

Mental health awareness course

Workplace training

Enter



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Mental health awareness

We are used to seeking help if we are physically unwell, but what if we feel mentally or emotionally unwell? Just like looking after our bodies, there are many ways you can look after your mind and mental wellbeing too.

Given a world that seems to be in constant change, busy lifestyles and daily demands at work from deadlines, always-on technology and long hours, it's no surprise that stress can take its toll on your mind and your body. Physical and mental pressures can make your job stressful, so this course has been designed for those in work, especially if you support other colleagues or even manage people.

1 in 4 people experience a mental health problem each year in the UK¹, so if you're among them or know others who are, you're not alone. The good news is that due to increased awareness and acceptance, there are many ways to get support.

It makes business sense too. Workplace wellbeing and good management go hand in hand and there is strong evidence that workplaces with high levels of mental wellbeing are more productive. Addressing wellbeing at work increases productivity by as much as 12%².

What will I gain from this course?

Through a series of audio and text, this course will help you to:

- ✓ Understand what mental health really is and the symptoms of mental ill health
- ✓ Start having conversations about your own and others' mental health
- ✓ Take action to support yourself or colleagues with their mental health
- ✓ Know where to go for more information and support

We want to help create more inclusive working environments, where we can all maintain our mental wellbeing and colleagues are offered support if they become ill due to mental health related conditions. Workplaces should be a place where people thrive so that everyone can achieve their potential. This course and others in this series are designed to help you achieve that.

¹ McManus, S., Meltzer, H., Brugha, T. S., Bebbington, P. E., & Jenkins, R. (2009). Adult psychiatric morbidity in England, 2007: results of a household survey. The NHS Information Centre for health and social care.

² Mental Health Foundation. (2016). Added Value: Mental health as a workplace asset



How do I complete this course?

The learning is divided into three short modules, each accessed from the menu tab, so you can dip in and out as it suits you. They take between 5-10 minutes per module and we recommend you complete them in order.

As with this page, you can input text into available form fields to capture your learning. Audio is accessed through links, so you'll need an internet connection to listen to these.



How do you feel?

Our mental health influences how we think and feel about ourselves and others, and how we interpret everything around us. It affects our relationships, how we communicate, our capacity to learn and how well we cope with change. A key factor in wellbeing is sharing honestly how we feel with others.

Start the course by noting down how you feel at this moment in time. On a scale of 1 to 10 (1 being uncomfortable and 10 being comfortable), choose your level of comfort and note the number below. You will get to reflect on this at the end of the course.

1. How comfortable would you be discussing your own mental health?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
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2. How comfortable would you be discussing others' mental health?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	----

When you're ready, start module one

Module one: Understanding mental health



Introduction

Module one:
Understanding mental health

Module two:
Starting the conversation

Module three:
Taking action

Finding support

Module aims

The key facts 1 2 3

Stress and mental health

Workplace wellbeing

Practical steps

Supporting mental health at work

Module one aims

- ✓ To understand more about mental health
- ✓ To break down preconceptions
- ✓ To be able to spot the signs of mental ill health in yourself and others
- ✓ Share tips on how we can all support each other

The key facts

If you go through a spell of poor mental health, you may find that work becomes very difficult. It can affect your thinking, how you feel, your confidence, your performance and your reaction to others. The impact of this can be devastating if left untreated, so a deeper understanding of it means you can look after your mental wellbeing and that of others.

What are mental and emotional health problems?

Our mental health fluctuates just like our physical health. We can all feel stressed, depressed or anxious at times. Whether this becomes a problem depends on how bad it is, how long it lasts and the impact it has on daily life and work. The most common mental health problems are depression and anxiety, which are often experienced together.

Module one: Understanding mental health



Introduction

Module one:
Understanding mental health

Module two:
Starting the conversation

Module three:
Taking action

Finding support

Module aims

The key facts

1 2 3

Stress and mental health

Workplace wellbeing

Practical steps

Supporting mental health at work

What are mental and emotional health problems?

- **Depression** causes people to experience low mood, loss of interest or pleasure in activities, feelings of guilt or low self-worth, disturbed sleep or appetite, low energy, and poor concentration
- **Anxiety** includes phobias, social anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD). It can feel like persistent feelings of unease, worry or fear which can make it difficult to live life as normal; for example, people may withdraw or avoid contact with friends and family, feel unable to go to work, or avoid places and situations
- Far less common are conditions such as **schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, and personality disorders**



How common is it?

