Guideline for managers: Wellness Support Plans (WSPs)

How to support the health of your team members

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Creating a safer
Cambridgeshire

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Introduction

The way employers view workplace wellbeing is changing. The focus is shifting from reactive management of sickness absence to a more proactive approach of prevention through promoting wellbeing and improving employee engagement. This Wellness Support Plan (WSP), has been created to help all employees manage their health and wellbeing at work.

This guide is designed to be a helpful starting point in your journey as a line manager towards supporting your team members with their health at work.

You might be:

- Managing someone who is experiencing a health challenge and want to know more about how you can support them
- Interested in using the WSP with staff who are currently well, as a proactive tool to promote and maintain their health at work
- An HR professional looking to promote this guide to managers, to help them support the wellbeing of their teams

Helpful definitions

Mental health
We all have mental health, just as we all have physical health, and how we feel can vary from good mental wellbeing to difficult feelings and emotions, to severe mental health issues.

Mental health challenges
We all have times when we struggle with our mental health, but when these difficult experiences or feelings go on for a long time and affect our ability to enjoy and live our lives in the way we want to, this is a mental health challenge. You might receive a specific diagnosis from your doctor, or just feel that you are experiencing poor mental health.

Work-related stress
Work-related stress is defined by the Health and Safety Executive as the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressure or other types of demand placed on them at work. Stress, including work-related stress, can be a significant cause of illness and is known to be linked with high levels of sickness absence, staff turnover and other issues such as increased capacity for error. Stress is not a medical diagnosis, but severe stress that continues for a long time may lead to a diagnosis of depression or anxiety, or more severe mental health challenges.

Mental wellbeing
Mental wellbeing is the ability to cope with the day-to-day stresses of life, work productively, interact positively with others and realise our own potential.

Poor mental health
Poor mental health is a state of low mental wellbeing where you are unable to realise your own potential, cope with the day-to-day pressures of life, work productively or contribute to a community.

Common mental health challenges
These include depression, anxiety disorders, phobias and obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD). These make up the majority of the challenges which lead to one in four people experiencing a mental health challenge in any given year. Symptoms can range from the comparatively mild to very severe.

Less common mental health challenges
Less common conditions like schizophrenia or bipolar disorder can have a big impact on people's lives. It may be harder to find appropriate treatment and, as understanding tends to be less, people may face more stigma. However, many people are able to live with and recover from these diagnoses and manage the impact on their life well.

What is a WSP?

Given the high levels of stress and poor mental health we are seeing in the workplace, there is a growing demand for innovative and proactive ways of managing our mental health at work. The WSP is inspired by Mary Ellen Copeland's Wellness Recovery Action Plan® (WRAP®): an evidence-based system used worldwide to manage mental health.

The WSPs are a personalised, practical tool we can all use, whether we have health challenges or not, to help us identify what keeps us well at work, what causes us to become unwell and the support we would like to receive from our manager to boost our wellbeing or support us through recovery.

As a manager, encouraging your team to draw up a WSP gives them ownership of the practical steps needed to help them stay well at work or manage a health challenge. It also opens up a dialogue between you and your team member, to help you better understand their needs and experiences and therefore better support their wellbeing. This in turn can lead to greater productivity, better performance and increased job satisfaction.

How will the WSP benefit my team members?

If your team member does experience a health challenge, you will then both have an idea of the tailored support that could help, or at the least a tool to use in starting that conversation. By regularly reviewing the agreed, practical steps in the WSP, you can support your team member to adapt it to reflect their experiences or new approaches they find helpful. By allowing the individual to take ownership of the process and of the WSP itself, you will be empowering them to feel more in control.

- ✓ approaches the individual can adopt to support their wellbeing
- ✓ early warning signs of poor health to look out for
- ✓ any workplace triggers for poor health or stress
- ✓ potential impact of poor health on performance, if any
- ✓ what support they need from you as their manager
- ✓ actions and positive steps you will both take if they are experiencing stress or poor health
- ✓ an agreed time to review the WSP and any support measures which are in place
- ✓ anything else they feel would be useful in supporting their mental health

The WSP is not legally binding, but is intended as an agreement between you and your team member in order to promote their wellbeing or address any existing health needs, including any adjustments they may wish to discuss.

