

Supporting the mental health of our staff: Employee Guide to dealing with stress and mental health issues in the workplace

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1.0 Introduction

We recognise that our employees are our most valuable asset and are committed to providing an environment that supports their mental health and wellbeing. We aim to achieve this by promoting a culture where everyone feels able to have a conversation about their mental health and wellbeing in confidence without being judged, in the knowledge that appropriate support will be provided.

The World Health Organisation defines good mental health as: “A state of wellbeing in which the individual realises their own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully and is able to make a contribution to his or her own community.”

Mental health and wellbeing, like physical health and wellbeing, can fluctuate on a spectrum from good to poor. Everyone is on that spectrum irrespective of age, personality or background and from time to time life events may impact to an extent where mental health and wellbeing is affected. This can occur because of experiences in our personal and working lives or they can just happen. Although the incidence of mental health problems is very common, there may still a stigma associated with them and this makes it difficult for some of us to talk about it. Whilst you may find it easy to talk to colleagues or your manager about a physical injury, you may be less likely to talk about changes to your mental health, and prefer instead to remain silent for fear of being treated differently or judged.

It is important though to let your manager or Human Resources know if you feel that your mental health and wellbeing is affecting your ability to perform effectively at work, more so if there are factors at work that may be contributing to or exacerbating the situation.

2.0 Scope

This guide applies to all University employees who are experiencing difficulties that are impacting on their mental health and wellbeing whether that be a short-term or long-term condition, or who are required to support and respond when a colleague discloses such difficulties. This includes issues relating to stress whether that is work-related or not.

3.0 Good mental health and resilience

We all have a responsibility to look after ourselves and adopt good working practices to support our mental health and wellbeing. This includes recognising the importance of taking leave, regular breaks during the day and switching off after work. New ways of working at home or a mixture of at home and on campus provide different needs and opportunities for self-organisation and self-care. We can

learn to recognise and respond to signs that we are under stress and strain and that some adjustment is needed. Planning activities that help you stay in balance and knowing what support services are available should they be needed is important whatever our role and work context. This may include seeking specialist advice from Occupational Health or involve arranging for a stress risk assessment to be completed. Further details about workshops on psychosocial resources for personal wellbeing and professional competence, mindfulness and other resources/support available can be found on [the staff-counselling website](#).

Recognising signs that your mental health is impacting on your behaviour and or performance at work

If you have a long-term mental health condition, you may recognise quite quickly when your behaviour or performance is changing and be able to implement steps to address matters. Where you have not experienced mental health issues previously, the impact may not be immediately apparent but may become more noticeable over time. Some of the signs and symptoms of mental ill health are detailed in Appendix 2.

If you notice your behaviour changing - for instance you may be more withdrawn, less engaged or irritable because of the personal issue you are dealing with - you may find it helpful to share some details with your manager and or colleagues. The extent to which you wish to share information is very much a matter for you to decide, but where you do decide to share information, it may help them to understand how they may be able to support you.

4.0 What if I am experiencing difficulties at work due to mental ill health?

You may be reluctant to talk about mental health and stress due to the historical stigma attached to it, but it is really important to speak out and let your manager or another trusted senior member of staff know how you are feeling. You may already be receiving informal personal support from family and friends, and in some cases professional support from either a GP or other medical professional. However, you also have a responsibility to alert your line manager if you have a condition affecting your mental health, which may be impacted by your work. You are expected to take reasonable steps to manage your own health and wellbeing and to deal with stressors arising outside of the workplace. The University has a duty to prevent injury to health from work-related stress and is required to take steps to mitigate those risks. Managers are expected to work with you to identify and implement reasonable adjustments and ensure that employees with mental health problems are treated fairly and protected from harassment as per the Equality Act 2010.

5.0 Seeking help to manage the impact of mental ill health in the workplace

How you are feeling may mean you are temporarily less able to perform your role in the way you can when you are well. It would be helpful to let your manager know that the issues you are dealing with are impacting on work. Your personal life is private and we will not expect you to disclose details concerning personal matters unless you feel you want or need to. Where the personal issues are affecting your health and impacting on your behaviour and or performance at work, it would be helpful to share sufficient information to at least enable your manager to help you.

