



# Mental wellbeing guide

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“Support that works”

A guide to supporting a colleague at work.

Stronger together

“Be the teammate you would want”.



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## Introduction and welcome:

Hello and welcome,

**Thanks for downloading this guide.** Whether you're supporting a colleague who's feeling overwhelmed, stressed, or simply going through a tough patch, you're in the right place.

I'm Richard McQuirke, Counsellor and founder of Secure Cortex. At Secure Cortex, we deliver focused, actionable workshops that improve mental wellbeing—quickly, effectively, and sustainably. This guide is designed to reflect that mission. Inside, you'll find practical, easy-to-apply strategies to help you support those around you in a meaningful and lasting way. These simple hints and tips can be very effective when used consistently and grounded in real-world results.

Because when we support each other, we all thrive.

"Helping You Help Others – Simply and Sustainably."



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## Supporting a colleague.

### Introduction

In every successful workplace, mutual support and collaboration are essential—and when it comes to mental health, colleagues often play a vital role. While professional support is important, the impact of a caring, non-clinically trained colleague should not be underestimated. A simple act of empathy or reassurance can ease isolation, encourage openness, and build trust. Whether someone is managing a heavy workload, adapting to change, or facing personal challenges, having a colleague they can count on makes a real difference. Supporting one another not only strengthens team dynamics but also creates a healthier, more resilient workplace.

"Support starts with you."



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## Supporting a colleague.

Simply being there to listen, offering words of support, or acknowledging a colleague's struggles can make a huge difference in their wellbeing. Creating a supportive work environment where mental health is openly acknowledged and respected can help foster trust, increase morale, and improve overall mental health in the workplace.

Even without professional training, a colleague's compassionate approach can be the first step in guiding someone toward the help they need. Your presence can promote a positive and inclusive workplace culture where people feel safe to reach out, knowing they won't face judgment.

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*"You Don't Need to Be an Expert—Just Be There."*

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## Recognising the signs.

Mental health challenges don't always show up in obvious ways. Often, the signs are subtle and can easily be missed — especially in busy workplaces or remote settings. As colleagues, we're not expected to diagnose anyone, but we can learn to notice changes in behaviour, mood, or routine that may suggest someone needs support.

### Common Signs to Look Out For

#### Emotional changes

- Appearing low, flat, or tearful
- More irritable, sensitive, or reactive than usual
- Anxious, restless, or overwhelmed

"When Someone Seems Off, Reach Out."

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## Recognising the signs.

### Common Signs to Look Out For

#### Behavioural signs

- Withdrawing from social interaction (e.g. avoiding conversations, meetings, or team chats)
- A drop in performance or missed deadlines
- Arriving late, calling in sick more often, or leaving early
- Overworking or perfectionism as a way of coping

*"Changed Behaviour Could Be a Cry for Support"*

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## Recognising the signs.

### Common Signs to Look Out For

#### Physical signs

- Tiredness or low energy
- Neglected appearance or change in personal hygiene
- Headaches, frequent colds, or complaints of physical tension

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"Visible Signs Can Reveal Hidden Struggles...."

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## Recognising the signs.

### Common Signs to Look Out For

#### Communication changes

- Snappy or abrupt in emails or messages
- Unusually quiet or disengaged
- Expressing hopelessness, guilt, or negativity about themselves



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"It's Not Just What They Say – It's How They Say It..."





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## In Remote or Hybrid Settings

Spotting the signs can be harder when working remotely. Look out for:

- Switching cameras off regularly
- Going quiet in chats or missing virtual meetings
- Constantly “busy” or unavailable
- Emails sent very late at night or outside normal working hours

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“Remote Doesn’t Mean Alone – Notice the Silent Signals..”

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## Professional Support.

Encourage seeking professional support.