Supporting your team

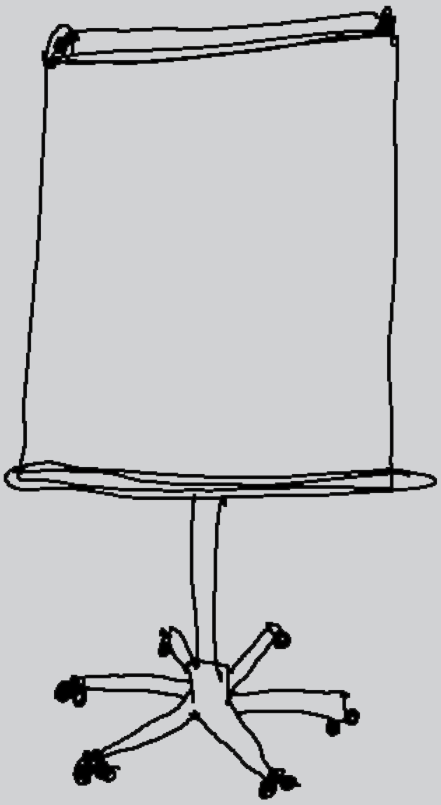
As a manager, you will be a key support in encouraging your team members to develop their WSP. You could start by:

- Asking your team member to have a go at completing the WSP
- Scheduling some time to discuss their WSP with you and finalise it based on these discussions

Ask the person you are supporting to think about:

- What they are like when they are feeling well and flourishing at work
- What a work environment that promotes good wellbeing looks like for them
- What helps maintain their wellbeing
- What coping strategies they already use for dealing with poor health and why they've been effective
- How they've addressed similar challenges in the past
- What hasn't worked for them in the past and why they think this might be

The WSP should be written and owned by the individual, expressing their own personal choices, their personal experience and their needs. Your role as manager is to discuss their plan with them and provide support, including guidance on what is possible for any reasonable adjustments. Try to avoid influencing them by offering your own advice or suggestions.



Once the WSP has been drawn up, factor in some time during your catch-ups or one-to-ones to review the WSP and make any necessary changes. The WSP is most effective when treated as a live, flexible document, so a regular 'feedback loop' with your team member to assess what is and isn't working is an important part of the process.

Confidentiality

The WSP should be held confidentially between manager and employee, with the employee being made fully aware of how the information will be used, and therefore only providing information that they are happy to share.

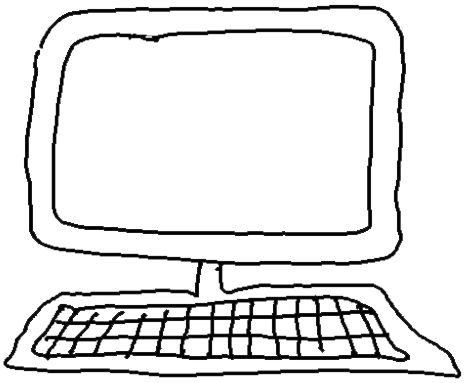
In order to fulfil your duty of care to keep your staff members safe at work, you will be obliged to break confidentiality if they are experiencing a crisis. If you become aware that someone is at serious risk of harm, whether this is the employee or someone else, you should call the emergency services.

Supporting staff wellbeing

The WSP is not only a tool to support staff when they are experiencing problems - it also helps identify how an individual's wellbeing can be proactively improved. Take a look at our tips below on how you can support staff wellbeing.

Your managerial style

- How people are treated and managed on a day-to-day basis is central to their wellbeing and to how motivated and engaged they feel, so it is important to reflect on your managerial style and tailor it to suit the needs of each team member and task. A good approach is to proactively ask your staff what support they need from you.
- Develop an atmosphere of trust by regularly asking for feedback about the support you provide.
- Weave wellbeing into your catch-ups with staff, ensuring that you regularly ask how they are and how well they feel their work is going.
- Encourage positive relationships with colleagues and provide mediation where necessary.
- Be supportive, approachable and responsive, ensuring that you are available for regular work-related conversations and increasing the frequency of supervision or catch-up time with the team member if required.
- Proactively support staff to monitor their workload and encourage healthy working hours and a positive work/life balance.
- Provide your team with meaningful work and opportunities for personal development and growth.
- Make sure that deadlines are reasonable, that work is clearly defined and well matched to each employee's abilities and that people understand their role in the bigger picture.



Supporting your own wellbeing

Don't forget that your wellbeing as a manager is just as important as that of your team. Developing a WSP of your own with your manager can be a helpful way of keeping track of what keeps you well and ensuring you're looking after your own needs too.

