

How to talk to your team about mental health

Mental health is being talked about more openly in all walks of life and business, and its value and importance is widely recognised.

The term encompasses emotional, psychological and social wellbeing. A person's mental health has an impact on their thoughts, feelings and behaviour, and determines how well they respond to stress and challenges. Mental health can have a profound effect on peoples' lives, and workers within the UK film and TV sector report lower levels of mental health than the UK average and are often reluctant to seek support at work.

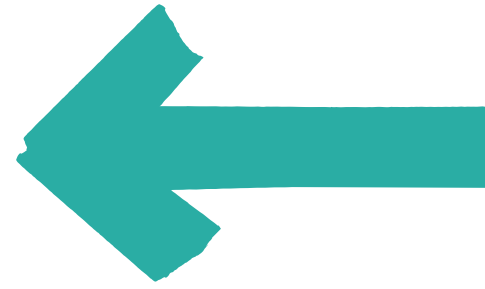
As leaders, it's important to be aware of the reasons that people may not seek help, so that you can proactively put measures in place to breakdown these barriers. Some of the reasons may be more obvious and could relate to stigma or fear of not getting work again, but less obvious underlying factors, including power imbalances and working within systems of oppression, will also factor in people's reluctance to seek support.

As an employer or manager, it's crucial to consider potential barriers when talking to your team about mental health, and to offer relevant and meaningful support options. This resource will cover the key skills needed for you and your teams to talk openly about mental health.

Mind charity has a list of definitions that can be helpful when discussing mental health which you can find [here](#).



What factors can affect mental health at work?



The demands of the film and TV industry could have a significant impact on the mental health of your team. Whilst some pressure can be good for us, it's important to be aware that excessive pressure can lead to workplace stress and subsequently poor mental health and performance. These are some of the potential barriers to good mental health at work:

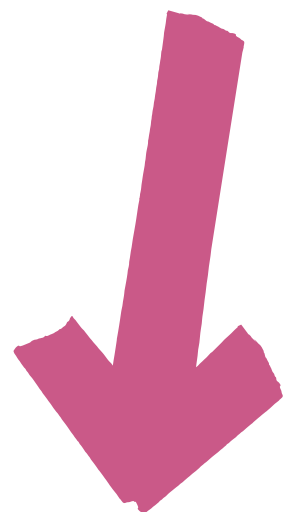
- Long working hours
- Lack of work/life balance
- Poor job design or lack of role clarity
- Unachievable workloads
- Poor relationship with manager
- Difficult working relationships
- Bullying/harassment/discrimination
- A lack of control or autonomy at work
- Exposure to distressing content
- Supporting vulnerable contributors

You may want to look at the [Health and Safety Executive's management standards](#) about workplace stress.

The role of managers

Managers are essential to monitoring the mental health and wellbeing of their teams and workers, and often the first to notice the signs of mental health or wellbeing challenges. Here are some key signs to look for:

- Changes in behaviour
- Changes in mood, appearance, levels of anxiety or stress
- Changes in performance and productivity
- Increased irritability and difficult working relationships



- Lack of engagement – with work, colleagues or simply being quieter than usual
- Increase in physical health complaints
- Underlying health issues becoming more severe
- Taking more time off work, or overworking (spending excessive time in work e.g. being first in and last out).

Talking to your team about mental health

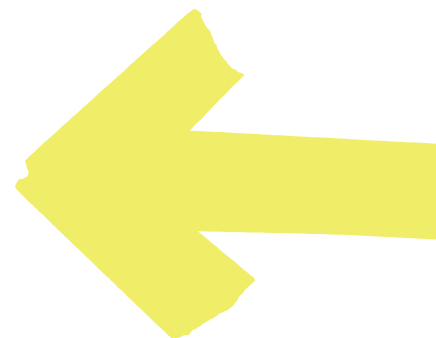
One of the biggest barriers to tackling poor mental health in the film and TV industry is overcoming stigma. Managers should ensure that their culture is proactively inclusive, trusting and transparent, so people feel safe to talk openly about their wellbeing.

Key actions

- Be clear from the start that you wish to support team mental health and wellbeing
- If comfortable, talk about your own wellbeing. This can help to normalise the conversation and create a trusting environment where people can disclose
- Model healthy behaviours i.e. taking breaks, connecting with family, leaving on time
- Share and discuss the production's wellbeing plan. If you don't have one, then check out [Mini Guide Discuss and agree your production wellbeing plan](#).
- Identify production crunch points with the team
- Ask the team how they would like to be supported
- Schedule regular check-ins and encourage the team to feedback openly

Talking to individuals about mental health

Early intervention when people are in distress can allow them to recover before it becomes a fully-fledged mental health issue. A manager will often be the first point of contact if someone



is experiencing a mental health challenge. It's important to develop compassionate and effective relationships with your team, so they feel safe talking to you.

