Your business's plan to improve employees' mental health

Taken from the Thriving at Work Mental Health Standards

Mental health affects one in six British workers. It's the leading cause of sickness absence. And it's costing UK employers between £33 billion and £44 billion a year.

Improving your employees' mental health is no longer a warm sentiment, it's business critical.

The Government has recognised this and commissioned an independent review called "Thriving at Work" to address the issue.

As a result, Lord Dennis Stevenson and Paul Farmer, Chief Executive of Mind created the Thriving at Work Mental Health Standards which sets out six mental health core standards for employers, drawn from best practice and available evidence.

You can read the full report here: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/thriving-at-work-a-review-of-mental-health-and-employers

It's a substantial report. Which is why, for your benefit, we're going to summarise core standard one for you as we feel that this will provide you with a great starting point to improve your employees' mental health.

Core standard one: Create a mental health at work plan

Produce, implement and communicate a mental health at work plan that encourages and promotes good mental health of all staff and an open organisational culture.

To explain this, the report suggests that every business should have a plan on how to tackle mental health. The following suggestions should be included within your plan.

There's three parts:

- **Part 1** is about promoting employee wellbeing

- **Part 2** is about tackling the causes of work-related mental health problems

- **Part 3** is about supporting staff that are experiencing a mental health problem

Let's get started with part one.

Part 1: Promoting employee wellbeing

1 **Get senior leaders on board.**

Senior leaders should promote employee wellbeing by:

- Speaking out about mental health
- Supporting a campaign to encourage all staff to take lunch breaks and work healthy hours.

2 **Raise awareness of mental health:**

In many workplaces mental health is the elephant in the room. Too often, employees are scared to talk to their manager and problems can spiral.

Your action plan should aim to raise awareness of mental health by:

- Embedding mental health in induction and training
- Celebrating key dates in the mental health calendar
- Running internal communication campaigns
- Recruiting Mental Health Champions.

3 **Involve staff in dialogue and decision making to create a culture of openness**

Your action plan should set out how you will involve staff by using methods such as:

- Staff surveys and focus groups
- Staff forums and diversity networks
- Engagement steering groups
- Monthly or quarterly performance review meetings
- Improvement or planning 'away days'
- Regular group problem-solving meetings or innovation events
- Work-stream groups that bring together different parts of the organisation
- Feeding back board decisions to all staff
- Effectively using internal communication channels.

4 **Promote a healthy work/life balance**

A poor work/life balance can quickly lead to stress and burnout, reducing levels of employee productivity, performance, creativity and morale.

Your action plan should set out how your organisation encourages staff to:

- Work sensible hours
- Take full lunch breaks
- Rest and recuperate after busy periods
- Avoid working at weekends – especially from home
- Take their full annual leave entitlement.

5 **Provide opportunities for learning and development**

Research on employee engagement tells us employees need to feel valued, supported and that their work is meaningful.

Your mental health plan should outline ways in which you provide staff with learning and development opportunities including:

- Coaching
- Training
- Job-shadowing.

6 **Offer positive working relationships and social connections**

Organisations should take positive action to make the workplace a mutually supportive environment where good work relationships thrive.

Your mental health plan should:

- Promote a culture of teamwork, collaboration and information-sharing
- Promote positive behaviour to avoid conflict and ensure fairness
- Ensure robust policies on bullying and harassment are in place and well publicised
- Encourage exercise and regular social events to boost staff health, team work and mental wellbeing
- Hold 'lunch and learn' sessions – these are a great way to get staff to take their full lunch break away from their desk
- Consider offering mentoring and buddy schemes. They can help new starters to understand your organisation faster and help all staff to gain confidence and develop new skills.

Part 2: Tackling the work-related causes of mental health problems

1 Routinely take stock

If you don't take stock of your employees' mental wellbeing, you won't have a clear picture of what's really going on.

Your action plan should detail how you plan to routinely take stock of staff mental health allowing you to:

- Understand the factors that affect staff mental wellbeing in your workplace
- Identify what you're already doing to support it
- Assess the impact your current approach is having
- Plan further improvements, enhance morale and increase productivity
- Take part in Mind's Workplace Wellbeing Index.

2 Upskill line managers

The way you manage and support staff who are experiencing a mental health problem can be key in shaping how they cope and recover.

Your mental health plan should outline ways you will support your managers in recognising poor mental health among their team members. You could do this by:

- Providing training on mental health and stress management – including how to spot the signs and how to have supportive conversations with staff
- Having clear guidelines for managers on managing mental health issues
- Encouraging and supporting positive manager behaviour.

3 Regular one-to-ones

Regular one-to-ones have significant benefits for employers, employees and the bottom line.

In your mental health plan detail how you will support managers in holding regular one-to-ones by:

- Encouraging managers to speak regularly with staff about how they're doing, and what might be impacting their mental wellbeing
- Putting in place appraisal and supervision procedures which ask about mental wellbeing and stress and give staff permission to talk about home as well as work issues if they wish
- Maintaining regular, clear lines of communication with all staff, especially those working in isolation.

4 The physical work environment

Noise levels, space, temperature and light can significantly affect staff wellbeing.

In your action plan set out how you will create a good working environment for staff by:

- Consulting with employees on how to improve the work environment and take action to ensure it is suitable
- Providing space dividers and quiet spaces for when employees need to carry out focused work
- Reaching an agreement on respectful behaviour to help manage noise levels may help tackle some of the typical issues.

Part 3: Supporting staff experiencing a mental health problem

Organisations need to send a clear signal to staff that their mental health matters and being open about it will lead to support, not discrimination.

In your action plan you should detail the support available to staff if they are experiencing a mental health problem. This could include:

- Signposting to medical services, such as NHS services or another healthcare provider
- Signposting to mental health and/or wellbeing peer support groups
- Offering employees free or subsidised access to private medical insurance
- Offering employees the right to request flexible working
- An internal wellbeing or mental health network for colleagues to share experiences and tips for managing mental health and wellbeing at work

- A formal or informal internal buddying system for individuals to have the opportunity to talk to someone outside of their line management structure and be signposted to support
- Offering or encouraging employees to access online peer support communities such as Elefriends
- Offering an EAP to employees
- Encouraging staff to use a Wellness Action Plan.

We can help you create your mental health plan

Okay, there's a lot of points here and it may feel a bit overwhelming.

That's where we can step in and make things easier for you, by helping you create the best possible mental health plan for you and your business.

If you'd like to make a positive change and tackle mental health head on, then get in touch with us today.

Simply contact our team on

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