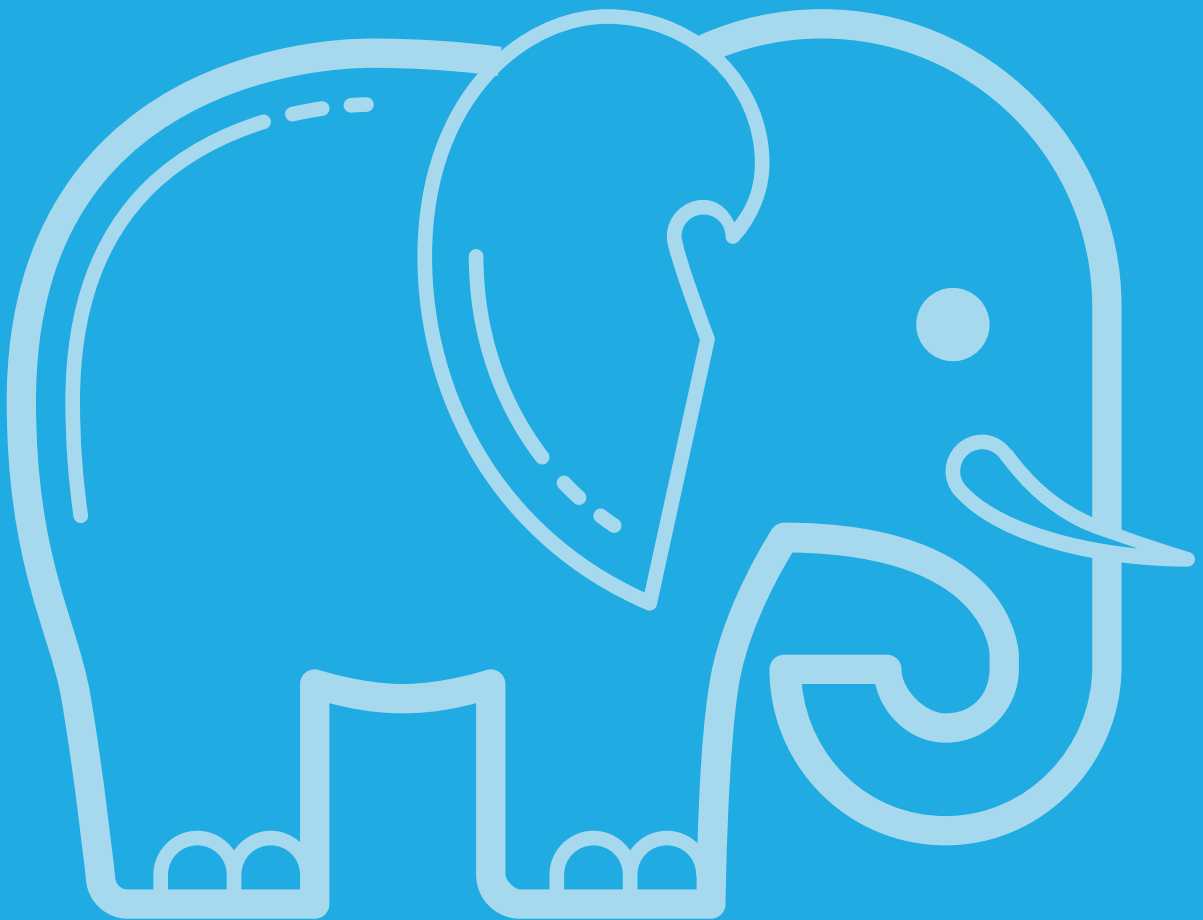




Mental Health Stigma:

The Elephant In The Room

Foreword From Our Founder

It's time for us to admit that 'employee wellbeing' has simply become another buzzword for many organisations.

In short, it's become another way for businesses to say "look, we're doing right by our employees and this is a great place to work".

We have to ask ourselves, "what's meaningfully changed over the past few years?". Since I lost my Dad to suicide in 2009, with very few warning signs, I still often question how many businesses are proactively supporting their employees to prevent them from reaching crisis stage.

The problem is, most businesses are approaching workplace wellbeing by:

- Running one-off mental health initiatives
- Relying on HR to solve wellbeing on their own
- Only providing reactive interventions like an EAP or MHFAs
- Guessing what employees need
- Not tackling workplace mental health stigma

Sadly, HR and People Professionals feel the brunt force of this.

