



Working in Partnership to Improve
Public Safety Technology

COVID-19 BRIEFING NOTE

SUPPORTING MENTAL HEALTH DURING THE PANDEMIC

COVID-19 (C19) has plunged us all into uncertainty and the constant news about the pandemic can feel relentless. All of this takes its toll on people's mental health, particularly those already living with mental health injuries or conditions. The frustration of being unable to control your circumstances and unable to tolerate uncertainty are common characteristics of many anxiety disorders. These feelings of helplessness are exacerbated by the sudden shock and loneliness of working at home and intensified by a 24-hour news cycle that repeats stories of disease, death and immediate and long-term economic disaster. Even the most stoic personalities will falter in these unprecedented circumstances and so it is imperative that we take immediate action to support our teams during these challenging times and that more broadly, we commit to support employees' mental health and well-being in the long-term.

60% of employees say they would feel more motivated and more likely to recommend their organisation as a good place to work if their employer took action to support mental wellbeing. Considering how much time we spend at work, it is unsurprising that workplace environments and culture affect our wellbeing. Smart employers recognise their staff not merely as assets or resources but as a central element of the organisation's community; and research consistently shows that when an organisation's people feel that their efforts are meaningful and that they are valued and supported, they tend to have higher wellbeing levels. Further, available cost-benefit research on strategies that address mental health points towards net financial and productivity benefits. For example, a recent WHO-led study estimated that for every US\$1 put into scaled-up treatment for common mental disorders, there is a return of US\$4 in improved health and productivity.

HOW TO RECOGNISE THE SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF YOUR STRESS

Physical	Emotional	Cognitive	Behavioural
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Change in sleep patterns 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shock or numbness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Confusion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Withdrawal from others
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Change in appetite 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anger toward others involved 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficulty concentrating 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Angry outbursts
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shallow or rapid breathing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fear 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficulty remembering details of events 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Irritability
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Headaches 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Depression or low mood 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feeling mentally "foggy" 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Crying
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Muscle tension & soreness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Guilt / frustration 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Impulsivity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decreased energy / ambition
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased heart rate / palpitations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sadness / tearful 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Over-focused on an activity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relationship conflicts
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stomach upset 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feeling unsafe of vulnerable 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased use of alcohol and/or medications
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Loneliness 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fear of being alone

HOW TO RECOGNISE THE SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF STRESS IN OTHERS

Physical	Emotional	Cognitive	Behavioural
• Weight loss or gain	• Irritability	• Poor concentration	• Increased smoking
• Grinding teeth	• Becoming angry with others too easily	• Unable to listen to others	• Increased use of alcohol
• Frequent colds or infections	• Depressed / tearful	• Memory lapses	• Restlessness / fidgeting
• Dizziness	• Frightened	• Confusion / disorientation	• Absence from work
• Palpitations	• Worried or anxious	• Difficulty making simple decisions	• Lack of motivation or commitment
• Nausea	• Panic attacks	• Poor planning and task execution	• Aggression
• Fatigue	• Impatient	• Less intuitive or creative	• Prone to accidents
• Self-neglect	• Mood swings	• Becoming vague	• Social withdrawal
• Change of appearance	• Constant negativity	• Easily distracted	• Loss of sense of humour
• Nervous	• Extra sensitive to criticism	• Reckless decision-making	• Defensive
	• Lack of confidence		• Becoming a workaholic

HOW TO SUPPORT GOOD MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING IN THE WORKPLACE

It takes more than good intentions however to improve and sustain the mental health of employees and there are certainly several proven methods of intervention that can readily be adopted for low-cost or no-cost, as well as larger-scale interventions which realise immediate results and target longer-term culture change.

SHORT-TERM: Normalise conversations about mental health

1. **Normalise mental health:** Promote open dialogue and embed positive attitudes and behaviours by adding a standing item to team meetings where people talk about wellbeing and stress as a group.
2. **Raise the profile of mental health:** Invite specialist speakers to in-house online “event” to raise mental health awareness. Hearing first-hand what it is like to have a mental health problem from people who have experienced the issues can help break down negative stereotypes.
3. **Empower staff to lead change:** Mental health champions working at all levels and talking openly about mental health sends a clear message that you will get support if you are experiencing a mental health problem and that this is not a barrier to career development.
4. **Use an effective communications plan about current and next steps, post-C19:** Poor communication can be a significant cause of stress and levels of staff/volunteer/director wellbeing and engagement will falter if they feel that they are overloaded with information that they cannot process; are excluded from key knowledge and conversations; and/or unable to feed their views upwards. Where communication is clear, open, honest, manageable and responsive, an organisation’s people will be able to access all the information they need to do their job whilst avoiding overload but still feeling valued.

MEDIUM-TERM: Make a public commitment to supporting good mental health

5. **Publish an organisation-wide mental health strategy:** Mental health should be at the heart of policies such as health & safety, working hours, sickness absence and return-to-work. Policies for furlough, performance management, disciplinary action, recruitment, change management and redundancy should take account of the impact these processes can have on employees' mental wellbeing. Staff should be signposted to appropriate support. Policies on performance management and disciplinary action also need to recognise that an individual's performance or behaviour can be affected if they are experiencing a mental health problem.
6. **Sign an industry, national or international pledge:** Making a public commitment to tackle mental health stigma and discrimination will send a powerful message to staff, volunteers, directors and stakeholders that it is absolutely OK to talk about mental health.

LONG-TERM: Invest in training and development

7. **Embed mental health as a theme in induction training:** As part of their induction training, ensure staff, volunteers and/or directors are given information on how mental health is managed and what support is available. Equality and diversity training should also cover mental health.
8. **Provide line managers with training on mental health, trauma awareness and stress management:** Training should provide advice on how to spot the signs of deteriorating mental health, PTSD and/or rising stress and how to have supportive conversations with staff. Training should be underpinned with clear guidelines for managers on managing mental health injuries and disorders.
9. **Invest in *Mental Health First Aid* training:** *Mental Health First Aid* (MHFA) is the help provided to a person developing a mental health problem, experiencing the worsening of an existing mental health condition or in a mental health crisis. Just like physical first aid is provided until medical treatment can be obtained, MHFA is given until appropriate support is found or until the crisis is resolved. Training staff to deliver MHFA to their peers provides help in preventing the mental health problem from developing into a more serious state; promotes the recovery of good mental health; and provides comfort to a person experiencing a mental health problem.
10. **Implement a mindfulness-based intervention:** Research has shown that mindfulness-based interventions (MBIs), including online MBIs, are effective in reducing stress amongst various workplace populations. A 7-week online MBI significantly reduces levels of stress and is an accessible, affordable and convenient approach, which has an unrestricted geographic reach.
11. **Build resilience through training:** An understanding of how resilient we are and learning the methods that help us build on and maintain resilience is critical for good mental health, as is the ability to recognise signs and symptoms of mental health problems on oneself and in others.

SOURCES OF INFORMATION, HELP AND SUPPORT

Anxiety UK	www.anxietyuk.org.uk
Breathworks	https://www.breathworks-mindfulness.org.uk
International Stress Management Association	https://isma.org.uk
Mental Health First Aid	https://mhfaengland.org
Mind	www.mind.org