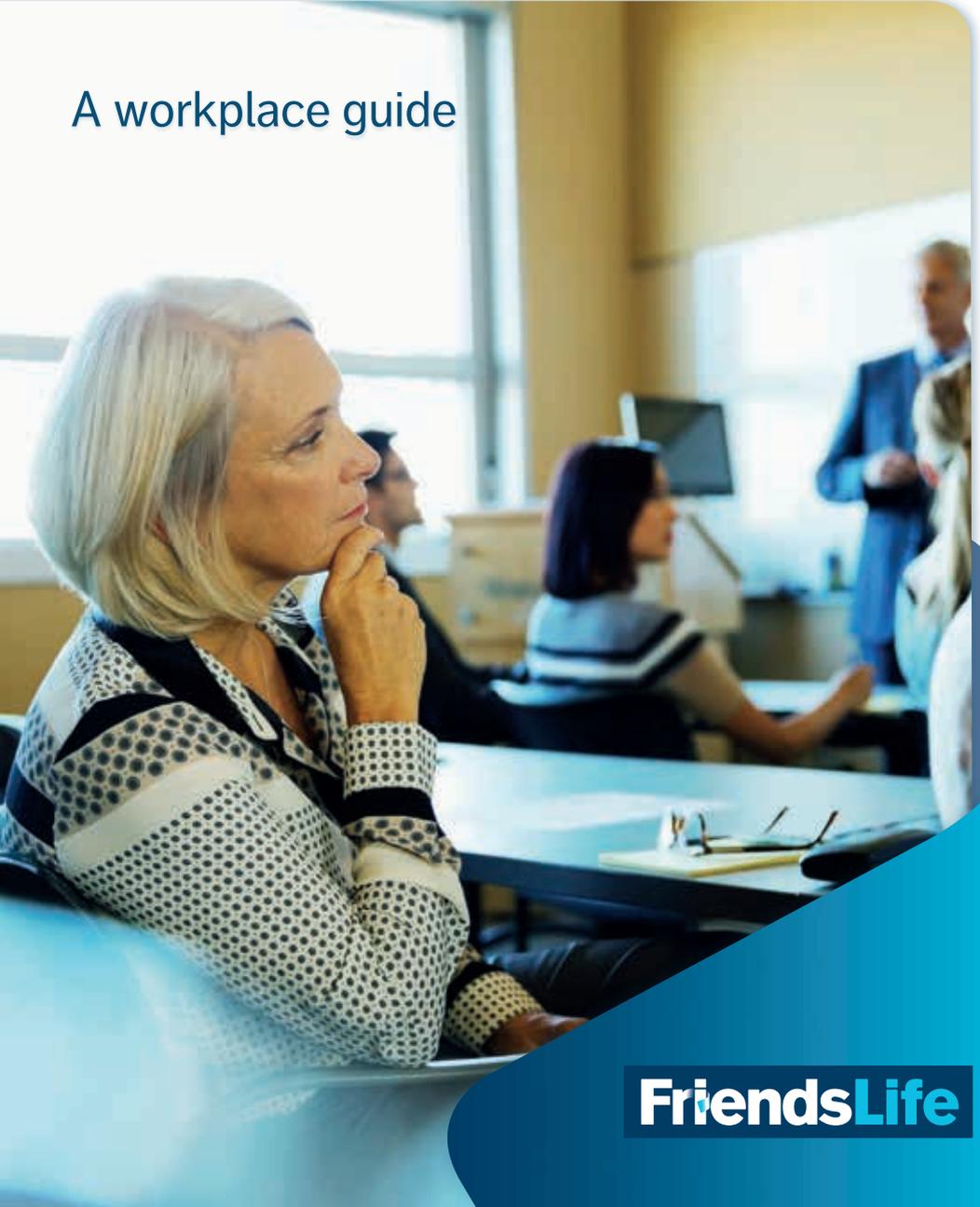


Listen up – Let's talk mental health

In partnership with

**BUSINESS
IN THE
COMMUNITY**

A workplace guide



FriendsLife

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Foreword

Despite one in six of us being affected every year by common mental health issues, such as stress, anxiety and depression, there is a dangerous culture of silence that pervades many businesses, meaning that the topic is not being discussed as openly as it should be. Not only do individuals not know how to speak out confidently about their own concerns, but friends and colleagues also struggle to find the right way of discussing the subject with people they know to be suffering in silence. Consequently, issues that could otherwise be resolved simply can soon develop into ill health, absence, disengagement and resentment.

