

Improving mental health awareness

Why is it important and how to do it in your school



The charity for everyone working in education

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An Introduction

A big part of creating a *psychologically safe workplace*, ending stigma around mental health, and ensuring that people seek help if they need to, involves increasing the *mental health awareness* of your staff and school as a whole.

Knowing more about wellbeing, mental health, and mental health problems, can help:

- School leaders and staff manage their wellbeing to stay well where previously stress may have become unmanageable / led to worsening mental health
- School leaders and staff know how to safely and appropriately talk about mental health, if they need to discuss their own, or want to support a colleague
- School leaders and staff to spot the signs in themselves or another colleague that their mental health may be struggling
- School leaders and staff seek the right kind of support, at the right time
- School leaders and managers be better leaders and managers! Making mental health and wellbeing a part of their everyday business in leadership and management brings rewards of staff trust, motivation and commitment.
- Create a culture in your school where mental health is a subject people are comfortable talking about

Some people may already have some knowledge and understanding of mental health, and others will have none. Some will be mentally well and accessing information about mental health information in relation to wellbeing, and others may be struggling or managing mental health problems and so might opt for information around support services. There is also a whole group of people in the middle who don't consider themselves to have a mental

health problem, yet nor do they feel completely mentally well, often because stress or life events are impacting on them.

Supporting people to access information and support in relation to potential external triggers can also be a useful way to engage employees in mental health conversations, for example, making it part of back to work conversations after parental, bereavement or caring leave. In order to take account of this and to reach all of your employees, regardless of their current mental health, raising awareness at all levels across your school is essential. This means practically, in teams and departments, as well as through policies and school plans.

Building mental health literacy means boosting employees' knowledge and skills so they can better manage their own mental health and improve their ability to support that of others. Ensuring staff and managers have a good understanding of mental health, and the factors that affect workplace wellbeing, is essential for building a healthy, happy and high performing school.



How to improve mental health awareness in your school

The following are ideas, tips and approaches for building and improving mental health awareness in your school. Some of them will also overlap or be effective in tackling mental health stigma as well as growing people's knowledge and understanding. You can try them on big and small scales, in departments, teams or across the whole school, depending on what is most appropriate for your school, your resources and your ambitions. Always remember to signpost people to where they can get help, when encouraging people to be more open about mental health generally.

Lead by example

Fundamental to creating a mentally healthy workplace, confident in its knowledge and awareness of mental health, is strong, supportive leadership. School leaders should share their knowledge and their plans to improve knowledge e.g. by attending training with staff, sharing resources they've found helpful in building their mental health awareness. Speaking out or leading exercises in this area is highly recommended.

Provide regular training and refresher courses

These will need to be appropriate to your school timetable and staff learning methods, but training of some kind is often essential to ensure all staff have a basic understanding of mental health, mental health problems, how to support themselves and how to have a conversation about mental health. Education Support provide introduction training to wellbeing and resilience for school staff and there are a range of external providers of training like this, who can also develop something bespoke for your school too.

Develop managers capacity to support staff

This involves training and ongoing support to managers, including practical support- managers need the capacity in their day to dedicate the time required to build compassionate and effective line management dynamics with their staff. Provide proactive support for staff line-managing people with mental health problems, including access to HR and, where necessary, occupational health services. Recognise that line managers who have personal lived experience of mental health problems are a unique asset to your school and staff.



Peer support and networks

We know that teachers thrive in collegiate environments. Setting up mental health networks and peer support groups is another good way to build, develop and strengthen mental health awareness, knowledge and activities. Make sure staff have some resource with which to do this, including time.

