

## Talking about mental health

Knowing how to approach and talk to a worker who has a mental health problem might seem difficult.

As an employer, if you believe a worker has poor mental health, you should arrange a conversation as soon as possible.

### Helping someone to feel comfortable

Some workers might not feel comfortable talking about their mental health straight away. But it's important to let them know they can talk about their mental health at any time. This could include arranging appropriate follow up conversations if concerns continue.

To help the person feel comfortable talking, you should:

- talk to them in private
- be flexible about when and where you talk
- approach the conversation in a positive and supportive way

It might be difficult for someone to talk about their mental health. So it's important you're calm, patient, supportive and reassuring.

When talking to workers, it's important to remember that factors outside of work could also have an impact on their mental health. For example, if someone close to them has died.

### Understanding what support is available

You should not be expected to be an expert in mental health. But knowing what resources are available can help workers get the support they need.

You should check what resources and support you can offer and tell workers about them. For example:

- an employee assistance programme (EAP) offering staff counselling
- mental health 'champions'
- external support networks

If a worker's mental health problem is a disability, or could reasonably be believed to be a disability, you must make [reasonable adjustments](#).

A worker's mental health problem might not be a disability. However, their job could be making it harder to deal with. You should still consider whether you can offer any workplace changes or support to help them. Changes are usually small but they can prevent workers needing to take time off.

### During the conversation

If a worker approaches you to talk about their mental health, you should thank them for opening up to you. Give them as much time as they need to talk.

During the conversation, you should:

- listen carefully to what they say
- try to identify what the cause is, for example by keeping questions open ended
- think about ways to help, for example if they know about options for support at work or how to request reasonable adjustments
- reassure them – let them know you'll help them get the support they need

You could agree to take time to think through what you've discussed before making any decisions.

## Terms used around mental health

Use appropriate language when talking about mental health. Language can affect how people feel and cause distress.

Be sensitive in the terms you use. Do not use words that are offensive or negative. For example, instead of saying 'suffering from mental health issues', say 'someone who has concerns related to their mental health.'

## Being clear about confidentiality

You should reassure the person that you will not share anything they tell you with anyone else without their permission, unless there's a good reason to. If there is, you should be clear about who you'll share it with and why.

If you direct them to external support networks, for example an employee assistance programme (EAP), reassure them that the conversations will be confidential. However, let them know they can still talk to you about it if they want to.

## If you think a worker is at risk

If you think a worker is at risk, you should encourage them to seek help.

This could include speaking to:

- a trusted friend or family member
- their GP
- occupational health

Your organisation might have an employee assistance programme (EAP) who you can:

- contact for advice
- direct a worker to

You can also tell them about external organisations who can help, for example:

- [Samaritans](#)
- [Shout](#)
- [Campaign Against Living Miserably \(CALM\)](#)
- [Papyrus](#)

The NHS provides a list of helplines and services that can support people with mental health problems:

- [England – mental health helplines on the NHS](#)
- [Scotland – mental health services on NHS 24](#)
- [Wales – mental health services on NHS 111 Wales](#)

If someone is in immediate danger, call 999.

Employers have a 'duty of care' to do what's reasonable and practical in situations involving a worker's mental health.

For example, a manager stays on the phone with someone until help reaches them.

### Once the worker is safe

Once the immediate situation has been handled, you should start thinking about how you can support the worker going forward.

The worker might need to take some time off. You should:

- follow your organisation's absence policy
- agree with the employee how you'll keep in touch during absence

When a worker is ready to return to work, you should have a process to follow.

Find out more about:

- [sick leave](#)
- [keeping in touch during absence](#)
- [returning to work after absence](#)