A number of organisations are waking up to the fact that failure to promote the mental wellbeing of employees can lead to long-term problems, including reduced competitiveness, lower productivity and fewer prospects for sustainable growth. Conversely, the rewards for businesses that engage with this issue are huge. A large part of this is making sure people feel equipped to start the conversation; this extends right through from boardroom leadership to empowering individual employees to have a voice. This booklet will help ensure that tricky conversations can be made easier and should help break down the silence stifling organisational resilience and individual wellbeing.

Business in the Community (BITC) is a business-led charity committed to shaping a new contract between business and society and we provide a number of tools, resources and connections to make this happen. BITC's Mental Health Champions Group is a collaborative business-led movement that is campaigning to end the culture of silence around mental health in the workplace, and ensure mental wellbeing is recognised as a priority boardroom issue. We are therefore very proud to support the publication of this booklet and we would encourage all businesses to take note. There is a strong moral and business case for engaging in mental health. So, do please read this booklet, share it, and start a conversation today.

Louise Aston
Director, Business in the Community Workwell

[www.bitc.org.uk/programmes/workwell/
mental-health-were-ready-talk](http://www.bitc.org.uk/programmes/workwell/mental-health-were-ready-talk)

About this booklet

The prevalence of common mental-health problems is such that we can all expect to go through periods when we are personally affected. It may be anything from stress or anxiety to insomnia or even depression. We shouldn't feel alone or somehow different from our colleagues, as we actually have plenty of company. However, it is difficult not to feel isolated when we're all keeping these problems to ourselves, either through choice or fear of disclosure. We've come a long way in talking much more openly about previous 'difficult' topics, like cancer and other physical health problems, and yet the mental-health issue is still not being discussed by many individuals and organisations.

Friends Life commissioned this booklet as a member of the Business in the Community Workwell Mental Health Champions Group. It is designed to provide a practical resource to help progress the recommendations in the group's inaugural report, 'Mental health: We're ready to talk', which launched in April 2014 at Responsible Business Week and called for an end to the hugely

damaging culture of silence on mental health in the workplace.

There are many different reasons why we choose not to talk about mental-health issues and they are all understandable, but a hindrance nonetheless, to taking preventative or early remedial action to stop a common problem escalating into a more serious condition. The simplest action we can all take when 'stuff' is getting to us and impacting our mental wellbeing, is to talk.

Whether you are someone experiencing a common mental-health issue, have a more serious longer-term mental condition, or have a team member or work colleague with a problem, we hope this booklet will help you begin that much needed conversation.

Rosie Harris
Chief Risk Officer, Friends Life
(and mental-health champion)

We want to help create workplaces where everyone feels able to be open about any mental-health issues they may be going through, where the 'silence' is finally broken and where we can all look forward to improved mental wellbeing.

Introduction

The continued stigma attached to mental-health conditions is enough to cause most people to keep personal or family distress hidden whenever and wherever possible.

One of the results of keeping mental-health issues secret is the perception that such problems are rare.

The reality is that 1 in 4 people will experience a mental-health problem in their lifetime. The most common problem is mixed anxiety and depression. Common mental-health problems may be short-lived, but could become more problematic if allowed to persist. Similarly, more serious mental-health problems are not necessarily lifelong, especially where effective treatment is employed.

All of us are likely to be affected either directly or indirectly by mental-health issues, through family or friends, neighbours or colleagues.

Having a mental-health problem does not mean someone is unable to work; the truth is we all probably work with someone who is experiencing a mental-health problem.

This booklet is for everyone and will give you some ideas about how to talk about, listen to, respond and provide support when mental-health issues arise in the workplace.

*'Some conversations are scary some aren't...
Let's get rid of the fear...'*



Let's talk about mental health at work

Many people still feel uncomfortable talking about mental health at work and this is the main challenge.

The Department of Health Attitudes to Mental Illness – 2011 survey report identified that despite 70% of people saying they would be comfortable talking to a family member or friend about their mental health, only 57% would be comfortable talking to their employer.

Employees are more likely to hide a mental-health problem from their employer because of the associated stigma; this, together with the fact that there is often no outwardly visible sign of a mental-health condition, means that providing appropriate support can be difficult, to say the least.

It is also important to remember that it is not uncommon for mental-health issues at work to be met with apprehension, suspicion or a certain degree of cynicism. Negative attitudes towards mental-health problems can still persist in even the most enlightened workplaces.

Remember you don't have to be an expert to talk about mental health.

What good will talking do?

It can be hard to know what to do to access support at work when you are experiencing a mental-health problem.

It can be equally hard to know what to do to support someone at work who is experiencing a mental-health problem.

But knowing how to ask for support and how to support your colleagues can make a huge difference to someone's life.

