

How to have a conversation with an employee about their mental health

1. Choose an appropriate place to talk –

The environment ideally needs to be somewhere private and quiet where the person feels comfortable. 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 –

Often 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-judgemental 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. Reassure people –

People may not always be ready to talk straight away. 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. If you reassure them consistently then eventually they will feel comfortable to approach you.

4. Don't make assumptions –

Once a member of staff has approached you an engaged in conversation try not to 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.

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. 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.

7. 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.

8. 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.

9. Encourage people to seek support –

Always encourage people to speak to their GP about available support from the NHS. There are lots of helplines available including Mind, Samaritans or Calm which is specifically aimed at men.

This information has been adapted from a Mind document on 'How to support staff who are experiencing a mental health problem' you can see the full document [here](#).