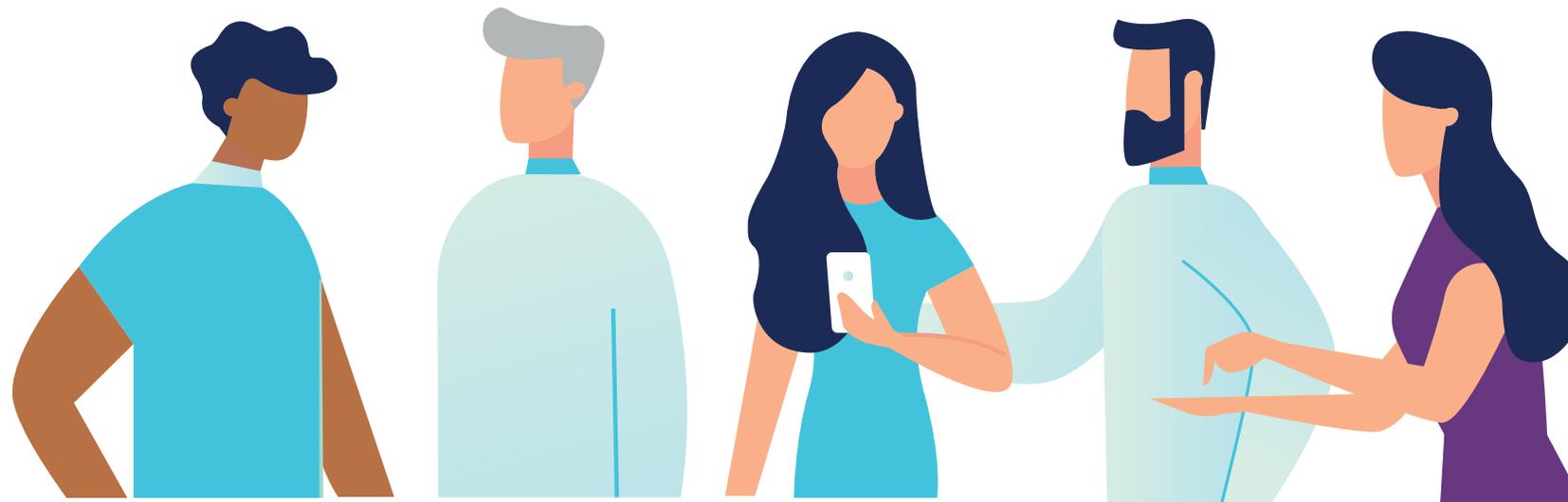


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YEAR"



WELLNESS ACTION PLANS A 10-STEP GUIDE FOR EMPLOYERS

GET IN TOUCH TO FIND OUT HOW WE CAN HELP...

This guide will provide you with the information needed to improve wellbeing or support recovery in the workplace. Learn about why a Wellness Action Plan (WAP) is important and what should be included.



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WELCOME TO THE REALITY HR WAP GUIDE FOR EMPLOYERS

Of all the issues facing employers today, mental health in the workplace is one of the most pressing. It's not an exaggeration to say that the UK is experiencing a workplace mental health crisis.

The government's Thriving at Work report, issued in 2018, revealed that 14.1% of workers consider themselves to have a mental health problem – a figure that rises to 26.9% among under-18s. Of those, a staggering 89% said their problems had affected their working life.

Despite those huge numbers, just 13% of employees in a survey carried out by the charity Time to Change said they would be comfortable talking about mental illness at work.

It's not just about "looking after" staff – addressing mental health and wellbeing makes business sense too. An estimated 70 million working days are lost to mental health issues in the UK each year, while employers suffer increased staff turnover, sickness absence, decreased motivation, and lost productivity.

Change is crucially important – employers must be equipped with the tools to communicate with their staff about mental health issues, and to deal with them when they arise. One of the most effective tools for achieving this is a Wellness Action Plan (WAP). A well-developed and implemented plan can not only help both employer and employee cope with the effects of mental health problems, but in some cases prevent them having a detrimental effect in the first place.

At Reality HR we are specialists in helping employers understand and manage mental health and wellbeing among their employees. This simple 10-step guide is designed to walk managers through the process of developing a WAP that has a meaningful impact on individuals and the workplace as a whole. We hope you find it useful.

Sally-Ann Hall-Jones
CEO | REALITY HR

WHAT IS A WELLNESS ACTION PLAN (WAP)?

A Wellness Action Plan is a document that every employee – whether they have a mental health problem or not – can use to help them and their managers identify what keeps them well at work.

It's important that these documents are highly personalised – there will be as many WAPs as there are people, and no one approach fits all. In the event of a mental health problem, the WAP can help managers understand what is required from them to increase wellbeing or support the individual through the recovery process.

