Mental Wellbeing Manager's Guidelines

Occupational Health, Safety and Wellbeing
Delivering quality services

Supporting a mentally healthy workplace

Coventry City Council

Statement

Coventry City Council aims to promote and maintain the health, safety and welfare of its employees. The Council recognises that it has a duty of care to look after the mental wellbeing of our staff whilst they are at work and to ensure, as far as is reasonably practicable, that workplaces and working environments are safe. The Council recognises its duty with regards disability under the Equality Act 2010

Introduction

This document recognises that the Council is committed to promoting and maintaining the health, safety and welfare of its employees. It is recognised that mental health & workplace stress is a health and safety management issue. The importance of identifying and reducing workplace stressors as far as is reasonably practicable is acknowledged.

These guidelines seek to provide information about managing mental wellbeing and stress to promote good management practice.

This document supports the fact that managers and employees have shared responsibility to manage stress. The City Council has a duty of care under the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 in this matter as well.

This document supports the requirement to make reasonable adjustments for disability under the Equality Act 2010

Supporting mental health in the workplace

It is important that any disclosure by an employee regarding mental health issues is taken seriously. For example, it's a good idea to talk to the employee to find out what support they might need at work.

Mental health issues may be caused by a variety of reasons. An issue can happen suddenly, because of a specific event in someone's life, or it can build up gradually over time.

Common mental health issues include:

stress (this is not classed as a medical condition, but it can still have a serious impact on wellbeing and lead to more serious condition)

depression

anxiety

Why talking openly about mental health is important

If staff feel they can talk openly about mental health, problems are less likely to build up. This could lead to:

- less time off for a mental health issue

- improved morale in the workplace

Creating a supportive environment

It's helpful if employers create an environment where staff feel able to talk openly about mental health.

For example:

- treating mental and physical health as equally important

- making sure employees have regular one-to-ones with their managers, to talk about any problems they are having

Facts about Mental Health Conditions

- Most people who have mental health conditions pose little risk to others and are more likely to harm themselves.
- Most people who suffer from major mental health conditions are supported by the Mental Health Services and their conditions can be controlled by medication.
- Mental health covers a broad range of conditions and is not static. For example, people do recover from conditions such as depression and may never have another episode. Others learn to live with periodic episodes of disturbed moods in conditions.
- Someone in crisis may well have difficulty being consistent at the time, but people with mental health conditions can have long periods of mental stability and be creative and productive.
- Stress which is not addressed can develop into mental ill health, including anxiety, depression and phobias. Stress is a very individual thing – what causes overwhelming pressure for one person, another may find easy to handle. There are differences in how people tolerate stress, due to many factors, including the extent of the problems they are experiencing, the support mechanisms they have in place and the resources they can call on to help them manage
- Acknowledging stress is not a weakness. On the contrary, acknowledging feelings of stress helps the individual to manage the cause of stressful feelings. If an employee is stressed but does not inform their manager, then their manager cannot support or help the employee to find a way forward. To deny stress simply delays resolution and increases the chance of the stressful feelings getting worse.
- Too much stress over a period of time, due to an individual's perception of the pressure they are under, can cause psychological and physiological changes in the body and can be a negative force.

- There are differences in how individuals manage stress due to many factors. Stress which is not managed can lead to anxiety, depression and phobias. Good support systems, however, can help offset the effects of stress.
- Anyone can be susceptible to feelings of stress or mental health problems due to the impact of life events such as bereavement, relationship breakdown, family or work-related issues.

Common Mental Health Conditions

Anxiety and depression are the most common forms of mental ill-health, which can also have an adverse impact on individuals at home and in the workplace.

Further information on mental ill health:

MIND

Equality Act 2010

Advice and support for mental health conditions is always available from the Occupational Health, Safety and Wellbeing Service

Tel: 02476 833285. email: ohc@coventry.gov.uk

Recognising behavioural and emotional signs of mental health issues in the workplace

There are often signs and symptoms which indicate the possible existence of a stress related problem or pressures that may affect mental well-being in the workplace. Some of these signs may be due to other factors but if several are present at once it is important that the manager gives the situation due attention.

- Deterioration in work performance
- Change of personality, i.e. being withdrawn
- Negative attitudes and behaviour, i.e. over-reacting, loss of motivation, poor time keeping.
- Increased sickness absence.
- Deterioration in workplace relationships, including front facing customer services.
- Poor memory and inability to concentrate.

If it is believed that an individual is demonstrating mental health issues, advice should be sought from Occupational Health, Safety and Wellbeing Service.