It's estimated that 1 in 4 people in the UK experience a mental health problem each year – that's over 15,000,000 people. It is among the leading causes of ill health and disability worldwide, so if you haven't experienced this yourself, many of your work colleagues could have.

What causes mental health and emotional problems?

Whether they arise or not can be affected by various factors like our brain chemistry, genetic disposition, childhood trauma or our individual biology.

Life events such as a new job, moving home or having children, to experiencing social adversity like discrimination or loneliness, to living with a physical health condition or disability can also cause problems. Episodes can happen just once in your life or reoccur over longer periods.

Module one: Understanding mental health



Introduction

Module one:
Understanding mental health

Module two:
Starting the conversation

Module three:
Taking action

Finding support

Module aims

The key facts

1 2 3

Stress and mental health

Workplace wellbeing

Practical steps

Supporting mental health at work

How are people affected?

People may have physical as well as emotional symptoms. Some people may have problems sleeping or get headaches. Others may be unable to leave the house, wash, or be unable to carry out basic day-to-day tasks during an episode. There can also be accompanying feelings of hopelessness and thoughts of suicide or other physical harm.

If untreated, mental and emotional health problems can be life threatening for those affected and can have serious impacts on those around them.



What support is available?

If diagnosed, there are many effective treatments and support available for mental health problems, including therapy or medication and often symptoms can be relieved by a change in mindset, environment or workplace adaptations. Most people are able to recover fully or manage symptoms especially if they get help early on. However, the stigma of talking openly about mental health often prevents them seeking help and recovery, so it's crucial that we all become more aware and accepting of mental health.

Getting support through a GP is a good starting point as well as the organisations referenced at the end of this course.

Mental health and employers

Research makes a positive case for investment in mental health by employers, finding an average return of £5 for every £1 spent. Poor mental health is estimated to cost UK employers up to £45 billion a year³.

³Mental health and employers. Refreshing the case for investment. Deloitte, January 2020

Module one: Understanding mental health



Introduction

Module one:
Understanding mental health

Module two:
Starting the conversation

Module three:
Taking action

Finding support

Module aims

The key facts

1 2 3

Stress and mental health

Workplace wellbeing

Practical steps

Supporting mental health at work

Stress and mental health

Key facts about stress

Stress isn't in itself a bad thing; a bit of stress can energise us day-to-day, but prolonged and excessive stress where someone is not coping harms our mental or physical health, undermine performance and make us unhappy, which is why it is important to be able to spot the early signs of stress, and get help or offer support to others.

Link between excessive stress and mental health

Stress in itself is not an illness, but it can lead to mental health problems like depression or anxiety, and in return, mental health problems can cause stress (for example, due to coping with symptoms or managing treatments).

Spotting the signs of stress

As humans we are programmed to respond to a perceived threat with a 'fight or flight' response which gets us ready for action; adrenaline is released into our bodies, our hearts beat faster, our blood pressure rises and our senses sharpen. However, if the body spends too much time there, it can create long-term harm, so it's important to spot the signs.

Some common signs that you are under too much stress are:

- ✓ A prolonged period of being irritable or tearful
- ✓ An inability to concentrate or make decisions
- ✓ Muscle tension, frequent headaches or tiredness
- ✓ Mood swings or being withdrawn
- ✓ Loss of motivation, confidence and commitment

In the workplace, this could look like:

- ✓ A decline in performance or motivation
- ✓ Uncharacteristic errors
- ✓ Arriving late to work
- ✓ Taking more time off
- ✓ Not looking after their physical appearance
- ✓ A loss of control over work

Module one: Understanding mental health



Introduction	Module one: Understanding mental health	Module two: Starting the conversation	Module three: Taking action	Finding support
Module aims	The key facts 1 2 3	Stress and mental health	Workplace wellbeing	Practical steps Supporting mental health at work

Workplace wellbeing: What practical steps can be taken?

A lot can be done to manage and cope better with stress and mental health problems.

What is work related stress?

The formal definition of work-related stress is the 'adverse reaction a person has to **excessive pressures** or other types of demand placed on them'. Stress is not an illness, it's a state – a response to pressure and we all respond differently – what stresses one person may not affect the other. Research shows that it is linked with higher levels of sickness absence, staff turnover and lower productivity⁴.

