

SAFEGUARDING

Bulletin

“safeguarding
not just a policy,
it’s a culture’

Nov 2019

UPDATE FROM LAST MONTHS

This Newsletter is dedicated to Mental Health. It is important that we understand what Mental Health actually is and how we can recognise some signs and symptoms. This Newsletter will outline some key facts and useful support networks.

Each Month the Safeguarding Newsletter will have signposts to support with Mental Health for children and Adults.

TALKING POINTS

Mental Health

Mental health includes our emotional, psychological, and social well-being. It affects how **we** think, feel, and act. It also helps determine how **we** handle stress, relate to others, and make choices.

'**Mental health**' and '**mental illness**' are increasingly being used as if they mean the same thing - they do not. Everyone has **mental health**, just like everyone has **health** ... A **mental illness** is an **illness** the affects that way people think, feel, behave, or interact with others.

How do I recognise a mental health problem?

If we have significant challenges in our home or work life, the chances are that it has an impact on our mental health.

Mental health problems can have a lot of different symptoms and signs. As a rule, you should seek help from your GP if you have difficult feelings that are:

- stopping you from getting on with life
- having a big impact on the people you live or work with
- affecting your mood over several weeks
- causing you to have thoughts of suicide.

At work, we might notice that we are more tired than usual. We might make uncharacteristic mistakes, find it hard to motivate ourselves, our timekeeping might slip, or we may be short tempered. We might look or feel very tired or drained. We might find we isolate ourselves, avoid colleagues or appear distracted. We might procrastinate more – or grind to a halt altogether. Or we might speed up or become chaotic, intruding into others' conversations and work, and taking on more work than we can manage.

We may find these early warning signs hard to see in ourselves, and it can help to have colleagues who can help us connect this to our mental health. If things progress, you might see more obvious signs of a mental health problem in a colleague – outbursts of anger or emotion, absences from work, or not looking after their appearance as they normally would. You may see signs that they have been sleeping less or perhaps drinking more in the evening.

What are mental health problems?

We all have times when we feel down, stressed or frightened. Most of the time those feelings pass, but sometimes they develop into a mental health problem like anxiety or depression, which can impact on our daily lives. For some people, mental health problems become complex, and require support and treatment for life.

Factors like poverty, genetics, childhood trauma, discrimination, or ongoing physical illness make it more likely that we will develop mental health problems, but mental health problems can happen to anybody.

Research shows that most people have some experience of a mental health problem, and the latest large-scale survey in England suggested that one in six people experience the symptoms of a mental health problem in any given week.

Why don't people talk about mental health?

Awareness of mental health is increasing, but we still face a world where people with mental health problems face discrimination, and can face challenges getting the help they need. Many people who experience distress try to keep their feelings hidden because they are afraid of other people's responses.

Fear of discrimination and feelings of shame are among the top reasons people give for not telling their colleagues about their mental health problems.

When we create workplace cultures where people can be themselves, it is easier for people to speak about mental health concerns without fear, and easier for them to reach out for help when they need it. Even so, the decision to disclose distress at work is not one people take lightly. It is vital that workplaces become environments where people feel safe to be themselves.

Looking after your mental health at work

We can all take steps to improve our own mental health, and build our resilience – our ability to cope with adversity. Self-care is a skill that needs to be practised. It isn't easy, especially if we feel anxious, depressed or low in self-esteem.

Try looking through the 7 evidence-based ways to improve your mental health below.

There's bound to be one or two you do well. These can be your **assets** – your go-to methods for working on your wellbeing.

Look for one or two you find hard. These can be your **challenges**. It may be that these areas are the ones you neglect under stress – for example drinking too much, isolating yourself or comfort eating, are all examples of ways we try and cope that are the opposite of what the evidence tells us works for our mental health.

Finally, look for one or two areas that you feel you could work on or try. These can be **goals**. Your goals and challenges can be the same but it's sometimes kinder to yourself to have some goals that you can meet more easily.

1. Talk about your feelings

Talking about your feelings can help you maintain your mental health and deal with times when you feel troubled. Talking about your feelings isn't a sign of weakness; it's part of taking charge of your wellbeing and doing what you can to stay healthy.

2. Keep active

Regular exercise can boost your self-esteem and can help you concentrate, sleep, and look and feel better. Exercising doesn't just mean doing sport or going to the gym. Experts say that most people should do about 30 minutes' exercise at least five days a week. Try to make physical activity that you enjoy a part of your day.

3. Eat well

What we eat can affect how we feel both immediately and in the longer term. A diet that is good for your physical health is also good for your mental health.

4. Drink sensibly

We often drink alcohol to change our mood. Some people drink to deal with fear or loneliness, but the effect is only temporary.

5. Keep in touch

Relationships are key to our mental health. Working in a supportive team is hugely important for our mental health at work.

6. Ask for help

None of us are superhuman. We all sometimes get tired or overwhelmed by how we feel or when things don't go to plan.

7. Take a break

A change of scene or a change of pace is good for your mental health. It could be a five-minute pause from what you are doing, a book or podcast during the commute, a half-hour lunch break at work, or a weekend exploring somewhere new. A few minutes can be enough to de-stress you. Give yourself some 'me time'.