

HOW TO HAVE A CONVERSATION WITH AN INDIVIDUAL ABOUT THEIR MENTAL HEALTH

1. Choose an appropriate place – somewhere private and quiet where the person feels comfortable and equal. Possibly a neutral space outside of the workplace. If they are a remote worker, consider whether going to where they are may help.

2. Encourage people to talk – people can find it difficult to talk about their mental health but it helps to have an open culture where conversations about mental health are routine and normalised. Ask simple, open and non-judgmental questions and let people explain in their own words how their mental health problem manifests, the triggers, how it impacts on their work and what support they need.

3. Don't make assumptions – don't try to guess what symptoms an employee might have and how these might affect their ability to do their job – many people are able to manage their mental health and perform their role to a high standard but may require support measures when experiencing a difficult period.

4. Listen to people and respond flexibly – everyone's experience of a mental health problem is different so treat people as individuals and focus on the person, not the problem. Adapt your support to suit the individual and involve people as much as possible in finding solutions to any work-related difficulties they're experiencing. Remember effective workplace adjustments are often quite individual but needn't be costly or require huge changes.

5. Be honest and clear – if there are specific grounds for concern, like high absence levels or impaired performance, it's important to address these at an early stage.

6. Ensure confidentiality – people need to be reassured of confidentiality. It's sensitive information and should be shared with as few people as possible. Create strict policies to ensure this. Discuss with the individual what information they would like shared and with whom. For further information on data protection see the Information Commissioner's Office.

7. Develop an action plan – work with your employee to develop an individual action plan which identifies the signs of their mental health problem, triggers for stress, the possible impact on their work, who to contact in a crisis, and what support people need (see next section). The plan should include an agreed time to review the support measures to see if they're working.

8. Encourage people to seek advice and support – people should speak to their GP about available support from the NHS such as talking therapy. If your organisation has an Employee Assistance Programme it may be able to arrange counselling. The Mind Infoline can signpost people on to support and our network of local Minds across the country can also help source advice and support.

9. Seek advice and support yourself – the Mind Infoline and local Minds can provide information to employers too. Occupational Health (if you have it) can provide tailored advice to support both employers and employees. If relationships have become strained or confrontational mediation can help – some local Minds run mediation services, as do ACAS. Small businesses can access the free Health for Work Adviceline service provided by NHS occupational health services.

10. Reassure people – people may not always be ready to talk straight away so it's important you outline what support is available, tell them your door is always open and let them know you'll make sure they get the support they need.