone be suffering from mental health issues.

Furthermore, management should be understanding of the needs of individual employees and how they wish their mental health issues to be handled. By doing so it creates a culture of trust between employees and senior members. This is the best starting point to then go on and help the employees more directly.

## Practical Solutions

	Solution	Benefit
<b>PREVENTION</b> – keeping employees’ feeling supported and cared for to prevent any mental health issues from arising	Get rid of the stigma and generate good levels of communication.	By emphasising that mental health is not something to be ashamed or embarrassed of, it can create a more open and honest dialogue within the organisation.
	Allow employees to take breaks from their work and encourage them to remove themselves from the work environment for a short while.	This can help ease the pressure of the workload and therefore the levels of stress they may feel.
	Train management in how to spot and deal with mental health issues.	Not only does this help management to understand mental health better but will also make the employees feel more comfortable knowing their bosses are able to help.
<b>INTERVENTION</b> – if mental health issues do arise then it’s important for steps to be taken that stop them from becoming a more serious problem	Consider flexible hours and teleworking during times of difficulty.	When employees are beginning to feel stressed or worried, give them the option of working from home or coming in at more suitable times; coming into work during this period may aggravate their mental health.
	Encourage regular but informal sessions that employees can go to where they can discuss any issues with HR or even a third party.	Helping employees to feel as though they always have someone they can talk to when they are going through a difficult time can stop the problem from becoming any bigger.
	Create ‘Mental Health Champions’ that allows for peer-to-peer discussions on mental health.	Sometimes employees find it easier to talk to colleagues of the same level as oppose to senior members or members from different departments (e.g. HR), allowing for employees to talk about their issues but with people they may feel more comfortable talking to.
<b>Protection</b> – Sometimes an employee’s mental health may become a serious issue and therefore it is important to give them the support they need in such a difficult time.	Ensure that employees are financially supported should they need time off due to sickness.	A regular replacement income such as Income Protection can help ease a lot of the worrying surrounding time off, with the employees feeling supported they can recover with less pressure and therefore more likely to return to work.
	Ask for help from outside sources, such as counsellors or legal advisors.	Sometimes in-house help is not enough to help someone, therefore referring them to a highly-trained professional or hiring someone to make the required changes to the organisation may be more beneficial.
	Ensure that when employees return to work, they are ready, able, and happy.	Making it easier for them to work, perhaps by starting them on smaller hours, will help them to adjust better. It’s also important to make regular contact and find out how they are feeling to ensure that it’s not too much too soon.

## Case Study

### ▶ DELTA HOTELS

Delta Hotels method is to focus on employee engagement as opposed to employee satisfaction. They state that the difference between the two is that engagement focuses more on how benefits can affect productivity, responsibility, and accountability. In order to improve the level of employee engagement within their organisation they targeted mental health. The result of this was a variety of offers in which employees were prompted to tackle many of the common work-related mental health issues. Furthermore, they hosted a 'Mental Health Week' for other companies to inform of the mental health issues that are very prevalent in the workplace and to try and get rid of the stigma that surrounds it. Because of this, they are consistently recognised as one of Canada's best employers.

### Expert Opinions:

“ To increase mental health literacy and reduce stigma, workplace training should be based on best practice principles of contact-based education, with contextually relevant examples and support from all levels of the organization.”

Moll et al. (2018). Workplace Mental Health Training in Health Care: Key Ingredients of Implementation. The Canadian Journal of Psychiatry.

“ From the perspective of IES' work in this area, there are multiple responsibilities that employers should consider. These include managing the risk of workplace stress, ensuring struggling employees can access support, and making adjustments, where appropriate, for workers with chronic and fluctuating mental health problems. Awareness-raising can complement and enhance organisational efforts to manage all of these but can't substitute for practical steps such as providing training or procuring specialist support. A big budget isn't necessarily required but a strategic, informed approach to addressing workplace wellbeing is essential.”

Sally Wilson, Senior Research Fellow, Institute for Employment Studies

## Fun Facts:

Women in full-time employment are nearly **TWICE** as likely to have a common mental health problem as full-time employed men. <sup>1</sup>



Less than a quarter **24%** of line managers have received any training in mental health. <sup>2</sup>

According to a survey by BITC<sup>2</sup>:

**60%** Three out of every five employees have experienced mental health issues in the past year because of work.

**31%** Almost a third of the workforce have been formally diagnosed with a mental health issue (29% in 2016).

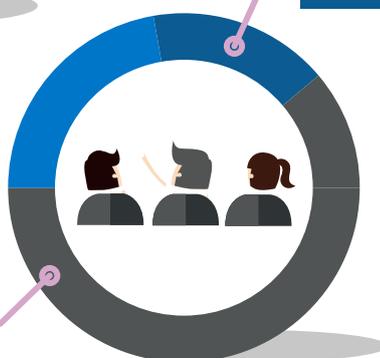
The most common diagnosis was:

- Depression
- General Anxiety

**53%** of employees feel comfortable talking about mental health issues like depression and anxiety at work.



But just **11%** disclosed it specifically to a line manager.



**76%** of those who have experienced a mental health issue as a result of work feel that colleagues care about their wellbeing.

Sources:

<sup>1</sup>Stansfeld, S., Clark, C., Bebbington, P., King, M., Jenkins, R., & Hinchliffe, S. (2016). Chapter 2: Common mental disorders. In S. McManus, P. Bebbington, R. Jenkins, & T.Brugha (Eds.), Mental health and wellbeing in England: Adult Psychiatric Morbidity Survey 2014. Leeds: NHS Digital.

