

Mental health adjustments

Mental health includes emotional, psychological and social wellbeing. It affects how someone thinks, feels and behaves.

Mental health problems can:

- happen suddenly, because of a specific event in someone's life
- build up gradually over time
- be hard to spot because everyone has different signs and signals
- be hidden because many people find it difficult to talk about their mental health
- fluctuate over time which means that an employee's ability to cope with the demands of the job might change

If an employee has a mental health problem, their employer should take it seriously, with the same care as for physical illness.

A mental health problem can be a disability under the Equality Act 2010. If an employee has a disability, their employer must make reasonable adjustments.

When making reasonable adjustments for mental health, employers should take into account that:

- every job is different, so what works in one situation might not work in another
- every employee is different, so what works for one employee might not work for another
- mental health changes over time, so what works for an employee now might not work in the future

Examples of reasonable adjustments for mental health

Reasonable adjustments are specific to an individual person. They can cover any area of work.

Working hours and patterns

For example:

- more frequent, shorter breaks
- paid time off for medical appointments
- flexible hours
- part-time or job share arrangements

Changing someone's role and responsibilities

For example:

- reviewing tasks or deadlines to help someone have a reasonable workload while managing their mental health
- breaking down work into short term tasks to reduce the complexity of someone's work and to provide structure to the working day

- reviewing someone's responsibilities to reduce those that are more stressful – for example reducing phone calls or customer facing work
- moving someone into a different role or department if their current job has a negative impact on their mental health

Reviewing working relationships and communication styles

For example:

- making sure someone is working with trusted people to limit the impact of different working and communication styles
- agreeing a preferred communication method to help reduce anxiety – for example by avoiding spontaneous phone calls

Changing the physical working environment

For example:

- allowing someone to work from home to manage distractions or engage in activities that allow them to manage their mental health – for example, so they can take regular breaks without feeling other people are watching them
- relocating someone's workspace to a quieter area to reduce sensory demands
- providing rest areas away from the main staff area to allow someone to rest away from social demands
- providing reserved parking to reduce the stress of commuting

Being flexible with policies

For example:

- offering paid time off for someone to attend appointments in work time
- being flexible with [trigger points](#) for absence so that someone is not disadvantaged by taking absence when they are unwell
- offering an extended phased return to support someone to build up hours gradually and continue their recovery

Additional support

For example:

- modifying supervision to provide regular check-ins, prioritising work and creating structure in the working day
- providing training or coaching to build confidence in skills relevant to the job
- providing a buddy or mentor to be a dedicated person who can support with work tasks

Case studies

[Read case studies about making reasonable adjustments for mental health](#)

Talking about reasonable adjustments for mental health

Conversations about reasonable adjustments for mental health might come about because:

- a manager notices that someone in their team is struggling with their mental health
- an employee asks to have a conversation about work adjustments for mental health
- an employee speaks to HR or occupational health and they recommend reasonable adjustments for mental health

What an employer should do

As an employer, you should help an employee who requests reasonable adjustments to:

- look after their mental health at work
- understand what to expect from a meeting about reasonable adjustments

For example, you could:

- ask them how they are
- make it clear they should look after themselves and focus on managing their mental health
- check if they have accessed support available through work – for example mental health support
- let them know about any policies that are relevant to reasonable adjustments for mental health
- let them know that the organisation will try to support them in accessing reasonable adjustments
- explain the reasonable adjustments process and procedures
- agree on a reasonable adjustment meeting date

What an employee should do

Someone experiencing mental health problems might not be sure what they need to manage their mental health. They might not know what adjustments to suggest.

As an employee, there are several things you can think about when deciding what reasonable adjustments will help. This can help you prepare for a conversation with your employer about reasonable adjustments.

Think about how your mental health affects your work

For example:

- Are there times in the day or week that are better or harder, or do you feel the same all the time?
- Are there tasks at home or at work that feel possible and easy to do now?
- Are there tasks at home or at work that feel unmanageable now?

Think about how work affects your mental health

For example:

- Are there some tasks or situations that make you feel good?
- Are there some tasks or situations that make you feel anxious, worried or numb?

Talk to a friend or family member

You can talk to a friend or family member to ask them what they see and think. People can find it hard to recognise patterns in their behaviour, especially when they are experiencing mental health problems.

For example, you could ask:

- When am I confident, settled and happy? What am I doing? Who am I with?
- When am I unsettled, anxious or withdrawn? What am I doing? Who am I with?

If an employee's mental health problem is not a disability

An employee's mental health problem might not be a disability.

You should still offer support and explore whether adjustments can help. Simple changes to working arrangements or responsibilities could be enough.

Making adjustments for mental health can:

- help employees to stay in work while recovering from or managing a mental health condition
- make sure employees are well, safe and productive
- create a healthy work culture by building awareness and showing a commitment to good practice
- make it more likely that employees will stay at your organisation, reducing recruitment and training costs

[Find out more about supporting mental health at work](#)