

## Model mental health policy

Everyone has ‘mental health’, just as everyone has physical health, and we all need to take care of our mental health and wellbeing in the same way as we look after our physical health.

Mental health problems are far more widespread than is commonly assumed. The Department of Health estimates that one in four of us will experience mental health problems at some stage in our working lives.

The following model policy can be used in the workplace to help support workers with mental health problems and to promote mental health and wellbeing for all staff.

Please note that the text in square brackets ***[…]*** indicates where you need to complete information specific to your workplace, or elseare notes for you to consider in relation to your negotiations.

For help in drafting and negotiating a mental health agreement, contact your regional organiser.

**More information:**

UNISON’s ‘Bargaining on mental health policies: a practical guide for UNISON branches’ <https://shop.unison.site/product/bargaining-on-mental-health-policies-a-practical-guide-for-unison-branches/> (stock code 3927)

### Policy statement

***[Name of employer]*** is committed to creating a healthy and safe working environment for all its workforce, and one that is supportive of employees experiencing mental health problems.

***[Name of employer]*** recognises that good mental health is fundamental to general wellbeing and acknowledges the benefits in morale and productivity in the workplace, of supporting employees to be able to achieve healthy working lives.

***[Name of employer]*** recognises that mental health problems can be triggered by factors both internal and external to the workplace.

***[Name of employer]*** recognises that mental health impairments, which have a substantial and long-term adverse effect on an individual’s ability to carry out day-to-day activities, are likely to make the staff member a disabled person under the Equality Act 2010[[1]](#footnote-1).

In accordance with equality legislation, ***[name of employer]*** will work actively to eliminate discrimination against and harassment of disabled people, promote positive attitudes to disabled people and encourage disabled people to participate in public life.

***[Name of employer]*** believes that any form of harassment, bullying, victimisation, or intimidation is unacceptable behaviour, undermines the dignity of an individual, is morally wrong and has a detrimental effect on the provision and delivery of services. This includes harassment and bullying related to disability and an individual’s mental health problems. For this reason, it will not be tolerated.

***[Name of employer]*** recognises that bullying and harassment around mental health problems may include:

1. Making public the nature of the person’s mental health problem without consent
2. Using offensive and discriminatory language to describe a person or their mental health problem
3. Spreading malicious rumours about the person’s mental health problem or their behaviours
4. Belittling, ridiculing or undermining the person due to their mental health problem
5. Excluding the person from workplace or social activities.

Harassment and bullying will be treated as disciplinary offences and appropriate disciplinary action, including warnings, compulsory transfers (without protection of wages or salary), and dismissal for serious offences, may be taken against any employee who violates the bullying and harassment ***[or dignity at work]*** policy ***[and other relevant policies]*** found at ***[provide a link.]***

***[Name of employer]*** also recognises that it has a responsibility to protect employees from bullying or harassment at work by members of the public and contractors. All staff have the right to be treated with respect by the public they provide services to or work with.

**More information from UNISON for reps and branches:**

‘Bargaining for equality and diversity: a trade union priority’ at [www.unison.org.uk/content/uploads/2020/03/Bargaining-for-equality-and-diversity-guide-and-model-policy.pdf](http://www.unison.org.uk/content/uploads/2020/03/Bargaining-for-equality-and-diversity-guide-and-model-policy.pdf)

‘Harassment at work’ [www.unison.org.uk/content/uploads/2016/12/24159.pdf](http://www.unison.org.uk/content/uploads/2016/12/24159.pdf)

‘Tackling bullying at work: a UNISON guide for safety reps’ [www.unison.org.uk/content/uploads/2016/10/Bullying20at20work.pdf](https://www.unison.org.uk/content/uploads/2016/10/Bullying20at20work.pdf)

‘Proving disability and reasonable adjustments’

[www.unison.org.uk/content/uploads/2019/02/25362.pdf](https://www.unison.org.uk/content/uploads/2019/02/25362.pdf) ]