There are six areas that can reduce work-related stress if they are managed properly:



Demands

Including workload and work patterns



Control

How much say someone has about how they do their work



Support

Encouragement and practical help offered by colleagues and managers



Role

Whether people understand their role and are clear on what is required of them



Change

How organisational change (large or small) is managed and communicated



Relationships

Promoting a positive culture, to avoid conflict and manage unacceptable behaviour

⁴hse.gov.uk/articles/what-work-related-stress

Module one: Understanding mental health



Introduction

Module one:
Understanding mental health

Module two:
Starting the conversation

Module three:
Taking action

Finding support

Module aims

The key facts 1 2 3

Stress and mental health

Workplace wellbeing

Practical steps

Supporting mental health at work

Practical steps

Workplace adjustments, if appropriately managed, can play a key role in preventing, better managing or avoiding excessive stress in the workplace:

Colleagues may say that they:

1. Are not able to cope with the demands of their jobs
2. Are unable to control the way they do their work
3. Don't receive enough information and support
4. Are having trouble with relationships at work, or are being bullied
5. Don't fully understand their role and responsibilities
6. Are not engaged when a business is undergoing change



Common workplace adjustments

Practical steps to address or relieve workplace pressures could include:

- ✓ Prioritising work
- ✓ Reviewing workload
- ✓ Re-negotiating deadlines
- ✓ Taking time out
- ✓ Creating a flexible working arrangement
- ✓ Asking for additional support from your team
- ✓ Seeking professional help internally or externally

Module one: Understanding mental health



Introduction

Module one:
Understanding mental health

Module two:
Starting the conversation

Module three:
Taking action

Finding support

Module aims

The key facts 1 2 3

Stress and mental health

Workplace wellbeing

Practical steps

Supporting mental health at work

Supporting mental health at work: How can you spot the symptoms in yourself and others?

There are many things you can do if you think you or someone else may be experiencing problems with stress or mental health.

Get to know others around you

Everyone is different, if you know them well, you're more likely to observe something out of the ordinary.

Be observant

Observing anything 'out of character', particularly if it continues for a long period, might be an indication of mental and emotional health problems. If you suspect that you are experiencing stress, anxiety or depression try this [NHS self-assessment](#) to get some understanding on how you have been feeling recently.

Increase your resilience

Actively working on your own self-care can increase your resilience to stressful situations. This includes taking regular breaks, exercising, working on patterns of negative thinking, getting restful sleep, eating healthily, drinking lots of water and watching how much you drink or smoke. Understand how to [build your resilience in the workplace](#).

Identify triggers and strategies

It can be helpful to look at what might trigger stress for you and learn strategies to manage emotions and negative thoughts. Bookmark this LifeSkills link to read in your own time about [looking after your mental health in the workplace](#).

Discuss it

Mental health and wellbeing are increasingly being prioritised in the workplace. Speaking to someone can help to identify the sources of pressure and the specific support you need to take action and get well. The next section 'Starting the conversation' gives you tips on how to do this.

Well done, you have completed module one.

Module two: Starting the conversation



Introduction	Module one: Understanding mental health	Module two: Starting the conversation	Module three: Taking action	Finding support
Module aims	Removing the stigma 1 2	Talking about your own mental health	Talking to others about their mental health 1 2	Having a conversation 1 2



Module two aims

After this module you will:

- ✓ Have an understanding of what people with mental health problems may feel
- ✓ Share tips on how to start a conversation
- ✓ Know how to help someone feel more comfortable about opening up

This module aims to give you confidence to start a conversation. Helping you know what to do for yourself, or, to support someone else who may be experiencing difficulties with their mental health.

Removing the stigma for line managers, teams and individuals

One of the reasons mental health often isn't addressed in the workplace is due to the stigma it carries. People aren't used to speaking openly about it, but it's vital that we do this in the right way to avoid perpetuating the stigma around it.

It is often misunderstood, and many people's problems are made worse by the discrimination they experience. When we are mindful about our language and willing to talk about mental health openly, workplaces can help employees think about mental illness as they would any other disease.

Module two: Starting the conversation



Introduction	Module one: Understanding mental health	Module two: Starting the conversation	Module three: Taking action	Finding support
Module aims	Removing the stigma 1 2	Talking about your own mental health	Talking to others about their mental health 1 2	Having a conversation 1 2

An overheard conversation



Click [here](#) to listen to some comments about Rakesh by two of his work colleagues, Anita and Mike. What does it bring up for you?

Hear the impact



Now, click [here](#) to listen to Rakesh's perspective

How would you feel?

