

# New Guidance on Mental Health From Acas

## In the know

To coincide with World Mental Health Day, Acas has produced new guidance on helping employers manage employees who may be suffering from poor mental health. This is particularly timely as the focus of the campaign this year is mental health in the workplace. Here, we take a look at the importance of the manager's role.

### Managers require a combination of qualities

- Acas earmarks the role of the manager as pivotal when supporting employee wellbeing;
- Managers should be approachable and encourage their employees to talk to them if they are experiencing difficulty.

### Opening up a dialogue

- There are certain signs which could alert a manager to the fact that an employee may be struggling with their mental health, for example, changes in usual behaviour or an increase in sickness absence;
- Employees may be reluctant to start a conversation with their manager about a mental health problem so the guidance suggests managers taking the lead and arranging a meeting as soon as possible to encourage the employee to open up;
- The meeting should be held in a private space and managers should allow the employee as much time as they need. Managers should be open-minded, try to find out what the cause of the problem is and be prepared for what the employee may bring to the conversation;
- Alternatively, if the employee is not prepared to talk, the manager should let the employee know that they may approach the manager at any time;
- If employees take sick leave, managers should agree a plan for contacting the employee whilst absent, and be positive, professional and supportive at all times. Consider a phased return to assist a smoother transition back to work;
- On their return, a return to work interview should be arranged to welcome them back and to ensure they feel supported and, from a practical point of view, to catch up on anything they have missed during their absence.

### Wider impact on team members

- Managers may need to increase their presence around the other team members who may be upset to hear their colleague is experiencing problems with their mental health. Regular catch ups should ensure any issues can be addressed.

### Potential disciplinary or capability procedures

- Even after adjustments have been made to the employee's role, formal procedures to deal with performance may be required;
- Manager's should consider further adjustments to the employee's current role or a move to lighter duties or another role entirely;
- Where the mental ill health amounts to a disability, the duty to make reasonable adjustments will apply.

### Croner Tips

**External assistance can often be vital for employers managing employees with mental ill health. An employee assistance programme which provides employees with access to trained counsellors can be invaluable. In addition, a referral for an occupational health assessment can provide employers with more details on how to support a particular employee's needs.**

The content of this briefing is correct at the time of publishing.

**Please contact the 24 Hour Advice Service for advice on your specific situation before acting on the information in this article**