### Aim of the policy

The aim of this policy is to:

* promote mental health and wellbeing for all staff
* promote an open and supportive culture where mental health problems can be raised and dealt with effectively
* communicate and promote ***[name of employer]***’s commitment to identifying and tackling organisational issues that negatively impact on mental health
* ensure appropriate risk assessments are regularly undertaken to prevent, identify and control sources of work-related stress and ensure that the outcomes of risk assessments are reported and acted upon
* provide employees experiencing mental health problems with access to professional assistance and support
* ensure that no worker, either current or potential, is discriminated against either directly or indirectly because of their mental health problem
* reduce barriers to employment for disabled people with mental health problems, and consider and accommodate all reasonable adjustment needs.

### Scope of policy

This policy applies to all staff who are employed by ***[name of employer]*** on and off the premises, including those working away from their main office or normal place of work and regardless of their type of contract ***[this could be negotiated in line with good practice employers].***

This policy is supported by and developed with the trade unions representing the employees.

### Definitions

The [World Health Organisation](https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/mental-health-strengthening-our-response) (WHO) defines **mental health** as “a state of **mental well-being** that enables people to cope with the stresses of life, realise their abilities, learn well and work well, and contribute to their community. It is an integral component of health and well-being that underpins our individual and collective abilities to make decisions, build relationships and shape the world we live in. Mental health is a basic human right. And it is crucial to personal, community and socio-economic development.”

**Mental health problems** vary markedly from clinically diagnosed conditions such as schizophrenia or borderline personality disorder through to depression and general anxiety disorder (for a full range of mental health problems, search: ‘types of mental health problems’ on the Mind website [www.mind.org.uk](http://www.mind.org.uk)). It is important to recognise that many people with mental health problems will never have had a formal diagnosis.

**Stress** is defined by the [Health and Safety Executive (HSE)](https://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/overview.htm) as “the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressures or other types of demand placed on them.”

Stress isn’t a mental health problem in itself, but it is closely linked to mental health as it can cause mental health problems such as anxiety and depression or make existing problems worse, while mental health problems can in turn cause stress.

Therefore, the control of stress is a crucial component in creating a working environment that minimises the incidence of mental health problems.

### Reducing work-related stress and anxiety

***[Name of employer]*** recognises that workplace stress is a health and safety issue and acknowledges the importance of identifying and reducing workplace stressors.

***[Name of employer]*** will use the [HSE Stress Management Standards](https://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/standards/index.htm) to help identify all workplace stressors and conduct risk assessments to eliminate stress or control the risks from stress. These risk assessments will be regularly reviewed.

***[Name of employer]*** will consult with trade union safety representatives on all proposed action relating to the prevention of workplace stress and they will be meaningfully involved in the risk assessment process.

Further details can also be found in ***[name of employer]***’s health and safety policy found at ***[provide a link***.]

**More information from UNISON for reps and branches:**

‘Guarding against stress: a toolkit for success’ [www.unison.org.uk/content/uploads/2017/10/24660.pdf](http://www.unison.org.uk/content/uploads/2017/10/24660.pdf)

‘Stress at work guide: a guide for UNISON safety reps’ [www.unison.org.uk/content/uploads/2014/10/On-line-Catalogue227032.pdf](http://www.unison.org.uk/content/uploads/2014/10/On-line-Catalogue227032.pdf)

***[Name of employer]*** recognises that workload can influence mental health, and that working in excess of contracted hours can impact on the wellbeing of staff.

***[Name of employer]*** is committed to:

* monitoring working hours arrangements to always ensure compliance with Working Time Regulations in terms of limits on working time, gaps between start and finish times, rest breaks and annual leave
* using the [Health and Safety Executive Indicator Tool](https://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/assets/docs/indicatortool.pdf) to identify parts of the organisation where workload pressures are excessive and take action to reduce workload
* training managers to identify where workloads are exerting excessive pressures, take action to reduce or reallocate workloads, as well as work with staff in prioritising demands as part of workload management
* encouraging staff to raise workload concerns, investigate those concerns and take appropriate action
* encouraging staff to take their full annual leave and planning of workloads to maximise the opportunity to take leave.