If your colleague seems to be struggling and hasn't yet sought professional help, it may be appropriate to gently encourage them to consider doing so. You might suggest they speak with their GP, who can offer guidance and connect them to the right support services. Alternatively, you can mention trusted organisations such as Mind, Samaritans, or Rethink Mental Illness, which provide confidential advice, crisis support, and mental health resources. The key here is to approach the conversation with sensitivity, care, and without any pressure. Everyone moves at their own pace when it comes to seeking help, and it's important not to rush or push them into action before they're ready. Instead, offer reassurance that seeking support is a strength—not a weakness—and let them know that there are safe, professional options available whenever they feel ready. By showing understanding and patience, you help create an environment where they feel empowered to take the next step on their own terms.

*"Reassure. Encourage. Support at Their Pace."*



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## **Listen without judgement.**

Supporting a colleague with mental health difficulties can be challenging, but your support can have a significant positive impact. Here are some reassuring tips for those supporting a colleague in the UK:

Listen without judgment.

Sometimes, the most helpful thing you can do is simply listen. Create a safe, confidential space where your colleague can share their feelings without fear of judgment. Avoid offering solutions unless they ask for advice—often, just being heard can be incredibly healing.

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"Being Heard Can Be the First Step to Healing."



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## Respect their privacy.

Mental health is a deeply personal and sensitive matter, and it's important to approach it with respect and care. If a colleague seems to be struggling, avoid pressuring them to open up or share more than they feel comfortable with. Everyone copes differently, and what feels helpful to one person may feel intrusive to another. Instead, let them know you're available if they ever want to talk, and make it clear that your offer comes without expectation or pressure. The goal is to create a safe, non-judgmental space where they feel supported—not scrutinised. By respecting their boundaries and allowing them to initiate the conversation in their own time, you show empathy, patience, and trust—key ingredients in any meaningful support.

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"Support Without Pressure. Presence Without Expectation."



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## What to Say and What Not to Say

When a colleague opens up about their mental health, your response can make a big difference. You don't need to be a counsellor — just a compassionate, calm, and non-judgmental presence. Start by listening. Often, people aren't looking for immediate solutions; they simply want to feel heard and understood. Resist the urge to fix or minimise their experience — instead, validate their feelings by saying things like “That sounds really tough” or “I’m really glad you told me.” Create a safe space. Be mindful of your tone and body language. Speak privately, avoid distractions, and reassure them that what they share will be treated with respect and confidentiality (unless there is a risk of harm). Be patient. Everyone's journey is different, and it may take time for someone to open up fully or feel ready to seek professional support. What matters most is that they know you're there for them — without pressure or judgment.

*"Support starts with showing up, not having all the answers."*

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## What to Say and What Not to Say.

### What to Say

These phrases show empathy, openness, and support:

- “Thanks for sharing that with me. That can’t have been easy.”  
*(Acknowledges their courage and vulnerability.)*
- “I’m really sorry you’re feeling this way. You’re not alone.”  
*(Reassures and reduces feelings of isolation.)*
- “Is there anything I can do to support you right now?”  
*(Shows willingness to help without assuming.)*

*"Compassion starts with simple conversation."*

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## What to Say and What Not to Say.

### What to Say

- “Would you like to talk, or would you prefer some space?”  
*(Gives them control over the situation.)*
- “Have you spoken to anyone else about this?”  
*(Encourages them to build a support network.)*
- “It’s okay to feel like this. You don’t have to have it all figured out.”  
*(Normalises emotional struggle.)*

"Compassion starts with simple conversation."

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## What to Say and What Not to Say.

### What not to Say

- “Just try to cheer up.”  
*(Minimises their feelings and suggests it’s a choice.)*
- “We all get stressed – it’s just part of life.”  
*(Dismisses their personal experience.)*
- “I know exactly how you feel.”  
*(Even if well-intentioned, it shifts focus to you and assumes too much.)*

"Support starts with showing up, not having all the answers."



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## What to Say and What Not to Say.

### What not to Say

- “You should...” or “Why don’t you just...”  
*(Unsolicited advice can feel overwhelming or patronising.)*
- “You’ve got nothing to be upset about.”  
*(Invalidates their emotions.)*
- “Snap out of it.”  
*(Oversimplifies complex emotional struggles.)*

"Be the calm in someone's storm."

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## Flexibility.

Encourage flexibility and compassion.