Supporting someone at work

If someone in your organisation or team discloses a health challenge to you, you may wish to read up on it a little so that you have a basic understanding of what they might be experiencing.

Focus on what you as a manager can do to support the individual, rather than offering advice. We've listed some tips below:

- Encourage staff to be open about problems
- Ensure confidentiality and provide an appropriate place for confidential conversations
- When talking about health, listen, be respectful and do not make assumptions
- Be positive – focus on what employees can do, rather than what they can't, providing training, mentoring or coaching if there are skill-gaps
- Work together and involve people in finding solutions as much as possible
- Support staff to develop personal resilience and coping strategies
- Involve staff in dialogue and decision-making and remember that people are often the expert when it comes to identifying the support or adjustment they need and how to manage their triggers for poor health
- Recognise and praise good work and commitment, providing regular opportunities to discuss, review and reflect on positive achievements – this helps to build positive self-esteem and develop skills to better manage triggers for poor health
- Encourage staff to seek further advice and support (for example from buddying or mentoring schemes), and seek advice and support yourself. If your organisation has a mentoring scheme, make the most of it, if it doesn't, consider setting one up

Case study - Pete

"I don't have a mental health challenge but I think wellbeing and mental health shouldn't be something we only talk about when we get ill so, when my manager in my new job told me about the WSP and suggested I fill one in, I thought it would be a good opportunity to think about what makes me stressed at work and what helps me to perform well and be productive.

"As part of my WSP, I identified that a few things cause me stress – for example, not being kept informed of developments in the organisation that could affect me, a chaotic office environment, and people not being supportive or approachable. Having set these out, I then considered ways they could be alleviated, such as scheduling regular catch ups with my manager to get updates on organisational developments, making sure I factored in time to get away from my desk and out of the office and ensuring that my manager and I had time to reflect on what was working and what wasn't working.

"My team seemed to be quite open about wellbeing so I chose to share my WSP not only with my manager but with the team too, so that colleagues were aware of any triggers or preferences I have in terms of how I work and the type of environment that keeps me well. Being given the opportunity to fill out a WSP when I was a new starter made me realise how valued my health and wellbeing were by my manager and organisation as a whole and gave me confidence, especially in dealing with potentially difficult situations."

Reasonable adjustments and the Equality Act 2010

As a result of completing a WSP, you might decide along with your team member that some reasonable adjustments are needed. A reasonable adjustment is an alteration that an employer makes which enables an employee to continue with their duties without being at a disadvantage compared to others.

Under the Equality Act 2010, there is a legal duty on employers to make these reasonable adjustments for employees with a disability. Whether a health problem is defined as a disability or not, employers are encouraged to make adjustments for staff who are experiencing health problems.

Adjustments could include:

Support from a manager:

- providing written instructions for someone whose anxiety affects their memory
- providing workload support and help with prioritising work
- agreeing the type of work they can handle whilst they are on a phased return to work
- increasing frequency of catch-ups or one-to-ones

Changes to the physical environment:

- arranging for someone who found the distractions of an open-plan office detracted from their work performance to have a desk in a quieter area
- moving a person's workstation so that they are not placed in very busy areas or with their back to the door
- provide a quiet space for breaks away from the main workspace
- allow for increased personal space

Flexibility with working patterns:

- flexible working hours, for example, allowing a person who has difficulty travelling in crowded trains to start early and finish early in order to avoid the rush hour
- allowing someone who is starting or reducing medication to have a day off if they are experiencing side effects, such as drowsiness
- enabling a person to arrange their hours to permit them to attend a weekly therapy session
- allowing someone to take time out of the office when they become particularly anxious
- enabling part-time working or job-share arrangements for someone unable to work full-time
- enabling someone to arrange their annual leave to have regularly spaced breaks throughout the year
- allowing someone who finds the pressure of large meetings very difficult to arrange to have at least 15 minutes between meetings
- a gradual return to work after periods of sickness absence
- the possibility of working from home, reduction in hours or relief from some responsibilities to prevent the person having to take time off sick during fluctuations in their condition

Wellness Support Plan template

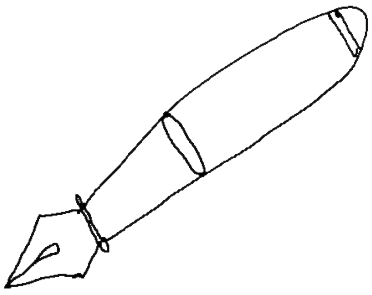
A WSP reminds us what we need to do to stay well at work and details what our line managers can do to better support us. It also helps us develop an awareness of our working style, stress triggers and responses, and enables us to communicate these to our manager.