Further details can be found in ***[name of employer]***’s workload agreement found at ***[provide a link. The workload agreement should also contain full details of the procedure including the appeal process, for staff to raise workload concerns outside of their immediate line manager*** ***without immediately entering into an official grievance procedure.]***

**More information from UNISON for reps and branches:**

‘Bargaining on workload’ [www.unison.org.uk/negotiating-workload-agreement-employer/](http://www.unison.org.uk/negotiating-workload-agreement-employer/)

***[Name of employer]*** recognises that the uncertainty created by organisational change can greatly aggravate stress and lead to a greater incidence of mental health problems amongst staff.

***[Name of employer]*** is committed to

* consulting with trade union safety representatives on any changes to work practices or work design that could precipitate stress
* conducting change through fair and consistent procedures that put communication with staff, listening to staff concerns and addressing staff concerns through negotiation with trade union representatives at the heart of the process
* undertaking equality impact assessments of any proposed large-scale organisational change that includes consideration of the potential impact on the mental health of staff
* monitoring consequences of change including assessing signs of increased pressures on staff and the need for appropriate remedial action in order to protect staff health and safety, to guard against a deterioration in staff morale and motivation, and to maintain standards of service.

Further details can also be found in ***[name of employer]***’s organisational change agreement found at ***[provide a link.]***

**More information from UNISON for reps and branches:**

‘Bargaining on workforce reorganisation’ [www.unison.org.uk/content/uploads/2021/09/Bargaining-on-workforce-reorganisation-v2.pdf](http://www.unison.org.uk/content/uploads/2021/09/Bargaining-on-workforce-reorganisation-v2.pdf)

### Promoting mental health and wellbeing

All staff are encouraged to develop their own [wellness action plans](https://www.mind.org.uk/workplace/mental-health-at-work/taking-care-of-yourself/guide-to-wellness-action-plans-employees/) to support their own mental health at work, and to discuss any aspects of this with their line manager and/or Occupational Health.

Research by the New Economics Foundation (NEF) has identified five key things we can all do in our everyday lives to improve our wellbeing:

Connect with other people:

* Staff are encouraged to connect with each other more by making an effort to speak to each other, rather than relying solely on emails or messaging.
* Line managers will use team meetings and team away days as opportunities for everyone to share experiences and get to know each other in an informal and relaxed way.

Be active:

* Staff are encouraged to participate in work sport, exercise and wellbeing activities (such as yoga classes, meditation sessions, lunchtime walking tours, football kick-abouts).
* Informal awareness-raising events open to all staff about physical and mental health and wellbeing, including healthy eating, will be made available for all staff.
* Staff are encouraged to walk up the stairs rather than use the lift.
* Staff are encouraged to cycle to work by registering with the workplace cycle to work scheme.

Keep learning:

* Staff are encouraged to participate in the workplace book club, quiz nights, language classes etc.
* The review of an employee’s participation in training and learning opportunities, related to both personal and career development, is a key aspect of all staff supervision and appraisals.

Take notice of the world around you:

* Staff are encouraged to participate in the online mindfulness sessions made available for all staff.
* Staff are encouraged to take time out away from their desks and office during their lunch break.
* All teams are encouraged to have a ‘clear the clutter’ day.

Do things for the community and other people:

* Staff are encouraged to participate in volunteering opportunities within their local community and will be granted paid leave to attend such opportunities where reasonable.
* Staff are encouraged to act as buddies and mentors to new employees and appropriate training will be provided.

***[Amend as appropriate for your workplace. These are just some suggestions of workplace activities that may promote wellbeing.]***

### Support for staff with mental health problems

**Reasonable adjustments**

Staff experiencing mental health problems are encouraged to inform their line manager and/or Occupational Health ***[amend as appropriate].*** While this is not obligatory, it is recommended that they do so to facilitate making reasonable adjustments.

