

Approaching a sensitive conversation regarding mental ill health

Every conversation a manager has with a team member who may be experiencing mental ill health will be different.

Sometimes, a team member may feel able to be very open with their manager from the very first meeting. In other situations, it may be difficult for the team member to open up and might take several conversations.

Below are a few tips and considerations for a manager to think about when approaching a conversation with a team member.

<p>Before the conversation takes place</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Choose an appropriate place. It should be in private and usually be one-to-one • Consider what you have observed that concerns you and note examples of this • Keep the meeting as informal and relaxed as possible • Make it clear anything discussed will be kept confidential unless agreed otherwise
<p>At the start of the conversation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Approach the conversation in a sensitive and calm manner, and manage emotions carefully • Ask how they are doing • Explain the reason for the conversation • Remember to ask simple, open and non-judgmental questions
<p>During the conversation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listen carefully and don't make assumptions • Reassure them that you are there to try to help • Be patient and don't try to force them into talking if they do not want to <p>If they disclose they are experiencing mental ill health:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Check if they have been to the GP and if so, what they recommended and whether any medication has been prescribed that may affect their performance or make it unsafe for them to perform certain duties • Discuss whether there are any parts of their role they are struggling with or feel unable to do • Adjourn for a break if emotions take over or to think through what has been discussed if the seriously unexpected arises <p>If they become angry or distressed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stay calm • Reassure them, that you are only trying to help them and as their manager you are responsible for ensuring they are coping • Adjourn for a break if necessary
<p>At the end of the conversation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Check if they think anything else should be discussed <p>If they have disclosed they are experiencing mental ill health:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage the team member to talk to their GP to get an expert opinion (if not done already) • Highlight sources of support within the organisation such as a mental health champion and outside the organisation such as mental health charities • Agree what will happen next, such as whether they will be referred to occupational health or if a further meeting will be arranged to discuss support options <p>If they have stated that there is no problem:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Respect their position • Make clear you are available at any time if they ever want to talk <p>If they are on authorised absence from work:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discuss what they would like their colleagues to know about the reason for their absence • Agree what information can be shared and what must stay confidential

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After the conversation	<p>If they have disclosed they are experiencing mental ill health:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Think about potential support or adaptations that may help • Arrange a further meeting to discuss support options • Document what was discussed and agreed <p>If they have stated that there is no problem:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitor the situation, and if you still have concerns consider seeking advice from sources such as HR, senior management and Occupational Health • Be available and approachable in case they want to talk to you at a later point about their health
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Common Adjustments got staff experiencing mental ill health

Adjustments to the work schedule	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow more breaks • Allow breaks to take place when needed rather than a pre-determined schedule • Change their working day to start earlier or finish later • Allow them to use paid un unpaid leave for appointments related to their mental health • Offer a phased return to work • Allow part time working on a temporary basis (or permanently if it is what they want)
Adjustments to tole and responsibilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review their workload and agree what duties they can do • Re-assign duties they may struggle with among the rest of the team • Discuss vacant positions in the organization and temporarily transfer them to a different role if they want to
Adjustments to working environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide partitions, room dividers etc. to enhance sound proofing and visual barriers between workspaces • Offer a reserved parking space to make it easier for them to get to work • Offer homeworking for some of the week • Increase the size of their 'personal work space' • Position them as far away as possible from noisy machinery • Provide a private space for them to use when they need privacy
Policy changes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extend additional paid or unpaid leave during a hospitalization or other absence • Allow additional time for them to reach their performance milestones • Allow them to make certain personal phone calls during the day
Ways to provide additional support and assistance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assign a mentor or buddy to support and help them • Arrange a regular one-to-one with their manager to discuss and prioritise tasks • Provide a personal computer to enable them to work at home when they do not feel able to attend the workplace • Offer additional training on the skills and duties their job requires

Remember talking at an early stage is vital

<p>Do</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Have a conversation in a private place• Make sure there are no interruptions• Be focused, get the information that will help you achieve the goal of supporting your employee• Ask open ended questions e.g. 'I was wondering how you are doing?'• Always allow the person time to answer• Try to put yourself in the other person's position and see things from their perspective• Make arrangements for a follow up meeting to review the situation	<p>Don't</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Attempt to start the conversation in front of everyone else• Initiate a conversation if you've got another appointment looming• Attempt to diagnose. Remember you're not a doctor• Push for answers, be patient• Tell the person what to do• Leave things up in the air <p>Remember you're not a counsellor or a therapist</p>
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Adpated from 'It's good to talk' Shaw Trust