Imagine you were Rakesh, and after you've managed to control your symptoms enough to continue to work, you hear your colleagues talking about you in this way. How would you feel?

- Less likely to manage your anxiety
- Worried that people are talking about you behind your back
- More likely to blame yourself for your problems
- Isolated from the team



Summary

The social stigma attached to poor mental health and isolation experienced by people with mental health problems can make their difficulties worse. Feelings of being excluded can make them reluctant to seek help, which makes recovery slower and harder.

Although some people can suffer from long term, chronic mental illness, with the right treatment and support they can take part fully in the workplace and communities in which they live.

Module two: Starting the conversation



Introduction	Module one: Understanding mental health	Module two: Starting the conversation	Module three: Taking action	Finding support
Module aims	Removing the stigma 1 2	Talking about your own mental health	Talking to others about their mental health 1 2	Having a conversation 1 2

Talking about your own mental health

If you are reading this, your employer wants to provide an inclusive and supportive environment in which everyone can speak openly about mental health. Here are some tips to starting a conversation.



Be as open as you feel able

This will help put the other person at ease, which in turn may make you feel better.



Be patient

Recognise that it can be difficult for someone else to understand what you are experiencing. That doesn't mean they don't want to.



Ask for help

Don't tell people you feel well if you don't. Ask for help if you need to. This is not a sign of weakness; it shows self-awareness and a willingness to take action.



Take care of yourself

Chances are if you share your mental and emotional health problems with others, they may want to open up about their own. You don't have to take responsibility for their experience.



Laugh about it, if you want to

Own your mental and emotional problems using humour, if that helps. It's OK to laugh.

Remember it's your choice to talk about your mental and emotional health problems. You can choose what you do or don't say, and you can ask for confidentiality. Nobody has the right to disclose this information other than you.

Module two: Starting the conversation



Introduction	Module one: Understanding mental health	Module two: Starting the conversation	Module three: Taking action	Finding support
Module aims	Removing the stigma 1 2	Talking about your own mental health	Talking to others about their mental health 1 2	Having a conversation 1 2

Talking to others about their mental health

If you're concerned for the wellbeing of a colleague, friend or family member and have a conversation with them, make sure it is in a quiet, private setting. Ensure you both have time and you don't have to rush off.



If you're preparing for a conversation, there are a number of things to bear in mind:

Ask how they are

Ask how they are but be prepared for "I'm fine". If this happens, you can sensitively point out examples of specific behaviours you have noticed to help open up the conversation, such as constantly looking tired and disheveled or working all hours.

Prepare some examples in advance and say something like: "I'm asking because I'm concerned that you're not fine. At the meeting on Wednesday you seemed very angry with [person]."

Try to say "I"

Be deliberate about saying "I" rather than "we've become concerned about you", to avoid the person feeling defensive because others have been speaking about them.

Ask open questions

Being curious and asking about someone is better than assuming that you always know how they feel.

Module two: Starting the conversation



Introduction	Module one: Understanding mental health	Module two: Starting the conversation	Module three: Taking action	Finding support
Module aims	Removing the stigma 1 2	Talking about your own mental health	Talking to others about their mental health 1 2	Having a conversation 1 2

Talking to others about their mental health

Give them space

Pause to let them find the words, listen patiently, and acknowledge their important feelings and experiences. If you can, repeat back what you have heard them say in their words, this can make the other person feel very heard and is reassuring.

For example, you could say “So, it’s getting to work and being able to concentrate... have I got that right?”

Say you want to help

Offer your help if you can. Show your care and concern. If the person gets upset, let them take their time, maybe offer them tissues, water or a moment to themselves. They will let you know when they have recovered enough to talk to you.

Provide reassurance

It’s important to offer reassurance and explain that help is available. You could signpost them to the finding support resources at the end of this course.

Talking to others about their mental health:

- ✓ Ask how they are
- ✓ Try to say “I”
- ✓ Ask questions
- ✓ Give them space
- ✓ Say you want to help
- ✓ Provide reassurance

Module two: Starting the conversation



Introduction

Module one:
Understanding mental health

Module two:
Starting the conversation

Module three:
Taking action

Finding support

Module aims

Removing the stigma

1 2

Talking about your own mental health

Talking to others about their mental health

1 2

Having a conversation

1 2

Having a conversation

Olivia's viewpoint

Listen to a conversation between an employee and their line manager, however the principles are the same for anyone starting a conversation about mental health.