It is likely to be best to arrange a time to have an online or in-person meeting. If you let your manager know that you wish to discuss a personal issue affecting your work they will be in a better position to give you their full attention.

If you are finding it harder to cope at work, particularly if you believe that some aspects of work or the working environment may be impacting on your mental wellbeing or exacerbating an existing mental health condition, you should raise this with your manager as soon as possible. This will allow them to discuss with you any support which may improve the situation, this may include professional support or some simple adjustments to your working arrangements.

If you do not feel comfortable discussing the issue with your manager because it is particularly sensitive you can talk to a member of the Human Resources team. If you are a member of a union you may prefer to discuss with your local representative. Support is also available from the Staff Counselling and Psychological Support service. Where you are not comfortable sharing details of the issue it is advisable to at least let your manager know you are having some difficulties.

Whilst your manager cannot necessarily resolve personal or health issues that you are experiencing, if they know you are having difficulties they can help you access support and may be able to make adjustments to your role or working arrangements to help you manage the situation. They may seek advice from HR in the first instance but it may also be necessary to seek support from Occupational Health and / or Health and Safety colleagues.

6.0 Confidentiality

Where you choose to disclose information to your manager or colleague they will endeavour to maintain confidentially as far as possible. They will not be able to provide a blanket guarantee that the information will not be shared at all, as it may be necessary to do so in the interests of supporting you. For example where advice from Occupational Health and or HR is required. There may also be circumstances where escalation to a senior manager is required for example where significant role changes may be required, where there is a concern that you may harm yourself or others or where you have disclosed a crime. You will be made aware if there is a need to share the information.

7.0 How might mental ill health impact on you when you are working?

Mental health ill health affects people in different ways and will impact differently depending on individual circumstances. It may for instance mean that you:

- Need to take time off to attend medical appointments or to seek support.
- Behave differently around your colleagues at work.
- May not perform as well as you would normally, you may make mistakes or not be as productive as usual.
- May feel more stressed by your work or work relationships and this may impact on your mental health and wellbeing.
- Be absent from work for a period of time as a result of mental ill health.

If you are absent as a result of mental ill health or require time off to attend medical appointments you should refer to [the HR website](#) for relevant HR policies.

8.0 Work-Related Stress

The University has a duty to prevent injury to health from work-related stress. Where you believe that work-related issues are impacting negatively on your mental health and wellbeing you should raise this with your manager as soon as possible so that they can explore the cause and assess what action to take. Work-related stress can trigger an episode of mental ill health in an employee who has previously successfully managed an underlying condition without that condition affecting their work.

Potential workplace triggers that may cause harmful levels of stress that need to be discussed with your manager include but are not limited to:

- Excessive demands in terms of workload, working hours/pattern which may be further impacted when staff leave or reduce contractual hours and tasks are simply delegated.
- Unrealistic objectives or deadlines.
- Insufficient support and or resources available.
- Unacceptable/inappropriate behaviours.
- Conflicting roles/responsibilities.
- Concerns in relation to organisational changes.
- Lack of control over work.
- Work patterns/ structures or rapid changes that conflict with health or neurodiverse agreed or needed practices. This includes new challenges related to working from home or a mixed at home and on campus pattern. You may also be affected by digital fatigue associated with working online, the negative impact on attention and mental control from multiple forms of online communication.

It may be appropriate depending on the circumstances for your manager to arrange for a stress risk assessment. Please refer to the [Managing Work Related Stress Policy](#).

9.0 Help and support to manage a long-term mental health condition

Where your mental ill health condition has or may have a long-term adverse effect on your ability to carry out normal day to day activities, the provisions of the Equality Act 2010 are likely to be met. This means that your manager will need to consider whether any reasonable adjustments are required to help you manage your condition in the work place. The type of adjustments will vary depending on the health issue, your role and individual circumstances.