Support for employees experiencing mental health issues

Further information on managing employees with mental ill health can be found in the Mental Wellbeing Policy

Support comes in many forms:

Line managers

Occupational Health, Safety and Wellbeing Service

Peer support from colleagues

Support offered by Mental Health First Aiders

Support offered by trade unions

Employee Assistance programme

The role of the line manager in supporting employee mental well-being in the workplace

Where an employee raises mental ill health or stress related issues, managers should always take the matter seriously.

In circumstances where a manager requires advice and support with an employee's stress or mental well-being issue, the employee must be referred to the Occupational Health, Safety & Wellbeing Service for a health assessment by completing the RD1 form. The HR Health and Wellbeing Team will advise managers on completing the referral form.

Reasonable adjustments must be considered for any employee with a stress related or clinical diagnosis. Agreement should be reached with the employee as to how any issues will be monitored and if necessary, how this will be communicated to other employees.

An assumption should not always be made that an employee's behaviour or conduct is attributable to their current or former mental health condition (if they have one which is known to their manager). Should an employee be considered fit for work and, on the basis that any reasonable adjustments have been made, then normal workplace rules regarding attendance and conduct will apply.

Stigma surrounding stress and mental health issues may impact on an employee returning to work after a period of absence. A loss of confidence in their ability to cope at work or have residual low energy levels is a common reaction. It is important that all employees are supported by their manager – such support may include a phased return to work along with support from the Occupational Health, Safety & Wellbeing Service.

Line managers have a duty of care to their employees to make every effort to recognise signs of stress and any mental health problems. Managers must not ignore warning signs as the situation may worsen. Managers requiring support in these circumstances should contact HR and Occupational Health, Safety & Wellbeing Service.

What action should the line manager/supervisor take?

Where a manager is concerned about an employee's wellbeing, a supportive discussion should take place with the employee to outline the manager's concerns and ascertain the nature of any problems being experienced by the employee.

When signs of stress/mental health issues have been identified, the line manager must undertake a personal risk assessment with the employee, in line with the Management of Attendance Procedures it may be appropriate to have a discussion with Human Resources and Occupational Health, Safety & Wellbeing Service.

Help for managing employee mental health issues

Wellbeing Workplace Audit

The Wellbeing Workplace Audit programme forms part of mandatory Health and Safety audit programme and is based on sickness absence statistics in key areas of ill health, including reported stress.

The audit report and action plan will be provided to all areas that undergo an audit, and advice provided to help implement this. A review will be carried out within 2 years as part of health and safety monitoring

Undertaking risk assessments in teams

The general principles for carrying out risk assessments for mental illness or stress are the same.

When undertaking risk assessments, it is important to adhere to the principles of risk assessment laid down by the Health and Safety Executive. These are:

- Identify hazards
- Decide who might be harmed and how
- Evaluate the risk by identifying what action you are already taking. Decide whether it is enough. If not decide what more needs to be done
- Involve the individual
- Record the findings of the assessment
- Review the assessment at appropriate intervals

Defining the issues for the purpose of a risk assessment

Some possible causes of stress in the workplace, which managers might need to consider when undertaking a risk assessment, are:

- Physical working environment
- Training needs
- Work level demands
- Job stability
- Working relationships
- Remote management
- Management style
- Levels of communication
- Equipment breakdown
- Violence in the workplace

Carrying out a risk assessment

- Find somewhere private, quiet and relaxed, with no interruptions, to conduct the assessment with the employee
- Explain the purpose of carrying out a risk assessment and give the employee the opportunity to ask questions

Supporting information	- Do not conduct the assessment like a formal interview or sit behind a desk - Remember that the employee may already be suffering from stress and feeling very anxious, so keep the discussion as informal as possible. - Do not rush the assessment, give the employee adequate time to express themselves and let them know you are listening to them - Do not complete the form during the discussion. Take appropriate notes and complete afterwards

You must record your findings and share these with employees. You must use this record to monitor progress and to help you keep sight of particular hazards.

Review assessment and revise where necessary, whenever significant changes occur in the City Council or in the way your unit/section handles business. Do this in consultation with employees. Review regularly.

