

GUIDE FOR MANAGERS:

Wellbeing Plan of Action (WPAs)



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Introduction

The focus on managing sickness absence has shifted to a proactive approach focusing upon prevention. A crucial element within this changed approach is through organisations promoting mental health and wellbeing and improving employee engagement.

In your search for new ways to address staff wellbeing the Wellbeing Plan of Action (WPA) is a tool your organisation may wish to introduce as it supports and aids employees to manage their workplace mental health and wellbeing.

A word about Wellbeing Plan of Action (WPA) and confidentiality

A WPA should be held confidentially between manager and employee in line with your company's Data protection policy and procedure. The employee must be made fully aware of how the information will be used, and therefore only providing information which they are happy to share.

If the employee is filling out a WPA as a result of being unwell, you may ask whether they would consent for a copy of it to be held with HR along with any other information about their mental health and/or wellbeing, in the same way as any Occupational Health report or a Return to Work plan.

In order to fulfil your employer duty of care to keep your employees and workforce safe at work, you will be obliged to break confidentiality if the employee is experiencing a crisis and they should be made aware of this fact in the event it becomes necessary i.e. if you become aware that someone is at serious risk of harm, whether this is the employee or someone else, you should call the emergency service.

Who this guide is for

This guide is designed as a helpful starting point for HR professionals and line managers in supporting their team members with their mental health and wellbeing at work.

What is a WPA?

Stress is something which we will all experience at different times in our lives. It will occur when we perceive that we are experiencing levels of pressure that we find difficult to cope with (i.e. either too much or too little pressure). A certain level of pressure, or challenge, is necessary to enable us to get

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the most out of life, but pressure should not be confused with stress. Stress, if mismanaged, can cause both mental and physical illness.

Given the growing importance organisations/employers are placing upon managing employee mental health, wellbeing and employee engagement, the WPA (adapted from Mary Ellen Copeland's Wellness Recovery Action Plan® (WRAP®): offers an evidence-based process for individuals to manage their mental health.

The WPA offers a personal and practical tool which helps to identify:

- What keeps the individual well at work
- What causes the individual to become unwell
- The support the individual would like to receive from their line manager and their employer (the organisation) to boost the individual's wellbeing or support them through a work challenge scenario' through to recovery

How a WPA benefits line managers

- As a manager, encouraging your team to develop their personalised WPA provides for them to have ownership of identifying the root causes and developing the practical steps needed to help them stay mentally well at work, maintain good wellbeing and/or manage a mental health problem.
- It opens up communication lines between you and your team member, to help you better understand their needs and experiences and be in a more positive and proactive position to better support their wellbeing.
- The WPA provides a good tool for starting 'that conversation' with an employee.

How a WPA benefits your organisation as the employer WPA can be introduced to new employees as part of their induction/on boarding process. This sends a very clear message and demonstrates the organisation's commitment to employee wellbeing through its' proactive management of the workforce in mental health and wellbeing.

- It can lead to better/improved performance, greater productivity, increase job satisfaction and enhance employee engagement.

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- WPA can also be used as part of the return to work process, when someone has been absent from work due to a mental health or wellbeing problem, as the WPA provides a structure for conversations around what support will help and what reasonable adjustments need to be considered.

How a WPA benefits your employees




By providing your employees with the opportunity to complete their WPA, they can plan in advance and gain an awareness of what works and what doesn't work for them

- Their WPA can help them to develop approaches which support their mental health and wellbeing, leading to a reduced likelihood of problems such as work-related stress occurring.
- By regularly reviewing the WPA agreed, practical steps, the employee will be better supported.
- The WPA remains flexible to adapt and be able to reflect their experiences or new approaches they find helpful.
- The employee is encouraged to 'own the process and their WPA' and feel empowered to be in control.

What a WPA should ideally cover

	Approaches the employee can adopt to support their mental health and wellbeing
	Early warning signs to look out for in a decline in their mental health and wellbeing
	Workplace triggers which have the potential to impact upon their mental health and wellbeing (i.e. refer to the HSE 6 key areas (factors))
	Self-assess the potential for any impact of poor mental health or wellbeing on their performance
	Identify any support they need from you as their line manager and 'have that discussion'
	Identify actions and positive steps you will both take if they are experiencing stress or poor mental health or wellbeing

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|  | Identify any work adjustments they would like the employee to consider |
|  | Identify anything else they feel would be useful in supporting their mental health or wellbeing |
|  | Agree and diarise time to review the WPA and any support measures which are in place |






How to support your employees to develop their WPA

As the employee's line manager, you are a key support in encouraging your employees to create their WPA.