The first conversation is between Carl and Olivia, Carl's line manager. Carl's colleagues have noticed that he hasn't been himself lately. His line manager, Olivia, has been asked to talk to him.



[Listen to how Olivia is feeling](#)



[Listen to the conversation](#)



How did Olivia do?

That didn't go as well as Olivia was hoping. Where do you think she went wrong?

- Olivia should have told him her manager's comments
- Olivia was unprepared
- Olivia should have highlighted her concerns about Carl's changes in behaviour
- Olivia should have told Carl she didn't believe him

Summary

Although Olivia gave Carl plenty of opportunity to talk about any problems, when he said he was fine she didn't know what to do next. If Olivia had prepared for the meeting, she would have planned how to approach Carl with her concerns without making him defensive or worried about his job. In some cases, it might be correct to reference the manager's comments, but this won't always be the case.

Module two: Starting the conversation



Introduction	Module one: Understanding mental health	Module two: Starting the conversation	Module three: Taking action	Finding support
--------------	--	--	--------------------------------	-----------------

Module aims	Removing the stigma 1 2	Talking about your own mental health	Talking to others about their mental health 1 2	Having a conversation 1 2
-------------	-------------------------	--------------------------------------	---	----------------------------------

Having a conversation

Let's take a listen to how this could have gone with some preparation. Listen out for:

- How she gives Carl space
- How she mentions the problems she sees
- How she shows her care and concern
- How she asks him questions
- How she provides reassurance



[Listen to the conversation](#)

How did the conversation go?

This conversation had a very different result. How do you think it went, on a scale of 1–10?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
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Summary

Olivia allowed Carl time to talk about his problems and offered support while remaining professional. Always consider your relationship and respond in a way in which you are both comfortable. She provided reassurance that the conversation and any HR advice would be confidential. Although the situation may not have been resolved immediately, Olivia has next steps and a plan to meet again to work together to establish adjustments that will help Carl.

Well done, you have completed module two.

Before starting module three, see if you can answer these questions?

- What can make the stigma worse for those with mental health problems?
- How can you prepare for a conversation?
- What's the best way to start a conversation?
- What can help you talk about your own mental health problems?

Module three: Taking action



Introduction

Module one:
Understanding mental health

Module two:
Starting the conversation

Module three:
Taking action

Finding support

Module aims

Starting the discussion

Regular catch ups

Making adjustments

How do you feel?

Questions

Module three aims

You will:

- ✓ Be more aware of the practical steps that can help
- ✓ Be able to be more positive and solution-focused with colleagues
- ✓ Share tips of how to support colleagues better

Talking about adjustments

Before the meeting

Making the practical adjustments to working processes and environment as we discussed in Module one, is key to enabling someone to return to work and in time feeling a valued member of the team. In this meeting, we are further along in the process and listening to Rakesh and his line manager Seiji.

Rakesh has returned to work after taking some time off due to mental and emotional health problems. His line manager, Seiji, has organised a catch up.



[Listen to how Seiji is planning to approach the conversation](#)



[Listen to Rakesh's perspective](#)

Module three: Taking action



Introduction

Module one:
Understanding mental health

Module two:
Starting the conversation

Module three:
Taking action

Finding support

Module aims

Starting the discussion

Regular catch ups

Making adjustments

How do you feel?

Questions

Common workplace adjustments

Practical steps to address or relieve workplace pressures could include:

- ✓ Prioritising work
- ✓ Reviewing workload
- ✓ Re-negotiating deadlines
- ✓ Taking time out
- ✓ Creating a flexible working arrangement
- ✓ Asking for additional support from your team
- ✓ Seeking professional help internally or externally

Starting the discussion

Now you've heard from Seiji and Rakesh, how do you think Seiji should start this meeting?

Check whether Rakesh would like to make any adjustments to his hours or duties

Reassure Rakesh that his work is appreciated

Ask Rakesh how he's feeling



[Listen to the meeting](#)

- If you are a line manager, notice how Seiji values and validates Rakesh, asks open questions and is able to bring up problems in a supportive way without judgement
- If you are a colleague, notice how you can help them open up by appreciating them, acknowledging where they are and suggesting practical solutions that can make them feel supported and heard



Summary

It's important that Seiji starts the conversation by asking how Rakesh is handling his return and reassuring him that his work is valuable. Once Rakesh has had an opportunity to talk and is comfortable, he can begin to discuss his adjustments and see how Rakesh is feeling. Let's find out how Seiji handles this.