Checklist for the risk assessment process:

The manager should work with the employee to identify the cause of any problems and to determine why they feel unable to cope, they should:

- Discuss the warning signs being exhibited
- Be aware that sometimes the employee may have no insight into their behaviour and may discount or minimise issues
- Work together to identify the problem
- Avoid making assumptions about what the problem is
- Listen to what the person is saying
- Try to see the situation from the other's perspective
- Ask them what help they feel they need and offer support
- Be aware that some employees may find change threatening
- Recognise the limitations in these circumstances of the role of the manager and seek help when appropriate from the Human Resources Health and Well Being Team and/or the Occupational Health, Safety & Wellbeing Service and health and social care professionals if appropriate
- Rate the risks in the usual way
- Record your findings
- Review your assessment and revise if necessary

Possible actions and solutions following risk assessment

After a joint discussion between the manager and employee a range of options to help manage the situation should emerge. These may include:

- More effective communication
- Training or retraining
- Prioritising or reviewing of workloads
- Further clarity of role and responsibilities

Supporting information	• Relationship mediation - managers and/or colleagues • Professional support from Human Resources and/or the Occupational Health, Safety & Wellbeing Service. • Suggest a buddy system • Flexible breaks • Use of Access to Work

This list is not exhaustive, but a thorough assessment of the situation will determine the action to be taken. If remedial action is beyond the authority of an individual manager, the matter should be referred 'upwards'.

Action plan and solutions following risk assessment

- Agree measures to be taken and be sure these are understood
- Provide a copy of the risk assessment to the employee in question
- Inform any employee who will be affected by the action agreed, before the action is agreed. If they are unhappy with the effect on them this could cause further problems.
- Monitor progress continuously with regular reviews
- Only 'sign off' when the employee has achieved positive performance levels
- Agree boundaries for confidentiality with the employee

If there is any doubt that the proposed actions are reasonably practicable then a discussion should take place with a senior manager.

Managers may find the situation difficult to manage if an employee is performing badly or has conduct issues. However, the employer's duty of care means managers must try to identify reasons for the problems. Where this is mental health related, all reasonable steps must be taken to make appropriate adjustments. Where stress related, all reasonable steps must be taken to reduce or eliminate hazards in the work place.

Personal stress

The manager may discover an employee's stress levels are work related or that their individual tolerance levels make it difficult for them to handle the inherent stress in their particular job. If after making all reasonable efforts and providing realistic time-scales to support the employee, they are still not performing or behaving in a satisfactory manner, then it may be necessary to initiate the appropriate procedure.

Sickness absence as a result of mental health and/or stress related issues.

When an employee states they are absent from work as a result of mental health or stress related issues, it is important that the line manager maintains contact with them. Depending on the circumstances, if it is inappropriate for the line manager to contact the employee concerned, HR needs to be informed so that arrangements can be made for an appropriate manager to contact the employee.

Supporting information	The manager must manage the situation in a timely, sensitive and supportive manner, so they are not perceived as either neglecting or harassing the individual.

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If the absence is managed well, the individual is more likely to return at an earlier stage, because they will feel supported. Relevant advice can be obtained from HR.

Managers should refer to the Managing Stress Checklist when taking absence phone calls from employees who call in sick and cite stress as the reason for absence.

Managers must follow the Promoting Health at Work process with regard to sickness absence.

Returning to work following a stress or mental health related illness

If an employee has been absent from work with a stress or mental health related illness, they are likely to need support to return to work and whilst they are being rehabilitated back into the workplace.

Before the employee returns to work line managers should contact them to discuss their needs and, if necessary, agree a phased return. HR and the Occupational Health, Safety and Wellbeing team should be involved in this process.

Employees are often concerned about their first day back at work and this can hold back the process of a return to work. Plans can be put in place to work with the employee to resolve any such fears, for example, being concerned that colleagues may ask questions about their absence or being tearful in the workplace. Strategies can be agreed between the employee and the manager for briefing work colleagues on how to address any issues of concern. If the employee feels overwhelmed on their initial return, planned measures of support should be in place. The Occupational Health, Safety and Wellbeing Service can provide support for both the manager and employee as required.

Managers must consider the impact a phased return will have on colleagues of the employee; consideration must also be given to the health and safety of others in the workplace and action taken by the manager, to redress any issues.

A personal risk assessment must be carried out

When the employee returns to work the line manager must review their progress to ensure any further serious risks are avoided so far as is reasonably practicable. Some of the areas managers might consider are:

- Regular informal meetings with the employee to maintain communication
- One-to-one well-being sessions
- Reducing working hours on a temporary basis, for example; late start, early finish, i.e. through a measured phased return (see Phased Return Guidelines for Managers and Human Resources)

	- Temporary reduction in contact with the public - Temporary reduction in workload - Mediation for dealing with issues regarding supervisors or problems with colleagues - Training - Job redesign – if possible - Change of location if possible If the employee's performance does not reach the required level, despite all reasonable action being taken, the manager should discuss this with Human Resources. **CONTACTS:** Occupational Health Safety and Wellbeing Service: ohws@coventry.gov.uk Tel: 02476 833285 Review date: July 2022