Medical information about employees will be kept strictly confidential unless they agree to disclosure. Its use will conform to data protection regulations.

***[Name of employer]*** will consider and accommodate all reasonable adjustment needs of employees experiencing mental health problems, and will do so within a reasonable timetable as agreed with the staff member. All decisions made about making adjustments will be documented.

***[Name of employer]*** will consult a variety of sources of information on adjustments including:

* the employee
* the employee’s GP, such as through a ‘Fit for Work’ Statement
* any specialist mental health support that the individual may be receiving, such as a community psychiatric nurse or consultant psychiatrist occupational health services
* any occupational health service provided by ***[name of employer]***
* trade union reps, particularly through examples of adjustments made for other members or in other workplaces.

Further details can also be found in ***[name of employer]***’s equality and diversity policy ***[and other relevant policies]*** found at ***[provide a link.]***

**Paid disability leave**

Disability leave is time off work on full pay for a reason related to someone’s disability including mental health impairments.

It may be for a long or short period of time, and may or may not be preplanned. It is distinct from sick leave, and includes time when an employee is well but absent from work for a disability-related reason.

***[Name of employer]*** considers disability leave as a potential reasonable adjustment under the Equality Act 2010[[2]](#footnote-2) for disabled workers, including those with mental health impairments.

Disability leave will not be included for the purposes of assessing performance, promotion, attendance, selection for redundancy, and similar issues. To do so might discriminate against the disabled employee.

In rare situations it may become clear that the employee is not able to return to their previous job. In this case other reasonable adjustments, including redesigning the job, retraining and redeployment, will be considered. Where no other option is possible consideration will be given to ill health retirement.

Further details can also be found in ***[name of employer]***’s disability leave policyfound at ***[provide a link.]***

Time spent on disability leave is counted as continuous service for all contractual benefits, including accruing annual leave, sick leave, pension rights and bonus. It will be recorded separately from sickness absence and will not be used in relation to any disciplinary or capability procedures.

Abuse of the disability leave scheme is a serious disciplinary offence, and will be dealt with under the disciplinary procedure.

**More information from UNISON for reps and branches:**

‘Disability leave bargaining guide and model policy’ [**www.unison.org.uk/content/uploads/2019/10/25870.pdf**](http://www.unison.org.uk/content/uploads/2019/10/25870.pdf)

***[Name of employer]*** recognises that a mental health problem may impact on the ability of staff to conduct their role and will consider whether workplace adjustments would address any issues.

Staff will be provided with an opportunity to disclose mental health problems impacting their work early on within appraisal, capability and disciplinary procedures.

***[Name of employer]*** recognises that it may be appropriate for a trade union rep to act on behalf of a member experiencing a mental health problem to express their views and concerns effectively.

Further details can also be found in ***[name of employer]***’s appraisal, capability and disciplinary procedures ***[or equivalent]*** found at ***[provide a link.]***

**Flexible working**

***[Name of employer]*** provides a range of flexible working options for all staff ***[ideally from day one of service]***including:

* Part-time working (including on a temporary basis)
* Flexitime, to vary start and finish times from the standard around a core time period
* Job sharing
* Compressed hours, such as a nine-day fortnight
* Homeworking or hybrid working
* Job sharing.

***[Name of employer]*** recognises that flexible working can help reduce mental health problems arising in the workplace by providing greater control over work-life balance.