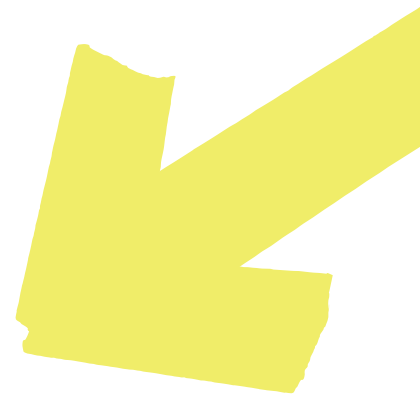
If you need to start a conversation about mental health, use our tools to make it open, trusting and effective.

How to prepare and build trust

- Schedule a 1:1 with the individual in a quiet, private space. If you're working remotely, consider ways to ensure privacy and schedule well in advance
- Don't keep rescheduling the meeting – this can increase anxiety and could imply the conversation is not important
- These conversations should remain confidential – be transparent if you need to seek additional advice or escalate an issue due to safeguarding concerns
- Reduce any unhelpful power dynamics by creating a warm environment:
 - Smile
 - Position yourself equally (i.e. not behind a big desk)
 - Keep your body language open and relaxed
 - Maintain comfortable eye contact
 - Use a warm and calm tone of voice
 - Validate their emotions and experiences
 - Don't dominate the meeting or give advice – listen to them
 - If working remotely – silence notifications, don't multi-task or type to others

During the conversation – Open Questioning skills:

- Asking open questions can encourage people to open up
- Open questions can't be answered with a yes or a no
- Open questions start with why, how, what or describe
- Your intention is to listen and reflect on the answer
- Ask one question at a time – try to avoid multiple questions
- Don't make assumptions or seek to diagnose a member of staff – we are all unique and have our own experiences and are experts in our own mental health
- Useful examples:
 - How are you thinking/feeling about this?
 - What's making things feel hard right now?



- What would the ideal situation look like for you?
- What support could I offer you?
- What would be a good first step?

During the conversation - Active Listening skills:

- Active listening can help people to feel heard and understood
- Listen in order to understand rather than to give advice
- Embrace silence – don't jump to fill it or guess at words
- Maintain comfortable eye contact, nod, lean forward, smile
- Don't get distracted by phones/emails/interruptions
- Give people time as they may not be able to tell you everything at once
- Listen to more than their words – consider their:
 - tone of voice
 - body language
 - facial expressions
 - overall mood

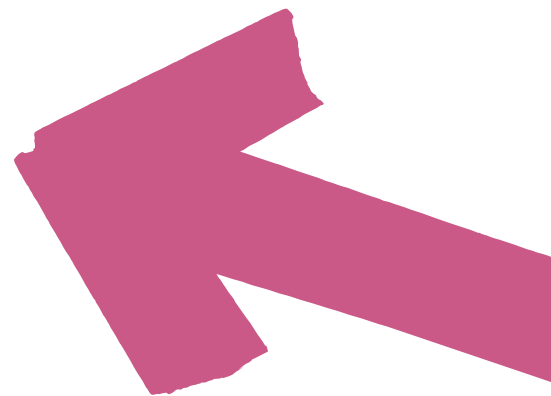
During the conversation – Practical Tools: Signposting:

- Signposting is a key managerial support tool you can offer; it is simply pointing someone towards a specific service or expert
- Expert support early on can lead to quick and robust recoveries
- Direct people to services that are relevant to their specific challenge or mental health problem
- Reassure them that everyone needs support sometimes and give them details on how you can be further contacted as needed

During the conversation – Practical Tools:

Reasonable Adjustments:

- A reasonable adjustment is a proportionate action you can take to provide support. Employers are legally required to offer these under the Equality Act if an employee has a disability. A mental health condition would be a disability under this Act if it is long term (has lasted or is likely to last for 12 months or more) and has a significant impact on an individual's ability to carry out day-to-day activities.



- Adjustments are unique to a person's needs, and delivered as part of broader support of good mental health and wellbeing, enabling people to perform their role
- Useful examples:
 - Working hours – could these be adapted or condensed?
 - On location – make sure someone has time to connect with family/friends
 - Working patterns – consider breaks and shifts, especially for night shoots
 - Workload – consider job share/reallocation of tasks
 - Support from others – offer coaching or mentoring
 - Minimising noise – quiet spaces, reduce exposure to scenes with loud noise
 - Access to daylight – walks, SAD lamp, access to windows

[Click here](#) to find a useful summary of workplace adjustments

During the conversation - Emergency Responses:

- An emergency response may be needed if someone remains extremely distressed throughout a conversation, or they share that they intend to harm themselves or someone else
- Don't be afraid of being direct, and asking, for example 'are you considering suicide?'
- Request the emergency contact number they have provided to the production. If you're worried about their safety or risk to others, then talking to their emergency contact might be a source of quick support – especially if they're able to attend any emergency.
- If an emergency contact isn't available, and you feel that someone is at serious and imminent risk of harming themselves, or others, then call 999.

Follow up

- Make sure that you follow up on anything you have said you will do, look into or change.
- Agree the next time you are going to connect with the individual and make sure you schedule this call/meeting.