Talking is the first step in understanding what can be done to support someone. Indeed, if someone is experiencing a short-lived period of anxiety or stress, talking with a colleague or friend may be all the help that is needed.

It is good to talk; it can help reduce isolation. It sometimes takes just one person to 'be open' and others then admit to having similar feelings, experiences. Remember, if 1 in 4 experience mental-health problems at some point in their life, you are rarely alone – you just don't know it until you start talking.

Talking also means people get the support and help they need in finding ways to cope with a problem.

But I don't want to talk...

It is important to understand what might stop you from talking about your mental-health problem or its impact at work.

Often fear of the unknown and uncertainty can make us feel out of control and keep us from doing things that would be helpful in the long term.

The symptoms of a mental-health problem itself may create a barrier to effective communication and worries about future prospects at work:

- loss of confidence
- reduced concentration
- poor memory
- reduced ability to problem solve
- negative thoughts about self and others
- increased irritability
- struggling to be around other people.

Concerns about job security, performance ratings, and bonus payments are common, as are worries about how colleagues and managers will perceive you. Often these are focused on weakness, failure or not pulling your weight and letting the team down.

The thought of what the response will be can be worse than the reality, and it is often better to address any concerns and explore opportunities for support.

How to talk about mental health at work

Employee tips:

If you are going to approach your employer/manager, consider:

- When is a good time to talk.
- How much information you want to give.
- Who you want the information shared with.
- What impact your mental health is having on your work.
- Focusing on what you need to continue to do your job.
- Asking for regular feedback and reviews.

'Be brave ... break the silence by talking about your mental-health problems.'

I still don't want to talk...but

'If I talk then others can understand.'

'People won't know unless I tell them how I'm feeling.'

'I can tell people as much or as little as I want.'

'Hiding fuels feelings of shame.'



What can colleagues do to help?

The people we work with play a vital role in our everyday lives. When people can talk about any issues they are facing, potential mental-health problems can be identified and addressed sooner.

Five ways to support your Colleagues:

- Be approachable.
- Show you care.
- Encourage them to talk.
- Listen to what they say.
- Direct them to available support.

'Talking means I will get the support I need.'

'It's not likely to be as bad as I think it is going to be.'

Broaching mental health in the workplace

Mental-health problems are a personal and sensitive issue and often people may not feel confident in talking openly about their problems.

Absence patterns or changes in productivity may give a clue that someone is experiencing difficulties. Remember, the quicker you take steps to find out what the problems are, the quicker solutions can be identified. The longer it is left, the greater the risk that the person's health will get worse.

Sometimes it will be obvious that someone is experiencing a mental-health problem and sometimes you will not know and would not need to know.

As a manager you may need to reach out to your colleagues and team members and make the first move in starting a conversation about mental health. If you know your team is about to hit a very intense period of work, which could be stressful, you could pre-empt things by inviting colleagues not to suffer in silence, rather to talk with you and/or colleagues about their concerns.

You may be able to use your usual management procedures to provide you with opportunities to talk in a supportive and non-threatening way. Review meetings, work-planning sessions and appraisals are all normal work processes which give you the chance to talk to someone about any problems they may be having.

Many team environments embrace informal chats or catch-ups as part of their routine and it may be that this can be utilised to ask someone about how they are feeling.

Some dos and don'ts...

Do

- Let the person know you are there if they want to talk.
- Keep it private – respect a confidence.
- Make sure you have time to talk
- Be empathic rather than sympathetic
- Let the person share as much or little as they want
- Ask open questions to help you to understand
- Ask how they would like you to help them
- Reassure the person that you will do your best to help
- Make a plan and review regularly

Don't

- Tell someone to pull themselves together – if they could, they would have by now.
- Diagnose or second-guess someone's feelings.
- Be judgmental or make assumptions.
- Grill anyone by peppering them with quick-fire questions.
- Talk over someone about your own or anyone else's experiences.
- Tell someone what to do.

What types of questions will help?

Generally, open questions enable people to talk about their difficulties in their own words and reduce the likelihood of misunderstandings or misinterpretations. Open questions also give the control over the conversation to the person who is experiencing mental-health difficulties.

- I noticed that you have been... and wondered how you are.
- How are you feeling?
- How long have you been feeling this way?
- Have you spoken to anyone else about this?
- How can I help?
- Is there anything that we can do that would help?
- Do you have any support or know where to get support to help you?

Once you start talking you need to listen

Listening gives others the feeling of being appreciated and respected.

People are more likely to talk to you if they feel they are being listened to and this enables information to be gathered to develop a shared understanding of the problem. If you are thinking about your response whilst someone is talking to you, you're not listening well. Think about your response when your colleague has finished talking.