Encouraging your staff to actively participate in creating their WAP helps manage expectations on both sides while opening a meaningful conversation between you and team members.

A WAP may help managers identify problems before they escalate, or to tackle them when they appear. In any case employees that feel valued and nurtured as individuals are more likely to be loyal and to be productive, good performers and are less likely to move on. Over the coming pages, we will walk you through the process of creating and implementing a WAP, for the benefit of your team members and your business alike.



FIRST STEP

HAVE THE CONVERSATION AT THE RIGHT TIME – BUT DO HAVE IT.

A WAP is not a reactive document – trying to put one in place once a team member has shown signs of a mental health issue is not the right time. Instead, make a plan to draw up a WAP for every existing employee – and make this part of the induction process for future employees. Have the discussion and develop the plan when your team member is in a period of good health and able to think carefully about what is included.

Avoid starting the conversation during a time when a person is busy or under stress – and if there are already signs of wellbeing issues then deal with the immediate problem first.

There may be times in the working year when it feels “right” to have the discussion – perhaps at the start of the year, or alongside a scheduled appraisal, or during quieter periods such as the summer holidays. Mental Health Awareness Week takes place in May and may be an ideal time to open a dialogue.

SECOND STEP

IF THEY DON'T TRUST YOU, THEY WON'T TALK TO YOU.

Once you are sitting down with your employee, ensure that they are aware of the steps your business takes to encourage a positive, trusting relationship between managers and team members.

It is important that individuals feel they work in a culture that is supportive and non-judgmental and where they can raise concerns or problems confidentially. Without this trust, your team will not feel able to discuss sensitive issues with you, and you risk damage to their wellbeing and losing them to other organisations where they feel more comfortable and understood.

Make sure that the employee understands what is expected of them and what they can expect in return. Do they know about regular breaks they are entitled to? Do they have a clear and realistic job description? Do they understand how success is measured and rewarded? Do they know who they can speak to if they need support?

THIRD STEP

IDENTIFY WHAT THE ISSUES ARE.

To help someone with their problems, you first need to know what triggers those issues and – importantly – how you can minimise them. Your team member may be experiencing problems in their personal life and, while you may not be able to change what's happening at home, it does help to demonstrate that you understand.

If the triggers are work-related, or worsened by work-related issues, ask how you could help ease the stress. Work patterns, pressure from line managers, communication styles and relationships between colleagues can all negatively affect wellbeing. Please be aware that triggers may be different for each person.

Sometimes change can be as simple as changing a shift pattern to avoid the team member working the same hours as a colleague they don't get on with, or helping them to avoid a stressful commute. Until you know what the problem is, you can't help solve it.

FOURTH STEP

KNOW THE SIGNS.

Everyone reacts to stress and mental health problems differently. When drawing up your WAP, ask how these issues might manifest themselves – this will help you spot the signs later.

Some people are very emotionally expressive, so you can spot problems early. Others will tend to bottle things up or withdraw, so that problems are less easy to notice. Others may make more mistakes than usual, lose or gain weight, take more time off or work longer hours while being less productive.

If you can spot the signs, you can often deal with it before it progresses - knowing your employees well is half the battle.

Consider how you might approach the topic and instead of asking “are you okay?” which is easy for someone to ignore, perhaps use the phrasing “I have noticed.....” the individual is more likely to engage this way and open up.

FIFTH STEP

WHO SHOULD YOU CALL?

Agree with your employee who should be contacted if there are concerns. This should be led by the employee – and sometimes it's just as important to establish who should not be contacted.

The appropriate person may not be the Next of Kin recorded in their personnel file - it could be a friend, family member, GP or counsellor who supports them with their health and wellbeing, or a mental health crisis team if the individual is already receiving that level of support.

Ensure it's clear as to when you would need to inform their preferred contact.

Make sure that information is shared appropriately with anyone who needs it – line managers, other senior staff, any on-site medical staff and so on. Ensuring that you know the right person for each situation is crucial to maintaining trust between you and your employee.



SIXTH STEP

AGREE HOW TO ACT.

Agree with your employee what the best way to help would be in the event of a problem. Remember that there's no one-size-fits-all approach. Some people will have been through a problem or crisis before and will know what helps them to get through it.

If the employee is struggling the steps may be:

- Give them time away from work (perhaps to sort out some personal issues, or to "reset" or do what they need to do to help manage their current feelings)
- Take them away from work to a private place to chat and support
- Remove immediate work pressures, or particular tasks that may not be easy to cope with in times of poor mental health

For more serious, immediate crises, agree what should happen if you become seriously concerned about their wellbeing. Who should you contact? Should they be taken to A&E, or is there a support worker or mental health crisis team available to them?