10.0 Reasonable Adjustments

Reasonable adjustments are often simple and practical steps that are quick and easy to implement. They may be required on a short or long-term basis and may include for example:

- Flexibility around working hours, different start/finish time.
- Adjustments to the work environment.
- Allowing you to work from home for a specific period.
- Provide specialist equipment e.g. Light box.
- Agree phased return following a long-term absence.
- Relax notice required to attend medical appointments.

In some circumstances it may be necessary to consider changes to your role for example where certain aspects have been identified as triggering or potentially exacerbating your condition. For example your manager may consider whether it is necessary to:

- Reallocate certain tasks.
- Make some changes to the job description.
- Review previously agreed objectives.
- There may be occasions where specific support is necessary for a specific period of time. For example following a return from absence you may find it beneficial to have:
 - More regular supervision/additional management support.
 - Additional training, coaching.
 - More direction in relation to prioritising and managing workload.
 - More feedback than has previously been provided.
 - Support from a buddy or mentor.
 - Mediation.
 - Professional support e.g. support from Staff Counselling service.

The combination of support required will vary depending on individual circumstances. Your manager is not a medical expert and may need to seek professional advice from Occupational Health, particularly where the mental health issues are complex. Human Resources may also be involved in providing advice and guidance in respect of reasonable adjustments particularly where it may impact on your job description.

11.0 What should I do if a colleague confides in me?

The first thing to remember is you may not be able to give a guarantee that you can keep the matter entirely confidential, as you may need to seek advice and guidance from Human Resources, Occupational Health or escalate to a senior manager to ensure that the individual receives appropriate support. It is important that you do not make promises you cannot keep and that you clarify the boundaries of confidentiality as soon as possible.

You should aim to protect confidentiality as far as possible in terms of minimising any disclosure to the absolute minimum and agreeing what information, if any, can be shared with team members.

Once you have responded to the immediate disclosure and taken steps to refer on and ensure that the individual is properly supported, you need to also consider the impact that dealing with what may have been a very emotional situation has had on you. Some situations may evoke strong feelings and prove quite upsetting. If this is the case you should in the first instance talk to your manager and let them know if you require any support. You may also wish to contact the Staff Counselling and Psychological Support service as they are available to help staff deal with any psychological and interpersonal challenges associated with their role.

12.0 Other considerations

12.1 What if the difficulties are related to your manager?

We understand that in some cases the relationship you have with your manager may be part of the issue. Where this is the case you can contact your local HR team to discuss your concerns and explore how best to resolve the situation.

12.2 Other health-threatening behaviours including Alcohol / Substance Abuse

Where the mental health condition has led to increased use of alcohol and / or other substances you may be signposted to other professional services.

12.3 Seeking support outside of normal working hours

If you have any concerns about your mental health outside of normal working hours then it may be helpful for you to talk to someone, a partner/relative or friend. You could also contact one of the external support agencies that are available in your area (see section 12.4).

At the next opportunity during working hours, do contact your line manager, a trusted colleague or Human Resources. They can signpost you to the available support services at the University.

There are occasions where contact with the workplace maybe necessary out-of-hours due to you working away from the campus or outside of the UK. In these circumstances it is important that arrangements are put in place with your line manager as part of the planning process for such activities.

12.4 Seeking support and staying safe in a crisis situation

If you are having unsafe thoughts and there is a risk that you will harm yourself you should seek urgent assistance. If this happens when you are at work you should alert your manager. If outside of work or working hours you should seek support from an appropriate external agency for example:

- The Samaritans on Freephone 116 123 service available 24 hours a day.
- Your GP for an emergency appointment or the out of hours team.
- NHS on 111 (England) or NHS Direct 0845 46 47 (Wales).
- Your local crisis team.
- A partner / relative or trusted friend who can provide support.

