

Talking about mental health can be challenging for some but it can be even harder when it comes to discussing it at work.

The biggest challenge is that people are often very reluctant to be open about the subject.

People often don't know how to speak up or what to say if someone approaches them.

Traditionally, employees have viewed mental health as a taboo topic and something better left at the door when they come to work.

A fear of being stigmatised or looked down on by colleagues, often makes people feel compelled to compartmentalise problems and to pretend everything is "fine" when it's not.

Research has found that authenticity and openness at work leads to better employee performance, higher levels of wellbeing and engagement, and greater employee retention.

What is mental health?

It's a common misperception that mental health only refers to mental illnesses such as depression or anxiety when in reality it covers so much more than the absence of disorders or disabilities.

The World Health Organisation defines mental health as a "state of wellbeing in which an individual realises his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and is able to make a contribution to his or her community".

The distinction between the two is key to understanding that people living with a mental illness can have good mental health, just as someone without a mental illness can have poor mental health.

Like physical health, everyone should take care of their mental health to stay happy and healthy, whether they have a mental illness or not.

Break the silence around mental health in the workplace

Talking is a powerful way to raise awareness and break down the stigma surrounding mental health. Organisational leaders should provide safety and space for these important conversations.

If we want to change the current perception of mental health then it's vital that we dispel myths and harmful stereotypes about people who experience or live with poor mental health.

Leaders such as line-managers will be on the frontline of these discussions and will play a vital role in setting the tone of the talks.

How they approach employees and respond to such topics will greatly influence their people's perception of the organisation's culture and impact their work experience.

Without emotional intelligence, empathy or active listening you run the risk of demoralising, disengaging and even losing your employees.

While this may seem daunting, it's important to remember that a small conversation about mental health has the power to make a big difference, so it's vital you have these conversations and offer your people the appropriate support

they need.

So, to help here are our 4 top tips for broaching the topic of mental wellbeing at work.



Ask open ended questions

Open-ended questions are an effective way to encourage someone to share their thoughts with you. Taking this approach will enable the person to share as much or as little detail as they want with you.

Let the other person set the boundaries and answer in a way that is comfortable to them. Using open-ended questions will also help you gauge the willingness of the person to share their feelings with you.

It's important to remember that trying to force a subject or a response from someone is likely to make them shutdown entirely.

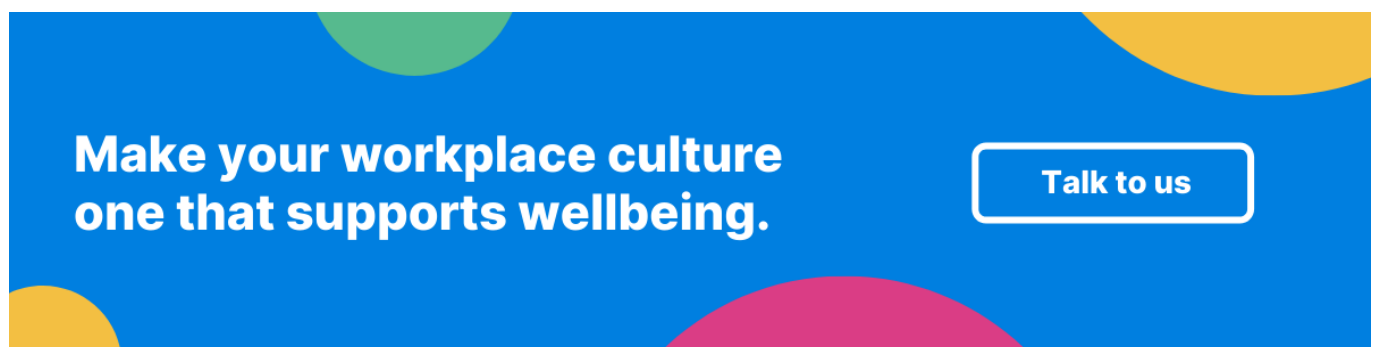
Be attentive to their body language and make sure you aren't being overbearing, which can come across as insensitive, inappropriate, and possibly bullying.

Avoid questions that elicit yes or no responses as they do not invite openness or encourage the other person to speak up.

And, although you want to help and show your empathy do not bombard them with too many questions as they may end up feeling overwhelmed.

Here are some examples of good open-ended questions to get you started:

- “You don’t seem quite yourself lately, is there something bothering you?”
- “I’ve noticed that you seem more stressed or worried lately. Is everything okay?”
- “Would you be comfortable telling me how you’re feeling?”
- “How do you feel your work/life balance is going?”
- “Is there anything you think we can do to better support you?”