If your colleague is struggling, they may benefit from some flexibility in how they manage their workload or meet deadlines. Offering support could mean helping them identify practical adjustments—like redistributing tasks, extending timelines, or prioritising more effectively—that reduce pressure without compromising team goals. These small but meaningful changes can make a significant difference in how manageable their day feels. At the same time, it's important to encourage a culture of empathy and understanding, where mental health is treated with the same importance as physical health. Creating a supportive environment not only helps your colleague feel less alone but also strengthens trust and resilience across the whole team.

"Practical support creates lasting impact."



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## Be mindful of workplace resources.

Many workplaces offer support services such as Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs), mental health resources, or access to counselling—often at no cost to the employee. If it feels appropriate, you can gently mention these options to your colleague, making it clear that there's no pressure to act on the information right away. Sometimes, simply being aware that confidential, professional help is available can provide a real sense of relief and reassurance. It's important to frame the conversation in a way that feels supportive rather than directive—you're not telling them what to do but rather letting them know they don't have to face things alone and that there are tools and services available if and when they're ready to use them.

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"Let them know they're not alone."



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## Offer practical help if needed.

When a colleague is feeling overwhelmed, even small acts of practical support can have a meaningful impact. While you may not be able to solve everything they're dealing with, offering to help with specific tasks—like covering a meeting, assisting with a deadline, or helping to prioritise their workload—can lighten the immediate pressure they're under. Practical support can also come in less obvious forms, such as creating a calm, non-judgmental environment where they feel safe and respected. Sometimes, simply being a steady, supportive presence—someone who listens without trying to fix—can be just as valuable as hands-on help. These seemingly small gestures not only ease day-to-day stress but also remind your colleague that they're not alone. In times of difficulty, knowing that someone is willing to step in, even in small ways, can make all the difference.

"Helping in the moment, healing in the long run."



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## Check in regularly but don't pressure.

Taking a moment to check in with your colleague and ask how they're doing can go a long way in helping them feel seen, supported, and cared for—especially during challenging times. A simple, genuine question like “How are things going for you lately?” can open the door to connection and remind them they're not alone. However, it's equally important to be mindful of how often and in what way you check in. Constantly asking how someone is can, over time, feel overwhelming or intrusive, even when your intentions are good. Strike a balance by offering support in a calm, consistent way—perhaps just letting them know you're there if they ever want to talk or need anything. Respecting their need for space is just as important as being available. It's about creating a supportive presence rather than putting pressure on them to respond or open up before they're ready.

*"Check in, not check up."*



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## **Maintain a supportive and inclusive workplace culture.**

Promote an open and supportive work environment where mental health is seen as just as important as physical health. Lead by example by being respectful and encouraging others to also be mindful of their colleagues' mental wellbeing.

By offering empathy, patience, and understanding, you can provide your colleague with valuable support, even without formal mental health training. Remember that just by being there, you are making a positive difference in their mental wellbeing.

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"Mental health matters—lead with empathy."



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## Know the emergency options.

If your colleague is in immediate distress or appears at risk of harming themselves, it's important to know what steps to take. Encourage them to contact Samaritans (call **\*\*116 123\*\***) or reach out to emergency services (call **\*\*999\*\***) if necessary. Your prompt support could be vital in ensuring they receive the help they need.

The following pages offer useful contact details for support and help organisations.

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*"Stay present. Stay calm. Help is a call away."*



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## Details of help and support organisations:

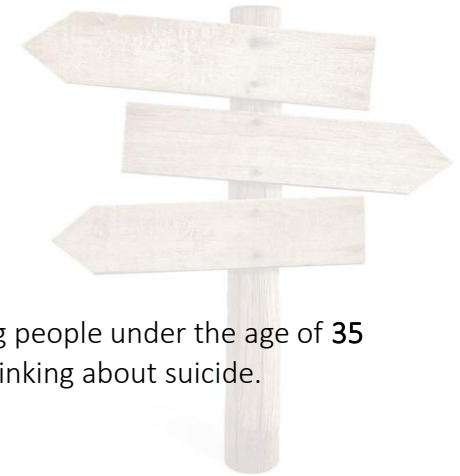
[Samaritans](#): (suicide prevention) call **116 123**