Don't get me wrong, seeing businesses do something for employee wellbeing instead of ignoring it altogether is encouraging. But the statistics still show mental ill-health remains the most common cause of long-term absence¹ and accounted for 50% of all work-related ill health cases in 2020/2021².

In addition, our data (to be revealed) confirmed our concerns that organisations are seeing little improvement by forgetting to address the elephant in the room... mental health stigma.

We have to do better and that's our aim with this report. To highlight some key statistics but also provide you with some practical solutions that can make a real difference.

Paul McGregor
Founder, Everymind at Work



¹ CIPD (2021). Health and Wellbeing at Work 2021.

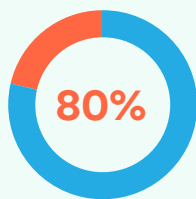
² HSE (2021). Work-related stress, anxiety or depression statistics in Great Britain, 2021.

Has Stigma Truly Been Tackled?

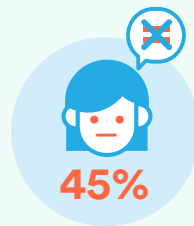
At Everymind at Work, we are on a mission to help employees feel safe to talk about mental health in the workplace. We know that at any given time, 1 in 6 working-age adults have symptoms associated with mental ill-health³ and that mental ill-health remains the most common cause of long-term absence⁴ and accounted for 50% of all work-related ill-health cases in 2020/2021⁵.

It is therefore encouraging to see that following the pandemic, 83% of HR leaders are planning to ramp up investment around employee wellbeing⁶ and mental health is now the most common focus of health and wellbeing activity for employers⁴.

Despite these promising statistics, our data insights collected between 2021 and 2022 show that organisations are seeing little return when failing to tackle mental health stigma. We've pulled out 6 of our key findings below...



80% of employees have struggled with their mental health



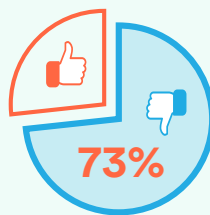
45% of employees would speak to no one at work about their mental health



68% of employees would benefit from extra help to manage their mental health



53% of employees would be worried about telling their employer if they had a mental health condition, in case it would negatively impact them**



73% of HR professionals say that it is hard to engage employees in wellbeing initiatives**



Employees ranked 'Lack of Confidence' as the challenge they need the most support with

³ McManus S, Bebbington P, Jenkins R, Brugha T. (eds.) (2016). Mental health and wellbeing in England: Adult psychiatric morbidity survey 2014.

⁴ CIPD (2021). Health and Wellbeing at Work 2021.

⁵ HSE (2021). Work-related stress, anxiety or depression statistics in Great Britain, 2021.

⁶ Benefex (2021). Employee Experience In The New World of Work.

Defining Mental Health Stigma In 2022

Stigma is defined as “a mark of disgrace associated with a particular circumstance, quality, or person”. In relation to mental health, stigma involves the social disapproval, discrediting or discrimination of individuals with a mental health condition.

Mental illness has long been stigmatised in societies worldwide and although attitudes have changed since the Middle Ages when the mentally ill were imprisoned or even killed, the current population still largely fears individuals suffering from ill-mental health and ignorance is prevalent. For example, statistics show that over a third of the public think people with a mental health issue are likely to be violent⁷.

The term ‘mental health’ itself has negative connotations. During our interactive webinar sessions, we often ask attendees what word(s) they associate with the word ‘mental’. Here is an example of the responses we get:



As you can see, quite often the responses we get include words like ‘mad’, ‘crazy’ and ‘nuts’. This is due to associative activation where our brains automatically associate the phrase ‘mental’, and thus ‘mental health’, with many negative connotations without us even realising it. In contrast, when most people hear ‘physical health’ they would likely have positive connotations (e.g. strength or fitness); highlighting that mental health stigma is still a societal problem.

The stigma associated with mental illness is often divided into three types: public, self and institutional stigma.

Public Stigma



Public stigma refers to the negative attitudes that society has towards individuals with mental illness. This typically stems from stereotypes, prejudice and misconceptions. As a result, many people think that individuals with a mental illness are dangerous, incompetent or to blame for their disorder for example.