You could start to encourage them to do this by:

- Providing your employees with a copy of our **Guide For Managers: Wellbeing Plan of Action**
- Diarising time to go through what a WPA is and to explain its' benefits and the company's commitment to mental health and wellbeing
- Asking if they would like you to work with them in their first try at completing their WPA
- **Remember:** Their WPA should be written and owned by them, expressing their personal experience, needs and personal choices, so do not be tempted to complete the WPA for them!
- Your role as their line manager is to discuss with them their plan and for you to provide support, including guidance on what is possible for any reasonable adjustments.
- Avoid influencing them by offering your own advice or suggestions.

In your discussion with the employee, ask them to think about:

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|  | Describing what a work environment which promotes good mental health and wellbeing looks like for them |
|  | What helps maintain their mental health and wellbeing |
|  | What they are like when they are feeling well and fulfilled at work |
|  | Whether they've experienced similar challenges in the past and how they addressed these |
|  | What coping strategies they already use for dealing with poor mental health and/or wellbeing and how these have been effective |

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Identify what in the past hasn't worked for them, why they think this might be and to consider whether the outcome would remain the same



Where appropriate or relevant, it's helpful to encourage your employee to seek advice from a health professional involved in their care, such as a GP or Occupational Health expert, on what they might wish to include in their WPA. E.g. Are there any workplace reasonable adjustments required?

Reasonable adjustments and the Equality Act 2010

After completing a WPA, you may with the employee have identified some reasonable adjustments are required.

A reasonable adjustment is an alteration which an employer makes which enables an employee to continue with their duties without being at a disadvantage compared to others.

Under the Equality Act 2010, there is a legal duty on employers to make reasonable adjustments for employees with a disability.

Whether a mental health problem is defined as a disability or not, employers are encouraged to make adjustments for employees who are experiencing mental health problems.

The types of reasonable adjustments often made for employees experiencing a mental health problem depends on the symptoms being experienced by the individual.

The reasonable adjustments should be bespoke to meet their needs.

It also depends on the organisation's resources, so it's important line managers are aware of what their organisation is able to provide and what is defined as 'reasonable' when entering into a conversation. This about being clear on this to help manage expectations and guide decision-making.

Adjustments may include:**Flexibility with working patterns**

- Flexible working hours, for example, allowing a person who has difficulty travelling in crowded trains to start early and finish early in order to avoid the rush hour
- Allowing someone who is starting or reducing medication to have a day off if they are experiencing side effects, such as drowsiness
- Allowing someone to take time out of the office when they became particularly anxious
- Enabling a person to arrange their hours to permit them to attend a weekly therapy session
- Enabling part-time working or job-share arrangements for someone who was unable to work full-time

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- Enabling someone to arrange their annual leave so that they have regularly spaced breaks throughout the year
- Facilitating that someone who finds the pressure of large meetings very difficult can arrange to have at least 15 minutes between meetings
- A gradual (phased) return to work after periods of sickness absence
- Working from home, reduction in hours or relief from some responsibilities to prevent the person having to take time off sick during fluctuations in their condition

Support from their line manager

- Providing written instructions for someone whose anxiety affects their memory
- Providing workload support and help with prioritising work
- Agreeing the type of work they can do whilst they are on a phased return to work
- Increasing the frequency of catch-ups or 1-to-1's

Changes to the physical environment

- Arranging for someone who found the distractions of an open-plan office detracted from their work performance to have a desk in a quieter area
- Moving a person's workstation so that they are not placed in very busy areas or with their back to the door
- Allowing for increased personal space
- Providing a quiet space for breaks away from the main workspace

Other types of support

- Where there are working relationship difficulties between colleagues, arranging workplace mediation

Supporting employee wellbeing

Being the role model

Your role and 'visual and verbal' action as a line manager on a day-to-day is key to the mental wellbeing of your employees.

- Being open to receiving feedback on your management and communication style and being aware of how you come across to others is a crucial and integral part of being an effective and good manager. It creates a productive, healthy, motivated and engaged workforce.
- Weave wellbeing and the company's approach and support for mental health into your regular meetings (both formal and informal) with those you manage.

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- Where you are aware of problems in working relationships discuss with HR whether mediation would be an appropriate route to encourage positive working relationships between colleagues.
- Be consistent, supportive, approachable and responsive, ensuring that you are available for regular work-related conversations and increasing the frequency of supervision or catch-up time with any employee who requires this.
- Develop and create the right workplace culture by proactively supporting employees to monitor and manage their workload and encourage healthy working hours and a positive work/life balance.
- Ensure deadlines given for work are reasonable, that work and targets are clearly defined and employees understand their role in the bigger picture.