13.0 University Related Policies and Procedures

- [Health and Safety Policy](#)
- [Managing Work Related Stress Policy](#)
- [Policy on alcohol and substance abuse](#)
- [Policy on support staff sickness absence](#)
- [Policy on sickness absence Academic and Academic related staff](#)
- [Policy on Dignity and Mutual Respect](#)

14.0 Sources of University Advice information and Support

Name	Email	Telephone	Link
Human Resources	hr@leeds.ac.uk	0113 3434146	HR Contacts
Staff Counselling & Psychological Support Service	staffcounselling@leeds.ac.uk	0113 3433694	Staff counselling website.
Occupational Health	occupationalhealth@leeds.ac.uk	0113 3432997	Occupational Health website.
Health Safety Services	safety@leeds.ac.uk	0113 3434201	Health and safety website.
Equality Policy Unit	equality@leeds.ac.uk		Equality website
Organisational Development Professional Learning	peopledev@leeds.ac.uk	0113 3434012	ODPL website
Trade Unions Leeds University UCU Unison Unite	ucu@leeds.ac.uk UNISON@Leeds.ac.uk Twitter: @UoLUnison		Leeds University UCU Unison Unite
Security	security@leeds.ac.uk	0113 343 5494/5 (non-emergency or (0113) 343 2222 (emergency only)	Security website
Student Support Services	General support for students - (includes a range of support options) scc@leeds.ac.uk	0113 3434107	Student Support Services
Specialist Support for Students	Specialist support for students scc@leeds.ac.uk	0113 3434107	Specialist Support for Students
Leeds University Union	Leeds University Union Help & Support -	0113 3801400	Leeds University Union

	helpandsupport@luu.leeds.ac. uk		
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15.0 External sources of information and support

- [Mental Health Foundation](#)
- [Mind](#)
- [Rethink](#)
- [Sane](#)
- [Time to Change](#)
- [NHS Choices](#)
- [NHS Moodzone](#)
- [Remploy](#)
- [Access to work](#)
- [The International Stress Management Association](#)
- [Health and Safety Executive website](#)

Appendix 1 - Glossary of definitions used within this policy

Disability as defined in the Equality Act 2010

A physical or mental impairment that has a substantial and long term adverse effect on a person's ability to carry out normal day to day activities (Equality Act 2010).

Mental ill Health

The term "mental ill health" covers a range of conditions from a mild one for example mild depression and anxiety to more serious and enduring conditions such as bi-polar disorder, psychosis and schizophrenia.

Work Related Stress

The Health and Safety Executive defines stress as "the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressure or other types of demands placed on them at work".

Reasonable Adjustments

Reasonable adjustments are changes to the work environment that allow people with disability to work safely and productively. Under the Equal Opportunity Act 2010, 'disability' includes: physical, psychological or neurological disease or disorder illness, whether temporary or permanent.

Appendix 2- Signs and Symptoms that may indicate stress or mental ill health

If you experience any of the following signs or symptoms then this does not necessarily mean that a mental health issue exists. However you may wish to seek additional support or advice if the signs or symptoms persist or they begin to impact on you. Please note this list is not exhaustive

Physical	Psychological	Behavioural
Fatigue	Anxiety/Distress	Increased smoking/drinking
Indigestion or upset stomach	Tearfulness	Use of recreational drugs
Lack of energy	Feeling low	Poor concentration
Changing sleep patterns	Less interested	Worrying more
Headaches	Difficult controlling emotions	Resigned attitude
Appetite and weight change	Indecision	Feeling overwhelmed
Joint/back pain	Loss of motivation	Angry Irritable and short tempered
Visible tension/trembling	Loss of sense of humour	Aggressive behaviour
Nervous speech	Difficulty relaxing	Repetitive speech/activity
Chest/throat pain	Memory lapses	Withdrawal
Sweating	Irrational/illogical thought process	Restlessness
Constantly feeling cold	Difficulty taking information in	Overreaction to problems
	Increase in suicidal thoughts	Lateness/leaving early
		Working excessively long hours
		Obsessive activity
		Disruptive behaviour

		Impaired/inconsistent performance
		Uncharacteristic errors
		Increased sickness absence