Conversation is key

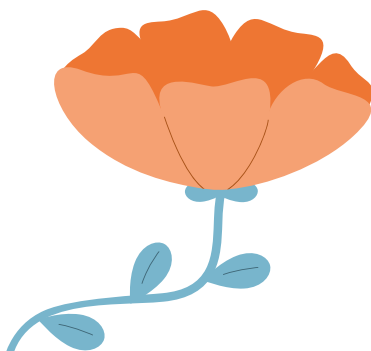
Just like tackling stigma, taking opportunities to talk about mental health is an important part of building awareness and improving knowledge. This can be a quick reference to encourage people to attend a stress management session being offered, or a deliberately organised staff wellbeing initiative that runs for a whole week. It can be a senior leader writing a blog about their own mental health experiences or signing up to be a part of a mental health campaign each year. Use our resource on tackling stigma to find out [more](#). Use [this guide](#) from Education Support to help you have safe and appropriate conversations about mental health at work. It gives suggested open questions, things to consider before you have the conversation, and tips on active listening.

Make mental health awareness part of CPD

Some schools already have mental health as part of their CPD sessions. This sends a clear message to staff about how important mental health awareness is within that school environment.

Do things in front of your staff

If you write a mental health policy, plan or framework, or sign up to an organisational pledge about mental health make sure you do this at an all staff event or meeting, if possible. This makes sure all staff hear your commitment and shows you're serious about being held to account in delivering on your plan.



Mental health champions

Lots of schools and other employers have [mental health champions](#) - these are staff at a range of levels who work to raise awareness around mental health, support the school's implementation of a mental health plan to make sure more employees are reached, and seek out feedback from mental health related activities, training and support to help ensure the school is pitching its messages and initiatives in the right way.

Signpost to support

Use our [signpost to support template](#) to make sure that staff know how to find out more about mental health and accessing mental health support, either through services provided by your school, or more widely in the local community / nationally.

Run focused internal communications campaigns on mental health and wellbeing

Use your own resources, the resources in this pack, or any others you'd like to, to encourage employees to start talking about mental health in the workplace. Tips, case studies, support available, blogs by staff and guides to good mental health are all options for things to include in a campaign. Make sure you think of how teachers and other staff are most likely to access any communications materials and tailor your campaign accordingly - on and off line using different tools.




Use a mental health calendar to hook messages and activities onto





There are plenty of days throughout the year that can be used in schools to raise awareness of stress, wellbeing and mental health. Often, there are themes and suggested activities provided by mental health charities. Running activities and information campaigns around these times when mental health may also be in the news more broadly will likely increase the chances of employees paying attention. Use our [mental health calendar](#) for key dates.



Suggested resources

In addition to the ideas and suggestions above here are some downloadable resources you can use. They range from accessing multiple guides across a range of mental health at work areas (e.g. promoting wellbeing, creating a mentally healthy workplace, how to manage stress at work) to short mental health awareness exercises, tips for managers, and toolkits for schools to use however suits them best.

-  **Mental health at work guides and resources** from Mind
-  **Mental health (pub) quiz** - A 15 minute tool to use with groups to improve people's basic mental health knowledge
-  **Teacher mental health toolkits** - A range of toolkits aimed at primary and secondary schools with resources and case studies for staff and school leaders to use. *This set of resources* has been specifically developed to support teachers during the Covid-19 pandemic.

-  **Tips for managers** to show staff you value and appreciate them
-  **How to run a staff mental health awareness session** - this helpful guide gives you ideas, suggested formats and a checklist of things to think about in running mental health awareness sessions for staff in any work context
-  **How to talk about mental health with colleagues** - a short guide with practical suggestions for staff
-  **Mental health calendar** - use this to hang events and activities off all year round



Sources:

1. <https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/publications/how-support-mental-health-work>
2. <https://www.mind.org.uk/workplace/mental-health-at-work/>
3. <https://www.mentalhealthatwork.org.uk/toolkit/ourfrontline-education/>
4. <https://www.bupa.co.uk/health-information/workplace-mental-health/staff-session>
5. <https://www.mind.org.uk/media-a/4659/how-to-implement-the-thriving-at-work-mental-health-standards-final-guide-online.pdf>



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