Supporting an employee who has a mental health problem at work

- If an employee discloses their mental health problem to you, you may wish to read up on it a little so that you have a basic understanding of what they might be experiencing.
- Do remember it's not your role as their line manager to give a medical diagnosis or medical advice.
- It is your role not to make assumptions about the employee.
- Focus on what you as their line manager can do to support the employee and encourage them to be open about problems they are experiencing.
- Ensure confidentiality and provide an appropriate place for confidential conversations.
- Discuss with the employee whether they would like you to accompany them to HR and/or OCH if this route is appropriate.
- When talking about mental health, actively listen
- Be positive. Focus on what the employee can do, rather than what they feel they cannot. Are there training, mentoring or coaching requirements if there are skills gaps?
- Recognise and praise good work and commitment, provide regular opportunities to discuss, review and reflect on positive achievements as this helps to build positive self-esteem
- Work together, involve relevant staff (i.e. HR, OCH etc.) in dialogue and decision-making and in finding solutions to working arrangements as much as possible.
- Support the employee to develop personal resilience and coping strategies

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- Encourage the employee to complete their WPA.

Definitions

Mental Health

- Everyone has mental health and like physical health, it fluctuates along a scale
- Mental health varies in individuals from good mental wellbeing to having mental health problems

Mental Wellbeing

- Mental wellbeing is the ability to cope with the day to day stresses of life, work productively and interact positively with others
- It is the experience of health, happiness, and prosperity. It includes having a sense of meaning or purpose, and ability to manage stress.
- Individuals with good mental wellbeing are able to:
 - Feel and express a range of emotions
 - Feel engaged with the work in general
 - Feel positive self esteem
 - Cope with the stresses of everyday life
 - In times of change and/or uncertainty, they adapt well

Poor Mental Health

- Poor mental health is a state of low mental wellbeing where an individual is unable to cope with the day-to-day pressures of life, work productively or interact positively with others

Mental Health Problems

- We all have times when we struggle with our mental health but a mental health problem is generally defined as when poor mental health continues for a prolonged period
- There may or may not be a diagnosis of a specific condition from a doctor

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- Mental health problems affect around 1 in 4 people in any given year

Common Mental Health Problems

These include anxiety, depression, phobias and obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) and symptoms can range from the comparatively mild to the very severe.

Mental Health and COVID-19

We do not yet know exactly what the mental health impacts of COVID-19 will be. There are many factors to consider including the impact of the lockdown and ongoing restrictions such as social distancing and self-isolation. Some employees will be fearful about contracting Covid-19, others will be anxious about family and friends. Some will have suffered bereavements during this time, often without the chance to say their 'goodbye' or attend funerals.

There will also be fears about job security, being placed on furlough or the potential to lose their job, returning to the workplace (including using public transport for commuting) and financial concerns. Some employees are working longer or more irregular hours and many are combining work with home-schooling and other family responsibilities, leading to a more challenging than usually experienced work-life balance.

Early research into the health impacts of lockdown including findings of fatigue, musculoskeletal conditions, poor work life balance, reduced exercise and increased alcohol consumption. In relation to mental health specifically, employees have been reporting reduced motivation, loss of purpose and motivation, anxiety and isolation through the lockdown requirements.

Evidence from previous quarantine situations, prior to the current pandemic, suggests that there are long lasting effects on mental health. These symptoms ranged from irritability and anger to depression and post-traumatic stress symptoms.

Work-related stress

Work-related stress is defined by the Health and Safety Executive as “the adverse reaction that people have to excessive pressures or other types of demand placed on them at work.”

The HSE has identified six key areas (known as 'risk factors') that can be causes of work related stress. Other factors may include career development: the extent to which the organisation provides opportunities for

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promotion, skills development and job security, as well as the work–home interface: the extent to which individuals are able to balance the demands of work and home.



Understanding ‘stress’ and what “stress” really means

Stress is not a medical diagnosis, but severe stress that continues for a long time may lead to a diagnosis of depression or anxiety, or more severe mental health problems.

Stress is something which we will all experience at different times in our lives. It will occur when we perceive that we are experiencing levels of pressure that we find difficult to cope with (i.e. either too much or too little pressure). A certain level of pressure, or challenge, is necessary to enable us to get the most out of life, but pressure should not be confused with stress. Stress, if mismanaged, can cause both mental and physical illness.

Some common causes of stress

- Being bullied or harassed.
- Bereavement
- Boredom
- Change in working arrangements
- Financial worries
- Home/work conflicts
- Loneliness
- Moving house

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- Covid-19
- Excessive workload
- Relationship problems
- Serious illness of a loved one

Some common effects of stress

- Chest pains
- Depression
- Headaches/migraine
- High levels of anxiety
- Inability to concentrate
- Being more prone to accidents
- Low self-esteem
- Panic attacks
- Relationship problems
- Stomach problems