Further details can also be found in ***[name of employer]***’s flexible working policy ***[or equivalent]*** found at ***[provide a link.]***

**More information from UNISON for reps and branches:**

UNISON’s full guidance is available from UNISON’s online catalogue (stock no 0303) at: [www.unison.org.uk/catalogue](http://www.unison.org.uk/catalogue)

**Other support available**

***[Name of employer]*** provides a range of further support for employees experiencing mental health problems including:

* Paid leave for medical appointments

**More information from UNISON for reps and branches:**

‘Time off for medical appointments and health screening’ [www.unison.org.uk/content/uploads/2017/05/Medicalscreeningleave.pdf](http://www.unison.org.uk/content/uploads/2017/05/Medicalscreeningleave.pdf)

* Allowing additional time for workers to reach performance milestones
* Consideration of redeployment to a more suitable role
* Adjustments to the physical working environment such as minimising noise (eg by providing a private office, room dividers / partitions or a quiet space for breaks away from the main workspace) or moving the workstation, providing a light-box or situating nearer more natural light etc
* Providing support with workload or prioritising workload
* Allowing the individual to focus on a specific piece of work
* Providing a job coach
* Providing a buddy or mentor.

Confidential support is also available for individual employees from the **employee assistance programme** and this may include counselling if appropriate, in addition to practical information and advice. ***[include a link or signpost to further information.]***

### Responsibilities of managers – general principles

Line managers should ensure that all employees are aware of this policy and understand their own and the employer’s responsibilities. Training on issues affecting the mental health and wellbeing of staff, including health and safety of staff, reducing work-related stress and anxiety, support for staff with mental health problems, promoting mental wellbeing and good management practice will be provided to all managers.

Medical information about employees will be kept strictly confidential unless they agree to disclosure. Its use will conform to data protection regulations.

Line managers should grant paid leave of absence for the required period of time for medical appointments including psychotherapy and counselling appointments, and on-going treatment of long-term mental health conditions.

Line managers should conduct and implement recommendations of risks assessments focusing on reducing workplace stressors within their area of management.

Line managers should ensure there is good communication between themselves and staff, particularly where there are organisational and procedural changes.

With the support of HR, line managers should also:

* ensure staff are fully trained to discharge their duties
* ensure staff are provided with meaningful developmental opportunities
* monitor workloads to ensure that staff are not overloaded
* monitor working hours and overtime to ensure that staff are not overworking
* monitor holidays to ensure that staff are taking their full entitlement.

Line managers (with the support of HR or Occupational Health where requested) should discuss the support options available for employees experiencing mental health problems, and encourage them to access workplace counsellors or specialist agencies as required ***[amend as applicable for your workplace].***

Line managers will consider all requests for support sympathetically and will not discriminate against those employees who are experiencing mental health problems. All employees must be treated fairly and consistently. Employees need to be confident that they will not be treated less favourably if they disclose their mental health problem or take up any support available.

***[Name of employer]*** will take seriously and investigate any complaints of discrimination, harassment or victimisation, using the agreed procedures and respecting confidentiality.

A line manager’s failure to actively implement the bullying and harassment ***[or dignity at work]*** policy ***[and other relevant policies]*** found at ***[provide a link]*** within their area of responsibility or to fail to deal with harassment and bullying when they become aware of it, could constitute a breach of the policy and disciplinary action may be taken. Managers have an additional responsibility to be exemplars of acceptable behaviour.

### Responsibilities of all employees – general principles

***[Name of employer]*** encourage employees to inform their line manager and/or occupational health ***[if appropriate for your workplace]*** if they are experiencing mental health problems so that any necessary support can be arranged.

Employees should raise issues of concern regarding work-related stress with their trade union safety representative, line manager or Occupational Health.

***[Name of employer]*** encourages employees to speak to their GP when they are experiencing mental health problems and to get appropriate medical support. Whilst staff will be expected to endeavour to arrange any medical appointments including for psychotherapy and counselling, outside of normal working hours so as to minimise time off work, it is accepted that such appointments are not always available and paid leave will be granted.

All employees have a duty to assist in the creation of a safe working environment, where unacceptable behaviour including harassment, victimisation or discrimination is not tolerated.

Employees should report any instances of harassment, victimisation or discrimination experienced because of their mental health problem.