Self-Stigma

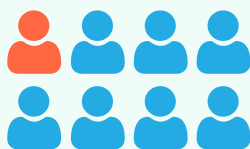


Self-stigma is when an individual internalises the misconceptions of the public and has negative attitudes towards their own mental illness. As a result, they may feel that they are dangerous, incompetent, broken or to blame for their own condition, thus increasing shame and exacerbation of symptoms.

Institutional Stigma



Institutional stigma is more systemic. In relation to the workplace, it is when an organisation’s policies and procedures, intentionally or unintentionally, negatively affect those with mental health conditions, often invisibly. As a result, this can become embedded in the organisation’s culture.



It is estimated that only 1 in 8 adults with a mental health problem receive any kind of treatment⁸



A study of over 90,000 people worldwide found that stigma of mental illness is one of the top reasons that they don’t receive care⁹

⁸ McManus S, Bebbington P, Jenkins R, Brugha T. (eds.) (2016). Mental health and wellbeing in England: Adult psychiatric morbidity survey 2014.

⁹ Clement, S., Schauman, O., Graham, T., Maggioni, F., Evans-Lacko, S., Bezborodovs, N., Thornicroft, G. (2015). What is the impact of mental health-related stigma on help-seeking? A systematic review of quantitative and qualitative studies. *Psychological Medicine*, 45(1), 11-27.

The Effects of Mental Health Stigma

For people with mental health conditions, the stigma they experience from the public, themselves or institutions can exacerbate the struggles they are facing. In fact, nearly **9 out of 10 people with a mental illness feel that stigma and discrimination negatively impact their lives**¹⁰. Below are some of the harmful effects that mental health stigma can have on an individual:



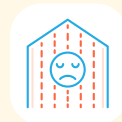
Reluctance to seek help and/or treatment, causing delayed or prolonged recovery



More likely to experience bullying, harassment and discrimination



Increased psychological symptoms



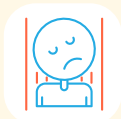
Feeling isolated and excluded, leading to further social withdrawal



Lack of support from friends, family and colleagues



Fewer opportunities for employment or social interactions



Low self-esteem and confidence



Hesitation to pursue opportunities



When it comes to the workplace, our data has highlighted that lack of confidence is a real issue for employees currently. **On average, employees agree that they criticise themselves a lot and do not feel confident***; it was therefore no surprise when 'Lack of Confidence' was ranked as the challenge they need the most support with when it comes to mental health and wellbeing.



¹⁰ Mental Health Foundation (2021). Stigma and discrimination.

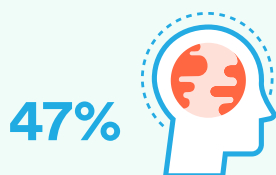
Mental Health Stigma at Work

Recent research by McKinsey & Company¹¹ found that 65% of people with a mental illness perceive stigma in the workplace and less than 1 in 10 employees describe their workplace as free of stigma on mental illness. However, **‘reducing stigma’ ranks last when employers list their top mental health priorities, despite 75% of the same employers acknowledging the presence of stigma in their workplaces.** Moreover, they found that 80% of employees believe an anti-stigma or awareness campaign would be useful, however, only 23% of employers reported having implemented such a programme.

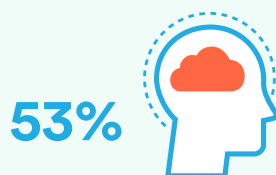
Unfortunately, this is not surprising as the abstract nature of stigma often deters employers from tackling it; yet the cost of ignoring workplace mental health stigma can be detrimental to both the organisation and its employees.

Here are some questions you may want to consider when it comes to identifying stigma in your organisation...

- Could you identify the ‘1 in 6 working adults’ that are struggling with their mental health?
- Are you unaware that employees are struggling until you see mental ill-health stated on a doctor’s note?
- Is engagement in wellbeing initiatives low?
- Do your people managers care about their employee’s mental health?
- Do employees cite mental health as a reason for absence? Do they have the means to do so?
- Do employees access/use your wellbeing benefits?
- Are burnout, presenteeism or leaveism high in your organisation?
- How are you measuring or assessing the level of stigma within your organisation?
- Do you have a health and wellbeing section within your engagement survey? If so, are you uncovering whether employees feel safe and cared for by their manager and the company?



