

FACT SHEET

How to talk to your manager about mental health

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During this pandemic, we've seen an increase in mental health difficulties and an appreciation of the impact mental health has on our wellbeing.

As a mental health professional, I cannot recall a time when employers have invested this much resource into supporting their employees' mental health. I've seen an increasing number of businesses introducing Mental Health Champions and First-Aiders into the workplace to offer help, support and direction. These initiatives, when appropriately introduced and maintained, are making a real difference.

Nevertheless, talking about your mental health difficulties in the workplace can feel daunting. In my consulting room, people can speak freely about their mental health difficulties. We can investigate the potential

barriers they may have when it comes to raising the subject with their line manager.

One of the biggest barriers people have, when it comes to talking about their mental health issues, is stigma. They fear that they will be seen as "lesser" somehow.





Other barriers include:

- > Thinking that the problem is not severe enough to raise with their manager, and prefer solving the problem themselves.
- > Worrying that the disclosure may lead to negative outcomes, such as having their concerns dismissed, not being considered for a promotion, being treated differently to their colleagues, or being a troublemaker.

Unfortunately, these barriers get in the way of receiving potential life-changing support in the workplace. A temporary change in the number of your responsibilities, added flexibility in the ways you work, or simply knowing that your line manager has a sympathetic view for your troubles can lift the weight off your shoulders.

Five tips to help you talk to your manager



1. Find the right time and place

Approach your line manager on a day when things are calmer in the workplace, if possible, or book some time with them when you know you'll be uninterrupted. Suggest a place where you will feel that your privacy will be maintained. Try to avoid looking out for the perfect opportunity, as it may never come!



2. Think how much you wish to disclose

You're in control when it comes to how much to tell your line manager. You can keep most of the situation to yourself, or be completely open with them. Lack of trust in your relationship with your line manager can limit how much you want to tell them, but also consider that they need to know enough to support you.



3. Make a list of what they can do to help

Have a few examples of what you are looking for to help keep the conversation focused on solutions. Sometimes, all you may need is for your line manager to be aware and sympathetic. Other times, knowing what you need can be hard to put into words. In those cases, try talking to your organisation's Mental Health Champion, or a Mental Health First-Aider first. If you have access to an Employee Assistance Programme, confide in the counselling line, or try a trusted friend.



4. Practice what you're going to say

You don't need to stand in front of the mirror talking to yourself. Talking through what you're going to say with a friend, or a Mental Health Champion will help you get your thoughts in order and manage any feelings of anxiety. At the very least, recount a few times in your own mind how you'd start the conversation, and your main points.



5. Take care of yourself

Here are some suggestions on how you can take care of yourself before you speak to your line manager:

- > Have practical plans prepared on the day. Before talking to your line manager plan your day, so that you have time to gather your thoughts.
- > Make sure you have some time for yourself after your meeting - opening up about mental health difficulties is sometimes upsetting and draining.
- > Be kind to yourself. Instead of judging, criticising, or ignoring your emotional pain, try to be warm and understanding towards yourself by practising self-compassion.

Know that you are not alone, **1 in 4 people** will experience a mental health problem of some kind each year in England (**Mind**).



4 February 2021 is **Time To Talk Day**.

Follow **#TimeToTalk** on Twitter to join the conversation and access other resources.



A small conversation about mental health has the power to make a big difference.



Time to change