Be an active listener

When someone reaches out to you, or asks to speak with you about their wellbeing, it’s vital that you actively listen to them, respond appropriately, and give them your undivided attention.

Do not be on your phone or answering emails when you sit down to discuss mental health; be totally present in that moment.

When the other person responds, let them take their time, and don’t interrupt them.

Avoid jumping to conclusions, and resist any urge you have to compare their experience to your own.

While it's helpful to show empathy, it can have the opposite effect if you diminish their experience or are dismissive of the impact their issue is having on them. It can come across as one upmanship or being tone-deaf.

Remember everyone's experience is relevant to them and they may feel more impacted by something that is a non-event to others.

When the other person is finished speaking, unless they directly ask you for your advice, avoid telling them what they should and should not do.

Sometimes people just need someone to listen to or talk to when they are feeling overwhelmed. Just being able to voice concerns, fears, or anxieties can really help alleviate negative feelings.

You can show you are actively listening with small verbal comments like 'I see' or 'what happened next?'

Avoid cliches

It's understandable as a listener to be lost for words at times, especially if you aren't sure what to say to someone who has shared something very sensitive with you.

But, it's best if you can avoid offering up mental health cliches, as they can leave the person feeling even more upset.

- "Pull yourself together."
- "Shake it off."
- "It's just a bad day."

- “Man up!”
- “You’ll get over it soon.”

Comments of this nature are not helpful and are likely to encourage the other person not to speak up again or feel worse for having been vulnerable in the first place.

So, if you find yourself unsure how to proceed or at a loss for words, try saying something empathetic or comforting instead:

- “That must have been hard for you”
- “I’m sorry you are going through this.”
- “That sounds really challenging.”
- “What do you need right now?”

Bear in mind, that when someone wants to share with you, it’s less about what you say and more about showing up, being present and actively listening.

Reassure them it’s good they want to talk

People often feel vulnerable when discussing their mental health, so if someone comes forward for support, to speak up, or share their concerns be sure to let them know that it’s positive that they did so.

Let them know that it was the right decision to talk about their experience, what’s happening with them, or that they are looking for support.

This will demonstrate to them that it’s indeed safe to discuss mental health: they are being listened to and that their wellbeing is valued.

Thank them for their contribution and then try to take responsive and appropriate action where possible.

Positive reinforcement like this will increase their sense of psychological safety at work and encourage them to engage more with you in the future.

Knowing that it's ok to have mental health issues or that's it normal to sometimes not be ok can really help someone to feel comfortable bringing their whole self to work.

Foster a workplace culture that supports wellbeing

Supporting and championing mental health at work has never been more important. We are going through an ongoing period of change and uncertainty due to the pandemic.

The past year has been difficult for everyone, but no two experiences have been the same and people have been affected in different ways.

That's why it's urgent that organisations foster openness and a culture that enables people to talk about their mental health.

With an employee wellbeing and engagement platform like Trickle, you can see how your people are feeling in real-time. With Trickle's MoodSense tool you can get a clear picture of how your people's overall wellbeing and what their sentiment is at the moment.

Always anonymous, MoodSense enables your people to share what's truly on their mind without fear of repercussions, which ensures you get the most accurate and dynamic feedback of the health of your workforce.

If your people indicate via MoodSense they are unhappy, the tool will ask them if they wish to send a Flare. Trickle's Flare feature has optional anonymity and can

be used to ask for guidance or more personal one-to-one support. Flares can be directed at a particular person and sent at any time.

Make it easy for employees to reach out

With Trickle your people have a voice and a safe space to use it to express their true sentiment, ask for support or seek guidance.

The Trickle app is available on desktop and mobile devices, which means your people have access to support and guidance when it's needed most, even out of office hours.

Managers are often time poor, so this extra availability with the Trickle app means that if someone is suffering they do not have to wait for an opportunity to access the help they need.

Trickle allows you to reach out to your people more effectively to support, maintain and improve their mental and physical wellbeing through collaborative engagement.

This more dynamic engagement means you will be alert to problems sooner and able to take earlier more impactful interventions.

Find out more about how Trickle can help your organisation support your people more proactively and make things better for everyone.

Get in touch for more information or to [book a short 20 minute demo](#).

Alternatively you can [trial Trickle absolutely free for 30-days](#).