

Thrive Law Reasonable adjustments for mental health

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About Thrive Law

Thrive Law is an award-winning employment law firm which provides litigation support and HR services to both individuals and companies.

Based in Leeds, there are around 15 people in the team. Thrive Law was founded by Jodie Hill. The firm is designed to be different with the drive to integrate the good practice principles for mental health, wellbeing and equality, diversity and inclusion in everything they do, both internally, but also in external support and client advice.

Alicia's story

Alicia is a senior associate solicitor at Thrive Law and has had PTSD and anxiety since her father passed away suddenly in 2015.

Alicia's anxiety fluctuates hugely. Most days, with management, she can cope well. However, on a bad day she can struggle to articulate herself and struggle to manage her workload. Alicia can get easily overwhelmed and can catastrophise the smallest things. These thoughts can cause her to have panic or anxiety attacks.

On occasion, her overall mental wellbeing can diminish and she experiences depressive episodes. During these episodes Alicia describes that life feels like someone has "turned out the lights" and she can particularly struggle with her motivation and stop communicating.

What Alicia and Thrive did

Alicia explained that she has been open about her anxiety with people at Thrive Law from the beginning. She felt comfortable to discuss her anxiety and its impact on her at her interview because they were so open about their mental health conditions too. This was because Thrive Law had publicly supported mental health and inclusion. Jodie, the firm's founder, has Anxiety, PTSD and ADHD and is an advocate for story telling around mental health and neurodiversity and leading with empathy.

As a law firm, Thrive understands their responsibilities for the health and wellbeing of their staff. There are wellbeing initiatives in place regardless of mental health conditions. Everyone gets wellbeing days off to focus on selfcare, an amount of money to spend on wellbeing activities and regular check ins. They are also clear on their need to provide reasonable adjustments.

At the point of employment, Thrive offered Alicia reasonable adjustments. These include reducing Alicia's expectations to attend social or networking events when her anxiety makes this difficult and ensuring that workloads and capacity are regularly discussed so they can be managed easily when anxiety is at its worst.

Alicia works flexibly, in terms of when and where she works, and can reach out to management for support at any time, even if it's just a chat to talk through how she is feeling. Jodie also tries to reduce Alicia's exposure to difficult clients if she's struggling. Jodie often acts as a "shield" for all her more junior members of staff if clients are unkind or unreasonable by stepping in to lead meetings or responding to emails.

One thing which is also particularly helpful is that Thrive has funded Alicia's mental health coaching. This is confidential to her and gives a long-term prospect of recovery as well as providing her with stress and anxiety management techniques to manage daily life.

The firm also has "Licences to Thrive" in place. Everyone in the firm fills out a document to show how they like to work and this helps others know what to think about or what to do when working with that person. Alicia has used her "Licence to Thrive" to explain her mental health conditions and how this might impact her. This gives her colleagues the information they need to adapt to her conditions in their day-to-day work and means she does not need to explain herself again and again, and others know what to look out for and how to step in and help her.

There are regular conversations surrounding mental health. A wellbeing check-in is the first question asked in everyone's 1-2-1s every month. This ensures time is set aside to check that the right adjustments and support are in place, and that they are genuinely making a difference. Alicia explained that this gives her opportunities to identify possible gaps in her support and what further ideas she has for adjustments. These meetings also help her to keep accountable for the self care she has committed to do.

This way of working brings many benefits to the firm. Putting wellbeing and mental health values at the centre of how employees work and interact means that it's easy to respond to issues as they come up. Systems are in place to quickly adjust ways of working and provide the necessary support to stop problems getting worse. Thrive does not need to 'fire fight' when someone raises a condition or experiences a decline in their mental health. Working in this way, Thrive is constantly learning about new ways they can support all employees.

Key learnings

Supporting people with mental health conditions does not have to start once someone is diagnosed. Applying the same principles regardless of diagnosis means there is a constant foundation of support to all.

Having regular protected time to talk about wellbeing helps to create an open conversation so that people feel comfortable in raising any concerns they have about their mental health.

Having a standard approach to allow people to communicate openly and clearly with each other about how they work best is helpful for everyone and makes everyone more productive.

It's the small everyday actions and adjustments that make the biggest difference. You do not need a huge budget to have an impact on your team's wellbeing.