47% of respondents with a mental illness believe that their colleagues would **think they are worthless** if they knew about their mental illness¹¹



53% of respondents with a mental illness believe that their colleagues would **doubt their character** if they found out about their mental illness¹¹



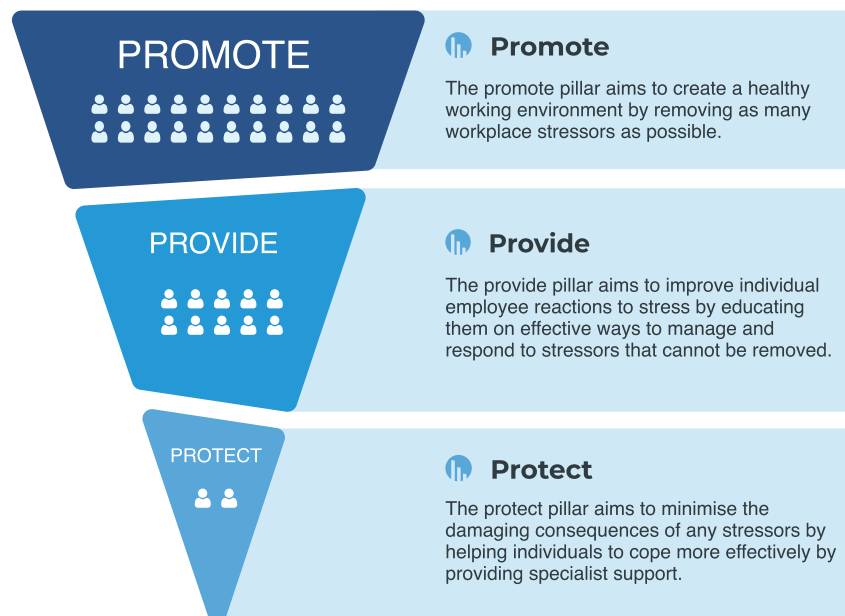
50% of respondents with a mental illness believe that their colleagues would **think they have little talent or skill** if they knew about their mental illness¹¹

¹¹ McKinsey & Company (2021). Overcoming stigma: Three strategies toward better mental health in the workplace.

How to Move From a Culture of Stigma to Support

The 3 Pillars to Improve Workplace Mental Wellbeing

To transform employee wellbeing, we believe that organisations need to implement a wellbeing strategy that is broken down into three key pillars: Promote, Provide and Protect. As there is no 'one size fits all' approach, these three pillars must be informed by the unique needs of the organisation and its employees to have a meaningful and long-lasting impact on employee wellbeing.



For years, businesses have focussed too heavily on the final pillar - Protect. These are reactive solutions that help employees in the midst of a crisis. There is a place for these interventions in the workplace, but they should not be the key focus. Implementing initiatives that do not tackle stigma, or require psychological safety, will not be engaged with if mental health stigma is rife. Instead, a wellbeing strategy should support a proactive approach to wellbeing, where the Promote and Provide pillars aim to negate the need for crisis support and make employees comfortable to engage and talk about mental health at work.

So, how can you use the Promote and Provide pillars to reduce mental health stigma in the workplace?

10 Key Ways To Reduce Stigma In Your Organisation

Mental health stigma needs to be addressed at an organisational, team and individual level. Here we have summarised 10 key ways you can do this:

1

Educate all employees

2

Publicly commit to supporting employee wellbeing

3

Promote a healthy working environment by minimising risks to mental wellbeing

4

Ensure the correct language is used in all communications

5

Empower, educate and encourage people leaders

6

Foster psychological safety within teams

7

Focus on equality, diversity and inclusion (ED&I)

8

Offer appropriate workplace adjustments

9

Create conversations

10

Share stories

1. Educate All Employees

At Everymind at Work, we strongly believe that everyone has a part to play in reducing workplace mental health stigma. Stigma typically derives from a lack of understanding and education of mental illness and mental health in general. If you can educate ALL employees, it will not only reduce stigma but also help them to better support themselves and those around them.