<sup>2</sup><https://wellbeing.bitc.org.uk/all-resources/research-articles/mental-health-work-report-2017>

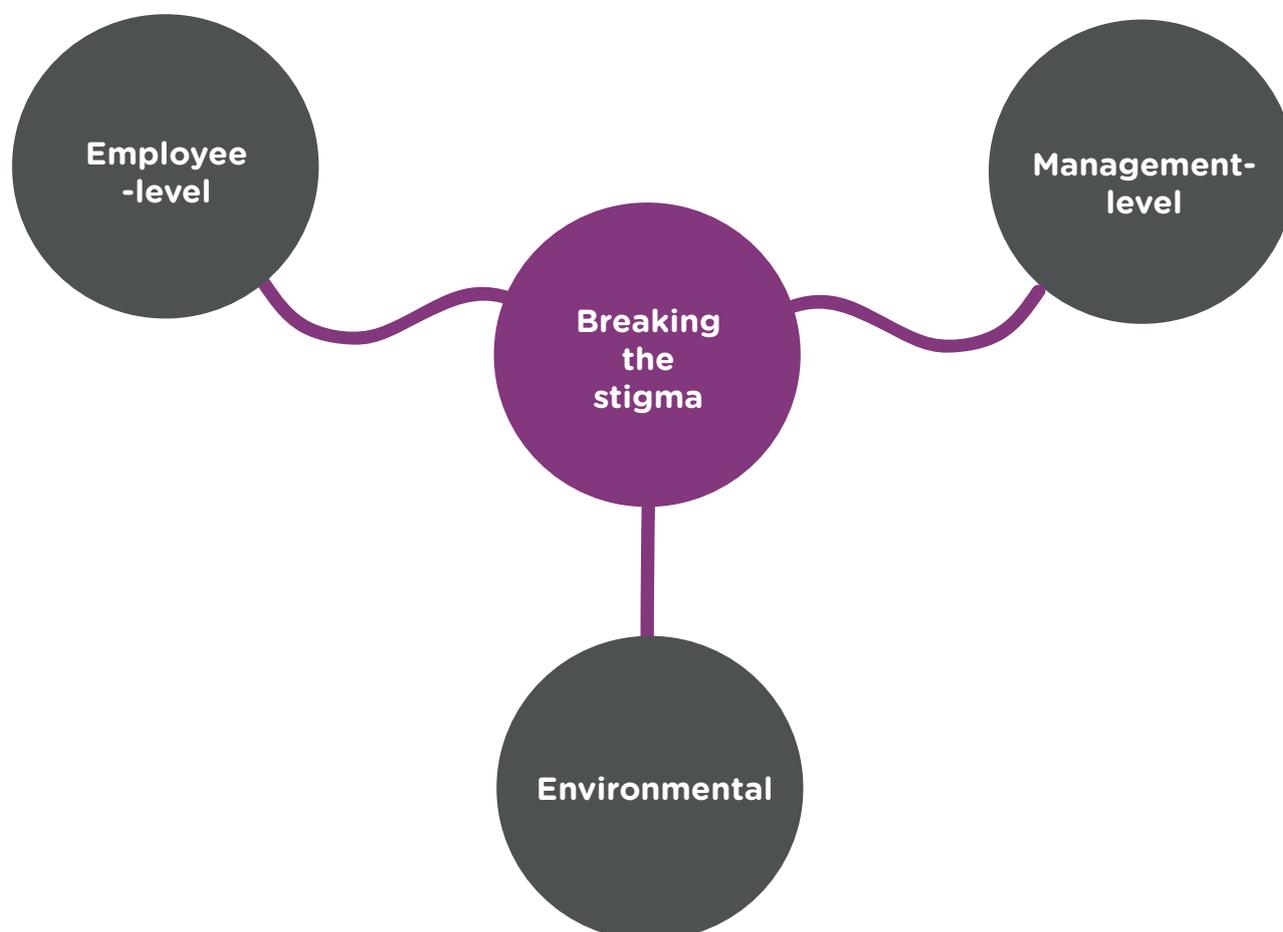
## Ask Yourself...



- How important is mental health in your organisation currently?
- What aspects of the jobs in your organisation can negatively impact on mental health?
- What stigma may currently surround mental health in your organisation?
- How can you increase awareness of mental health in your organisation?

## Exercise:

Take some time to brainstorm some ways in which you can reduce the stigma surrounding mental health in your organisation. Use the below mind-map as a starting point to record your thoughts and ideas of how their can be achieved and implemented at the employee and management level as well as environmental.



## Useful Links/Resources

The Stress Management Society have written a report on the '4-7-8' Breathing Exercise, how to do it and how it's beneficial:

**<http://www.stress.org.uk/deep-breathing-4-7-8-approach/>**

A key way in which we fight against stress is resilience, the Stress Management Society report on ways in which resilience can be improved:

**<http://www.stress.org.uk/2859-2/>**

Mind, a charity devoted to improving the lives of those with mental illness, have written a document on how to promote wellbeing and tackle the causes of work-related mental health problems

**[https://www.mind.org.uk/media/428496/Resource3\\_HowToPromoteWellBeingFINAL.pdf](https://www.mind.org.uk/media/428496/Resource3_HowToPromoteWellBeingFINAL.pdf)**

Mindful, a non-profit committed to increasing the awareness of mindfulness, give 10 quick tips on how to be centred and present (mindful) whilst at work:

**<https://www.mindful.org/10-ways-mindful-work/>**



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