[Papyrus](#): (suicide prevention) A confidential support and advice service for children and young people under the age of 35 who are experiencing thoughts of suicide, or anyone concerned that a young person could be thinking about suicide. The helpline number is **0800 068 4141** and is open from 9AM to midnight every day. You can also text them on 077862 09697 or email [pat@papyrus-uk.org](mailto:pat@papyrus-uk.org)

[CALM](#): (suicide prevention) is an organisation which offers help, information and advice to anyone. They deal with issues such as abuse, bullying, mental health, relationships, suicide and self-harm. The CALM helpline is open every day from 5PM – 12AM (midnight) on **0800 58 58 58**. You can webchat with them via their website or via WhatsApp. [www.thecalmzone.net](http://www.thecalmzone.net)

### Shout:

Shout: (Suicide prevention) Offers a free, 24/7 [confidential messaging service](#) for anyone who is struggling to cope. Text the word 'Shout' to **85258**. Shout is a de-escalation service operated by trained, shout volunteers who work with people in distress to take them to a calmer moment and empower them to take next steps to feeling better and handle future issues. [Note: this is a text messaging service only.](#)





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## Details of help and support organisations:

### National Domestic Abuse Helpline:

24-hour freephone operated by Refuge and staffed by female advisors.

They can be contacted on **0800 2000 247** and are open 365 days of the year, 24 hours a day.

Alternatively, you can send a message via a form on the website with details of how and when someone can get in touch with you safely. They also operate a webchat which is open Monday to Friday 3PM-10PM. [www.nationaldahelpline.org.uk](http://www.nationaldahelpline.org.uk)

### Childline:

Offers information, advice and confidential counselling to anyone aged 18 or under on any issue affecting them.

Their phoneline is open all day every day by calling on **0800 1111**, or you can go to [www.childline.org.uk](http://www.childline.org.uk) to access their webchat service.

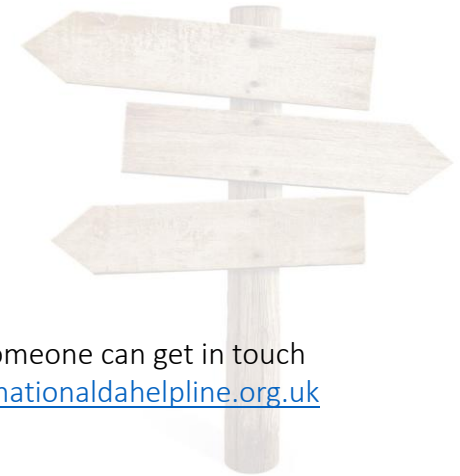
You can visit their website to access more information on them or send an email using a Childline account.

### SP-UK:

SP-UK: (Suicide prevention) National Suicide prevention helpline UK Offers a compassionate and understanding lifeline for those struggling with mental well-being or having suicidal thoughts.

Their helpline is open every day from 6PM-midnight.

To speak to a dedicated volunteer, you can call them on **0808 689 5652**. They also have a good website with useful information. [www.spuk.org.uk](http://www.spuk.org.uk)



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## Details of help and support organisations:

[Victim Support](#): (victims of crime) Offers emotional and practical support, advice and information to people affected by crime, including their friends, family and any other people involved.

Their helpline is free and confidential, and available 24/7 on **0808 16 89 111**

On their website you can also chat to them online or find the details for services in Scotland or Northern Ireland.

[Beat](#): (eating disorders) Offers support and information for people affected by eating disorders.

Their helpline is open every day from 9AM-midnight during the week, and 4PM-midnight on weekends.

You can call them on 0808 801 0677, or their Youthline on **0808 801 0711**.

They also have a webchat service available Monday to Thursday from 8PM to midnight.

[Galop](#): (LGBT+ support) is an LGBT + anti-abuse charity working with and for LGBT+ victims and survivors of interpersonal abuse and violence. They also support people supporting a survivor of domestic abuse; friends, families and those working with a survivor.

You can contact their helpline on **0800 999 5428** and it's open Monday to Friday 10AM-5PM and Wednesday and Thursday 10 AM-8PM.