Listening means keeping your mind calm and quiet and letting go of any beliefs or assumptions about a person. It's also about them, not you.

'Everyone has something to say ... so pay attention and listen.'

You have listened, but have you heard?

The key to supporting people with mental-health issues is hearing what they say and responding to what they think would be helpful to them, when it is possible to do so.

To listen effectively, the listener puts themselves in the speaker's place and tries to see things from the other person's point of view.

Remember

- It's not enough just to 'hear' people, you must demonstrate (to them) that you heard what they said.
- The listener needs to maintain eye contact, focus on the words spoken and things left unsaid and watch the body language.
- Listening to understand uses:
 - reflecting (echoing words back)
 - paraphrasing (rephrasing the content)
 - summarising (condensing the information).

'I'm more focused on you than me; I'm getting a sense of your problems now.'

Ok, you have talked and listened, now what?

Start with what you know or the information you have and remember that often things do not change unless you take some sort of action.

Employee tips

- Make time to talk to your line manager.
- Be honest about how your work is being affected.
- Be open to any ideas that may help you.
- Make an appointment to see your GP.
- Consider all treatment options offered that may help.
- Not everybody will completely understand – you are unique – but talking to various people will help give you different support, ideas and perspectives.

'If you always do what you've always done ... you'll always get what you've always got.'

Make sure that you look after yourself

Mental-health problems can feel overwhelming and this can stop us from doing the things that ordinarily keep us well, that we value and give us a sense of pleasure and enjoyment in our lives.

Try to think about the ways in which your problems are affecting you:

- What time are you going to bed and getting up?
- How many naps are you taking in the day?
- What are you eating and how regularly?
- What things have you stopped doing?
- Have you given up any hobbies or interests?
- Who do you spend time with?

Try and think about what might help with these areas:

- See if there are things you can do differently that might make a difference.
- Plan what to do.
- Do it.
- Review it.
- Don't give up if it did not work first time.
- Do it a few more times to give it a real chance to work.

Get other people to help and support you in making any changes – you might be surprised at what a difference this makes.

What else can line managers do?

Being supportive through listening may be enough, but sometimes practical support is needed.

Be aware of what is available to help you support someone else, such as Human Resources or Occupational Health Services. You may have access to other manager assistance services.

Be aware of what support may be available to someone with mental-health difficulties, such as Employee Assistance Schemes, Counselling or Psychological Therapy Services or Occupational Health Services.

If there are performance issues, do not just pretend that they are not there. Being an ostrich is not going to help the situation. Acknowledge any issues in a non-blaming way and plan how to support someone to overcome them in both the immediate and longer term.

Think about and discuss whether any short-term adjustments could be put in place to help the person to manage their symptoms more effectively whilst at work and help them to continue to feel that they are valued and can make an ongoing contribution to the team and organisation.

Don't assume because someone has a mental-health problem that they need to be off work and at home. Often this is the worst thing that could happen, as it can fuel a sense of worthlessness and symptoms can spiral as a result, making a successful return to work in the future less likely. One size doesn't fit all, so talk alternative options through in a supportive way.

Talking about reasonable adjustments

There may be a number of reasonable adjustments that could be made at work that will reduce the impact of a mental-health problem on someone's ability to work and can ensure that the right support is being provided. In the context of this guide, you may need to talk about these; this can also include planning ahead to agree arrangements in case someone becomes unwell again or in the future. Any support needs to have regular planned reviews.



Possible short-term adjustments you could discuss:

- altering start/finish times
- flexible or reduction in working hours
- altering break times
- altering targets or predictable tasks
- reallocating duties
- introducing a buddy system
- working from another location
- modifying instructions or making sure they are written down.

'You cannot direct the wind ... but you can adjust the sails.'

When someone is off work

This can be tricky as most people are worried about doing something that may make the person feel worse or the situation worse. Even when someone is off work, colleagues or a line manager can continue to offer support by maintaining regular contact.

If it is possible, offer a choice as to the method by which you will contact someone:

- telephone
- email
- letter.

And in the timeframes preferable to them:

- weekly
- fortnightly
- monthly.

If contact is being driven by a set process, let the person know. Ensure that accurate information about job security and timescales on pay is provided. This helps clear lines of communication and manages expectations. Clear communication and keeping someone well-informed, also reduces the likelihood of someone worrying about what they don't know.

Avoid putting pressure on planning a return-to-work date, but review needs regularly and keep it on the agenda so that support can be provided when someone is ready to return.