Module three: Taking action



Introduction

Module one:
Understanding mental health

Module two:
Starting the conversation

Module three:
Taking action

Finding support

Module aims

Starting the discussion

Regular catch ups

Making adjustments

How do you feel?

Questions

Regular catch ups

One-to-one meetings are essential anyway for the team, but particularly if someone is returning to work and is making adjustments to their hours and duties. By asking Rakesh how he felt about the adjustments and providing reassurance about only making changes he is happy with, Seiji has offered support and established open communication.

It's also important to be as open as possible to the team. This should be agreed in advance with the employee, but here, part of the reasonable adjustments was that Rakesh did not answer the phones and had different working hours. The reasons for this arrangement don't need to be disclosed to the team, but it is important that Seiji had agreed with Rakesh, prior to his return, that the team would know about the adjustments to his work when he returned, so they can also support him.



Module three: Taking action



Introduction

Module one:
Understanding mental health

Module two:
Starting the conversation

Module three:
Taking action

Finding support

Module aims

Starting the discussion

Regular catch ups

Making adjustments

How do you feel?

Questions

Making adjustments



Offering support

Although workplace adjustments may not be necessary and may not be what is required by a colleague experiencing mental and emotional health problems, it may be helpful to consider how you can accommodate them and offer support.



Making workplace adjustments

Whether being mentored by a colleague or working flexibly, there are lots of adjustments that can be made to support people through mental and emotional health problems.

You can find more examples of adjustments that can be made using our list of resources and support at the end of this course.



Everyone is different

When making adjustments, consideration should be given to the fact that everyone is different.

What works for one won't necessarily work for another, so try and be creative with the actions you take. This will probably be done in a conversation with the employee and their line manager.



Handling an emergency

What to do if there is an immediate risk. It will rarely happen, but if in conversation you feel there is an immediate risk of self-harm or harm to others, you should:

- Call the emergency services
- Make sure support is on hand

Module three: Taking action



Introduction	Module one: Understanding mental health	Module two: Starting the conversation	Module three: Taking action	Finding support
--------------	--	--	--	-----------------

Module aims	Starting the discussion	Regular catch ups	Making adjustments	How do you feel?	Questions
-------------	-------------------------	-------------------	--------------------	-------------------------	-----------

How do you feel?

Now that you've found out more about mental and emotional health, how comfortable would you be discussing your own or others' mental health? On a scale of 1 to 10 (1 being uncomfortable and 10 being comfortable), choose your level of comfort.

How comfortable would you be discussing your own mental health?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
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How comfortable would you be discussing others' mental health?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
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Summary

However experienced or informed you are, talking about mental and emotional health concerns can be difficult. This module has given you the mental health basics to help you feel more comfortable in these conversations. You can return to this training at any point if you want a quick reminder of how to approach conversations about these problems.

Use the space below to reflect on what you have just learnt. Did any of the information surprise you? How might you approach a friend or colleague about mental health problems differently now than at the start of the course?

Module three: Taking action



Introduction

Module one:
Understanding mental health

Module two:
Starting the conversation

Module three:
Taking action

Finding support

Module aims

Starting the discussion

Regular catch ups

Making adjustments

How do you feel?

Questions

Well done, you have completed module three.

Before finishing this module, see if you can answer these questions?

How should you start an adjustments meeting?

How should you communicate adjustments to the team?

Give an example of a work adjustment

What's one thing you should mention in this sort of meeting?

Explore advice for before, during and after a conversation using our list of resources and where to find support in the final section.



Support and resources

Please be aware of accessing information from the internet or non-expert sources. Treatment advice should only ever be given by a qualified health care professional. These are our recommended additional support services:

- [Mind](#): provides advice and support to empower anyone experiencing a mental health problem. Mind also campaigns to help improve services, raise awareness and promote understanding
- [Mental Health Foundation](#): provides information, guidance and resources on all aspects of managing mental health at home, at school and in the workplace
- [Time to Change](#): campaign changing the way people think and act about mental health problems
- [Rethink Mental Illness](#): a charity that improves the lives of people severely affected by mental illness through local groups and services, expert information and training and successful campaigning
- [NHS](#): public advice on looking after your mental health and that of others
- [Action for Happiness](#): focuses particularly on wellbeing and how to lead a happier life. Its Ten Keys to Happier Living is also available as an app
- [Mental Health in Further Education](#): provides a network for those interested in adult education and mental health
- [Samaritans](#): If you're going through a tough time, you can talk to Samaritans free – day or night, 365 days a year