If an employee is found to have harassed, victimised or discriminated against another employee in relation to their mental health problem, then they will be seen as having committed a disciplinary offence, more details in the bullying and harassment ***[or dignity at work]*** policy ***[and other relevant policies]*** found at ***[provide a link.]***

### Information and training

All staff will be informed of this mental health policy. A copy of the policy will be made available to staff on the intranet, and a copy will be provided to new employees on induction.

In addition, training about mental health and wellbeing and about this policy will be given to all employees, including supervisors, managers and new staff. This will include information on what support is available for staff with mental health problems, and, for managers, on what their responsibilities are.

***[Name of employer]*** will provide training for all managers and supervisory staff in good management practices, and will provide adequate resources to enable managers to implement the company’s agreed stress management strategy.

Occupational health and safety staff will provide specialist advice and awareness training on stress, and train and support managers in implementing stress risk assessments.

This mental health policy will also be brought to the attention of contractors and agency staff who will be required to comply with the policy as part of their contract.

All staff, contractors and agency staff will be informed of the organisation’s bullying and harassment ***[or dignity at work]*** policy found at ***[provide a link.]***

### Trade union involvement

Consultation will take place with the recognised trade union on the implementation, development, monitoring and review of this policy.

Union reps will be given training equal to that of managers and supervisors and sufficient time to carry out their duties.

### Review and monitoring

***[Name of employer]*** will ensure that all new employees, supervisors and managers will receive induction on the policy.

Adequate resources will be made available to fulfil the aims of this policy. The policy will be widely promoted, and copies will be freely available and displayed in ***[name of employer]*’s** offices and through the staff intranet ***[amend as appropriate to your workplace].***

This policy will be reviewed jointly by unions and management, on a regular basis.

### Further information

Employee assistance programme – provide details of your workplace EAP

Mind - providing advice and support to empower anyone experiencing a mental health problem. They direct callers to sources of local support through its helpline available Monday to Friday, 9am to 6pm. Tel: 0300 123 3393 Email: info@mind.org.uk [www.mind.org.uk](https://www.mind.org.uk/)

Mind Cymru - Mind in Wales, working to ensure everyone in Wales has access to the mental health information, support and services they need. [www.mind.org.uk/about-us/mind-cymru/](http://www.mind.org.uk/about-us/mind-cymru/)

SANE - UK-wide mental health charity offering an advice line, 4.30-10.30pm every day of the year. Tel:0300 304 7000 [www.sane.org.uk](http://www.sane.org.uk)

Breathing Space - Scottish charity offering an advice line for anyone feeling low, anxious or depressed. Advice line available Monday-Thursday 6pm to 2am and Friday 6pm to Monday 6am. Tel: 0800 83 85 87 <http://breathingspace.scot>

Lifeline - the Northern Ireland crisis response helpline service for people who are experiencing distress or despair. Advice line available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Tel: 0808 808 8000 [www.lifelinehelpline.info](http://www.lifelinehelpline.info)

Samaritans - UK wide charity offering support for all forms of acute distress. The advice line is available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Tel: 116 123 [www.samaritans.org](http://www.samaritans.org)

[Better Health – Every Mind Matters](https://www.nhs.uk/oneyou/every-mind-matters/)  - a national campaign and digital platform with the aim of equipping people to take simple, early steps to look after their mental health, improve their mental wellbeing and support others.

[NHS.UK](https://www.nhs.uk/) - providing advice, tips and tools to help individuals make the best choices about their health and wellbeing.

### Signatories

This agreement is made between ***[name of the employer]*** and UNISON, a registered trade union.

This agreement comes into force on:

Date:………………………………..

This agreement will be reviewed on:

Date:………………………………..

SIGNED ……………………………. for **[name of the employer]**

Date ………………………………..

SIGNED …………………………….. for UNISON

Date ………………………………..

1. In Northern Ireland the relevant legislation is the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 1995 and subsequent amendments and supplementary laws [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. In Northern Ireland the relevant legislation is the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 1995 and subsequent amendments and supplementary laws [↑](#footnote-ref-2)