Mental health at work summary

Talking about mental health at work can be scary, so just remember:

- You can overcome the fear by having a conversation.
- You don't have to be an expert to talk about mental health.
- More talk means more action.
- Everyone has something to say, so pay attention and listen.
- If you always do what you've always done, you'll always get what you've always got.
- You cannot direct the wind, but you can adjust the sails.

'You can't get much done in life if you only work on the days when you feel good!'

Other mental health resources

- **Business in the Community Workwell - Louise Aston**



Call us on **0202 7566 6672**



Email us at
louise.aston@bitc.org.uk



**www.bitc.org.uk/
programmes/workwell**

- **Mind**



Call us on **0845 766 0163**
Monday to Friday, between
9.15am and 5.15pm (GMT/BST).
For deaf/speech impaired callers
use same number, (or if using BT
Textdirect add prefix 18001).
Admin **020 8519 2122**.



Email us at
contact@mind.org.uk



www.mind.org.uk



Write to us at
**National Office
15-19 Broadway
London
E15 4BQ**

Confidential help on a range of mental-health issues, via the infoline. Also provides special legal service to the public, lawyers and mental-health workers.

- **Association of Therapeutic Communities**



Call us on **01242 620077**



Email us at
**post@
therapeuticcommunities.org**



**www.therapeuticcommunities.
org**



Write to us at
**Barns Centre
Church Lane
Toddington, Nr Cheltenham
Gloucester
GL54 5DQ**

General information about therapeutic communities. Website provides a list of ATC member organisations to contact, who offer therapeutic residential support.

- **C.A.L.L Helpline (Community Advice & Listening Line)**



Call us on **0800 132 737**
24 hrs Freephone helpline or text
'help' to: 81066. Mental-health
helpline for Wales, that offers
a confidential listening and
support service.



www.callhelpline.org.uk

Other mental health resources *continued*

- **National Women and Mental Health Information Line**

 Call us on **0845 300 0911**
Monday, 10am-12 noon &
2pm-5pm/ Tuesday, 2pm-5pm/
Wednesday, 10am-12noon &
2pm-5pm/Thursday, 2pm-5pm.

The National Information Line for Women and Mental Health is run by women for women and provides information on all aspects of women's mental health.

- **Rethink**

 Call us on **020 7840 3188**
Monday to Friday, between
10am and 1pm. General
enquiries on **0845 4560455**.

 Email us at
info@rethink.org

 **www.rethink.org**

 Write to us at
**89 Albert Embankment
London
SE1 7TP**

Rethink works to help everyone affected by severe mental illness recover a better quality of life.

- **Samaritans**

 Call us on **0845 790 9090**
ROI **1850 60 90 90** and
Admin **020 8394 8300**.
Confidential support, for
anyone in crisis.

 Email us at
jo@samaritans.org

 **www.samaritans.org**

 Write to us at
**Chris
PO Box 90 90
Stirling
FK8 2SA**

- **SANE**

 Call us on **0845 767 8000**
Everday, between 6pm and 11pm.
Admin **020 7375 1002**.

 Email us at
info@saneline.org.uk

 **www.sane.org.uk**

 Write to us at
**1st Floor
Cityside House,
40 Adler Street
London
E1 1EE**

Information and support on all aspects of mental health for those experiencing mental illness, or their families or friends.

- **SupportLine**

 Call us on **01708 765200**
Admin **01708 765222**

 Email us at
info@supportline.org.uk

 **www.supportline.org.uk**

 Write to us at
PO Box 2860
Ilford
Essex
RM7 1JA

Offers confidential emotional support to children, young adults and adults by telephone, email and post.

- **Talking2Minds**

 Call us on **020 8133 0217**

 **www.talking2minds.co.uk**

 Write to us at
55 Princes Gate
Exhibition Road
London
SW7 2PN

Help for anyone who has experienced trauma or negative experiences and is displaying the symptoms of PTSD whether they have or have not been diagnosed by the medical system.

- **The Mental Health Foundation**

 Call us on **020 7803 1100**

 Email us at
mhf@mhf.org.uk

 **www.mentalhealth.org.uk**

 Write to us at
9th Floor
Sea Containers House
20 Upper Ground
London
SE1 9QB

Aims to help people survive, recover from and prevent health problems.

RehabWorks is an evidence-based medical organisation that provides injury management and rehabilitation services for industry and insurance since 1987.

They are a UK market leader in the bio-psycho-social approach to rehabilitation using a systematic stepped approach through prevention, early advice and treatment.

They offer a triage and early intervention service that is managed and delivered by clinical specialists with a work-focused approach. Other services include case management, occupational health, preventative programmes and general health and wellbeing days.

FriendsLife