Queen Mary
University of London

New Ways of Working

A Guide to Promoting Staff Wellbeing

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Understanding wellbeing needs

Wellbeing is an overall balance of your environmental, social, emotional, mental, and physical health. Wellbeing is a changing state of how a person evaluates their life in a moment in time. There is no 'one size fits all' approach.

Increasingly, it is recognised that managers have a central role to play in promoting good mental health and wellbeing in the workplace. Discussing wellbeing can be difficult to initiate with colleagues so we have drawn together some tools to support these conversations. This support is vital, especially when introducing new ways of working.

Stress can impact wellbeing in the workplace. By understanding the sources of workplace stress, colleagues and managers can we support each other to promote individual wellbeing.

According to the CIPD Health and Wellbeing Survey Report (2020), the main causes of employee stress include:

- Workloads/volume of work
- Management style
- Relationships with family, friends, and colleagues
- Personal illness or health issues
- Pressure to meet targets or deadlines

Other factors that impact individual stress levels might be:

- Change in working practice/pattern/environment (e.g., new ways of working or office relocation)
- Change in homelife situation (e.g., moving home or change in living circumstances)
- Change in the department or institution (e.g., restructure or team members leaving/starting)
- Individual factors out of their control (e.g., personality, self-confidence, and resilience)

Managers can explore ways to manage team stress by exploring the Wellbeing Essentials Toolkit and understand your role as a manager to mitigate work-place stress, for example:

- Demonstrate good practice by identifying the risk factors
- Continue to assess the situation on a regular basis
- Promote active discussion to help agree on practical improvements that can be made
- Focus on the underlying causes of stress and their prevention

Spotting the signs of stress

If colleagues start acting differently, it can be a sign they are stressed. Managers should look out for signs of stress in teams and consider whether the stress could be linked to work pressure. Acting early can reduce the impact of pressure and make it easier to reduce or remove the causes.

If managers are worried that a colleague is showing some of these signs, they should encourage them to contact our Employee Assistance Programme for free, confidential advice and counselling.

A change in the way someone acts can be a sign of stress, for example they may:
- Take more time off work
- Arrive late to work or disengage during meetings
- Show signs of being anxious or nervous

You may notice a change in the way someone thinks or feels, for example they may:
- Be more withdrawn
- Be more hyperactive
- Lose motivation, commitment, or confidence
- Be more tearful, sensitive, or aggressive

If there is something wrong at work, managers can assess the risks of work-related stress in their team and take action to protect staff by using the HSE Management Standards approach.

Supporting each other

An essential building block for supporting workplace wellbeing is the ability to have open, authentic conversations about mental health in the workplace, both individually and on a strategic level – this is more important now than ever as we move to new ways of working.

It's important to note that we all have mental health which impacts:
- How we think, feel and act
- The decisions we make
- Ourselves and our relationships
- How we experience life events

There are many factors that impacting workplace stress, for example:

- Job role change (e.g., change in role and responsibilities)
- Work life balance (e.g., balancing homecare responsibilities and workload deadlines)
- Organisational change (e.g., departmental restructure)
- Individual factors (e.g., personality, self-confidence, resilience)

Good mental health at work and good management go hand in hand. Refer to the following support mental health at work guide to:

- Manage your own mental health at work
- Reach out to a colleague in distress
- Make your workplace more mentally healthy

Having wellbeing conversations

According to the CIPD Health and Wellbeing at Work Survey Report (2020) heavy workloads remain a main contributor of increased stress levels. It is important to recognise the physical, mental and emotional aspects of stress, and that there are many strategies to help manage these stressors.

Managers can take steps to identify and reduce stress at work and support colleagues by doing the following:

- Check in regularly (weekly, bi-weekly, or monthly), virtually and/or in-person
- Ask about wellbeing during 1-on-1 meetings and make space for social 'team-time'
- Look out for and recognise the signs of stress in yourself and others
- Tackle unhealthy working habits such as working beyond contracted hours
- Help to review workloads by asking about capacity to decrease/increase workload
- Promote wellbeing opportunities and allow colleagues to prioritise their own wellbeing
- Undertake wellbeing action plans to understand how managers can help
- Review your own management style and try to manage by outcomes rather than output

See the conversational prompts below to practice having conversations around wellbeing:

What if you notice some changes?	How do you start the conversation?
Set time and space aside	How are you?
Let them lead the conversation	No, really, how are you?
Don't try to diagnose or second guess	How are you feeling?
Ask open questions	I have noticed....
Ask about their coping strategies	How are feeling right now?
Listen actively and non-judgementally	What support do you need?
Signpost them to further support	How can I/we help you?
Maintain your boundaries	Who else can help?
	What have you tried so far?

If you are responding to disclosure, there are things we can do to support further:

- Avoid diagnosing mental health illness and instead ask what support they need
- Discuss with them what (if any) information they can share
- Give reassurance and encourage people to ask for support
- Seek advice yourself (from HR advisors and Occupational Health)
- Maintain confidentiality and refer to your local Mental Health First Aider

Further guidance and signposting

Supporting your transition back to campus:
- Working on campus guidance
- Return to campus conversations
- Sensitive and supportive conversations

Promoting staff mental health and wellbeing:
- Mental Health First Aiders
- Dignity and Respect Champions
- Free advice and counselling

Optimising communication for hybrid working:
- Understand the right communication tool
- Management tools for remote working
- Staff tools for remote working

Developing yourself and others:
- Explore the benefits of having a workplace coach
- Developing leadership behaviours for yourself and others
- Preventing work-related stress in teams

Wellbeing support for managers	Wellbeing support for staff	Wellbeing support 1-on-1
• Training to have wellbeing conversations: Wellbeing for Managers	• Training for academic and professional services staff: Staff Wellbeing	• Coaching and mentoring initiatives: Request a workplace coach
• Toolkits to support managers and supervisors: Manager's Essentials	• Health and wellbeing e-learning modules: Wellbeing for Researchers	• Our values in action framework: Values in Action
• Training for researchers and their managers: Researcher Wellbeing	• Challenging inappropriate behaviour workshops: Active Bystander	• Internal conflict resolution offering: Request an independent mediator

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