SEVENTH STEP

AGREE HOW TO MANAGE ABSENCE.

Set expectations now and understand what will and will not be possible in terms of contact. The usual requirement to report absence may not be possible for some people when experiencing a mental health issue. Understanding and agreeing this will ensure that everyone stays focused on supporting recovery and not aggravating the illness in any way. Managers need to know in advance that an employee who doesn't make contact is not necessarily "AWOL" and needing to be disciplined, but that it is actually a symptom of their illness.

It's important to recognise that sometimes with mental health conditions unwanted contact from work may delay recovery but at the same time, you as their employer will need to understand what is happening so you can cover their absence appropriately.

Keep in mind that it might be appropriate for a tailored and phased return to work plan to help ease them back into the workplace.



EIGHTH STEP

ESTABLISH WHO SHOULD KNOW WHAT.

This is about agreeing who, within the workplace, should or should not know about the individual's health issues. It is up to the employee themselves to discuss this if they wish to. Keep this information strictly confidential – don't share it, even with your own manager, unless there is a specific justification for doing so.

As part of the WAP it should be discussed who should be made aware of the potential for issues arising and what should be said.

If there is a period of absence, then it should be agreed what should be told to the wider team, if anything.

If the individual is happy for their wider team to know what is happening, support the team to act in an appropriate supportive manner and not avoid the individual for fear of getting it wrong.



NINTH STEP

DISCUSS THE SUPPORT THAT IS AVAILABLE.

Sometimes employees will not be aware of the support that is on hand – or perhaps they only find out when there is a problem and it is too late. Make sure they have details of the options – is there an employee assistance programme they can access support and counselling through? Are they able to contact a company funded doctor or nurse?

Is there a health cash plan that will enable employees to seek treatment and support outside of work rather than waiting for availability from their doctor or hospital?

This information should be documented – perhaps on a leaflet or card that they can hold on to until they need it.

It's worthwhile ensuring the details of Samaritans are available on: 116 123.



TENTH STEP

REVIEW AND NURTURE.

A WAP should be a living document – not just something that is produced and then forgotten.

Regularly review the wellness action plan, especially after any specific absence or episode, to ensure it is working as it should.

Check at intervals to ensure it still provides the manager and individual with the comfort and confidence of knowing what will happen if health and wellbeing issues do occur.

As a business, ensure that WAPs and the reasons for them are fully understood by managers and staff. Like appraisals and performance reviews, they should form part of the working culture.

THIS IS YOUR WAP TEMPLATE

This template is ideal for implementation with all of your employees showing your commitment to their health and wellbeing. Please be mindful that there may be some individual cases where you will need to go into more detail outside of this template. Please contact us for support with this if you need to.

Here at [INSERT YOUR COMPANY NAME] we recognise the importance of staff wellbeing and have developed a Wellness Action Plan. This plan is optional, confidential and aims to help support your mental health and wellbeing at work. We would like to regularly review this form with you and help provide any support that we can to address any health needs.

1. What do you think helps you stay mentally healthy at work?

For example: taking a lunch break, talking to colleagues, keeping lists of things to do, team building exercises.

2. Do you recognise any situations at work that you think might trigger poor mental health for you?

For example: conflict, change, poor processes, exclusion from decision making, poor communication, tight deadlines.

3. Do you have any mechanisms that you use already to manage stress?

Examples could be: relaxation techniques, exercising, talking to someone

4. Is there anything you think your manager could do to help support you in staying mentally healthy whilst at work? Consider if you have any preferences around your working style.

For example: clear communication, regular feedback, flexible working, a need for quiet time, a preference for email contact etc.

5. If you start to feel mentally unwell – are there any warning signs that you think we may notice?

Examples could be: withdrawing from colleagues, changes in normal working patterns

6. If we notice any early warning signs what would you like us to do?

For example: talk to you about it or contact someone you have asked us to contact? Please include contact details of that person if you wish.

7. What steps do you think you can take if you start to feel unwell and is there anything we can do to support this?

For example: take a break, go for a walk, speak to your manager.

8. Is there anything else you would like to share?

Thank you for taking the time to complete this form. Please talk to us at any time that you need to and know that we are fully invested in supporting your wellbeing. We will continue to review this form together.

Employee Name:

Line Manager Name:

Date:

Date for next review:

Employee Signature:

Line Manager Signature:



Supporting hundreds of young people, parents and professionals each year, YPI is the leading youth counselling charity in Basingstoke. We provide Mental Health and emotional support to young people aged 11 to 25 years old and parents of all ages through a range of interventions including 1-to-1 counselling sessions, group work and psycho-educational activities. We pride ourselves on being a locally run charity with a strong community focus.

<http://www.ypicounselling.co.uk>

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