The information in this form will be held confidentially and regularly reviewed by you and your manager together. You only need to provide information that you are comfortable sharing and that relates to your role and workplace. This form is not a legal document but it can help you and your manager to agree, together, how to practically support you in your role and address any health needs.

It is the responsibility of the employer to ensure that data gathered in this form will be kept confidential and will not be shared with anyone without the permission of the member of staff. Certain circumstances may require confidentiality to be broken - refer to page 5 for more information on this.

1. What helps you stay healthy at work?

(For example, taking an adequate lunch break away from your desk, getting some exercise before or after work or in your lunchbreak, light and space in the office, opportunities to get to know colleagues)



2. What can your manager do to proactively support you to stay healthy at work?

(For example, regular feedback and catch-ups, flexible working pattern, explaining wider organisational developments)

3. Are there any situations at work that can trigger poor health for you?

(For example, conflict at work, organisational change, tight deadlines, something not going to plan)

4. How might experiencing poor health impact on your work?

(For example, you may find it difficult to make decisions, struggle to prioritise work tasks, difficulty with concentration, drowsiness, confusion, headaches)

5. Are there any early warning signs that we might notice when you are starting poor health?

(For example, changes in normal working patterns, withdrawing from colleagues)

6. What support could be put in place to minimise triggers or help you to manage the impact?

(For example, extra catch-up time with your manager, guidance on prioritising workload, flexible working patterns, consider reasonable adjustments)

7. Are there elements of your individual working style or temperament that it is worth your manager being aware of?

(For example, a preference for more face-to-face or more email contact, a need for quiet reflection time prior to meetings or creative tasks, negotiation on deadlines before they are set, having access to a mentor for questions you might not want to bother your manager about, having a written plan of work in place which can be reviewed and amended regularly, clear deadlines if you have a tendency to over-work a task, tendency to have particularly high or low energy in the morning or in the afternoon)

8. If we notice early warning signs that you are experiencing poor health - what should we do?

(For example, talk to you discreetly about it, contact someone that you have asked to be contacted)

9. What steps can you take if you start to experience poor health at work? Is there anything we need to do to facilitate them?

(For example, you might like to take a break from your desk and go for a short walk, or ask your line manager for support)

10. Is there anything else that you would like to share?

Employee signature: _____

Date: _____

Line manager signature: _____

Date: _____

Date to be reviewed: _____

Useful contacts:

- BCH Occupational Health, Safety & Wellbeing Unit - http://bedscambshertsintranet.sharedservices.police.cjx.gov.uk/org_support/human_resources/occ_health,_safety__wellbeing.aspx
- Employee Assistance Programme - http://bch.helpeap.com/
- National Mind - http://mind.org.uk/
- National Mind Blue Light Programme - http://mind.org.uk/news-campaigns/campaigns/bluelight/
- Blue Light Info Line - 0300 303 5999
- Peterborough & Fenland Mind - 01733 362990 or http://www.pfmind.org.uk/
- Mind in Cambridgeshire - 01480 470480 (St Neots), 01223 311320 (Cambridge) or http://www.mindincambs.org.uk/
  NB: Both local Mind branches offer a wellbeing service which includes free face-to-face support, no formal diagnosis is required.
- Insight Healthcare - 0300 555 0888 or www.insighthealthcare.org
- Psychological Wellbeing Service (via the NHS) - 0300 300 0055 or www.cpft.nhs.uk

Telephone support:
- Lifeline (Cambridgeshire Mental Health Helpline) - 0808 808 2121
- Samaritans 24-hour helpline - 116 123
- SANEline - 0300 304 7000

Online support:
- Living Life to the Full - www.livinglifetothefull.com
- Mood Gym - www.moodgym.anu.edu.au

Counselling services:
- Cruse Bereavement - 0844 477 9400 or www.crusebereavementcare.org.uk
- British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy - www.bacp.co.uk
- UK Council for Psychotherapy - www.psychotherapy.org.uk
- British Association for Behavioural and Cognitive Therapists - www.babcp.com

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