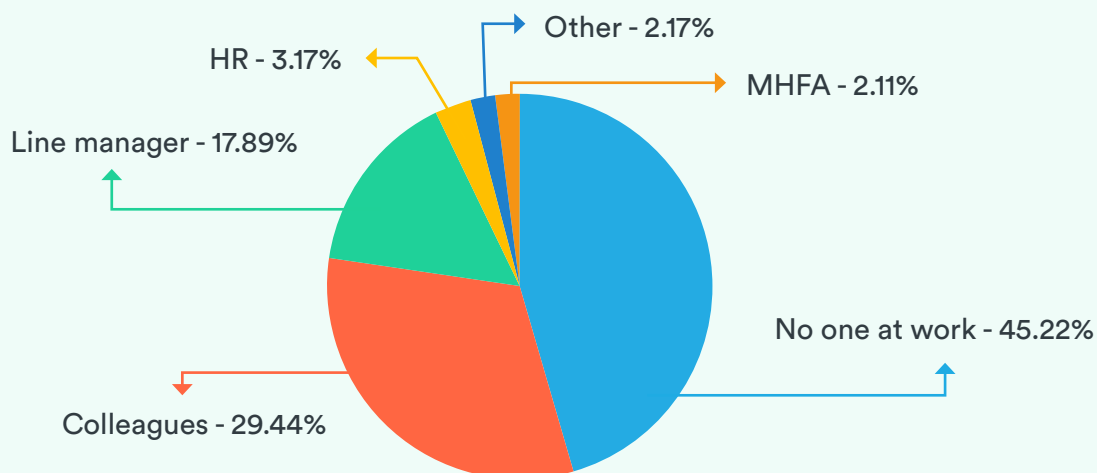
Through such education programmes, you should focus on reinforcing positive messages and giving employees permission to learn and be curious. If a company adopts a coaching style culture where it's ok to ask questions, raise ideas and give feedback, where 'failing fast', learning and moving on is encouraged, employees start to feel safer in their environment. By promoting and celebrating wellbeing through education and other initiatives, it will become the norm and help reduce mental health stigma within the organisation.

One tip is to start utilising language like 'wellbeing', 'wellness' or more relatable terms such as 'stress' to gain initial attention as opposed to 'mental health'. We've also seen benefit from bringing in external speakers to be a catalyst for change and focusing on positive mental health before going on to discuss ill-mental health. It's about gradually chipping away at the stigma, one step at a time.

P.S. the [Everymind Champion](#) course is a great place to start!



At work, who would you most likely speak to about your mental health?



Our data insights show that 45% of employees would speak to no one at work about their mental health. Of the 55% that would speak to someone at work, they would most likely speak to their colleagues (29.44%). This highlights the importance of ALL employees having a solid understanding of how to support others because you never know when someone might reach out.

2. Publicly Commit To Supporting Employee Wellbeing

It is believed that 46% of organisations still lack a formal strategy and tend to act on an ad-hoc basis when it comes to employee health and wellbeing¹². This approach can foster stigma, making wellbeing initiatives look like a ‘tick-box exercise’. To show employees that you truly care about their wellbeing, it needs to be engrained in everything you do and clearly align with company values.

The best way to start this is by publicly committing to support employee wellbeing. For example, you could try calling out wellbeing within your employee value proposition (EVP) to attract new recruits, e.g. “one of our strengths is our commitment to employee wellbeing via our many initiatives carrying full leadership support”. You may want to make a formal statement on your public (e.g. website, social media) as well as internal communication channels. Or you can partner with a wellbeing provider, like Everymind at Work, who will work with you to implement a successful wellbeing strategy worth shouting about!



46% of organisations still lack a formal strategy and tend to act on an ad-hoc basis when it comes to employee health and wellbeing¹².

3. Promote A Healthy Working Environment By Minimising Risks To Mental Wellbeing

Statistics show that 822,000 British workers suffered from work-related stress, depression or anxiety in 2020/21¹³, yet one in five HR professionals report their organisation is not taking any steps to identify and reduce work-related stress¹².

The risks to employee mental health at work, typically fall into one of five categories: job characteristics, role characteristics, the work environment, relationships and/or the individual. Employers may not be able to control all of these factors, but it is important that they are aware of them and implement any interventions that may help proactively support employee mental health and wellbeing.

It is therefore advised that organisations complete a business-wide mental wellbeing risk assessment at least once a year which, by default, will cover many psychological elements supportive of reducing stigma. It is important that this becomes a working document, containing tangible actions which are reviewed on a regular basis.

You may find the [Everymind at Work Workplace Mental Wellbeing Risk Assessment](#) a useful starting point!

¹² CIPD (2021). Health and Wellbeing at Work 2021.

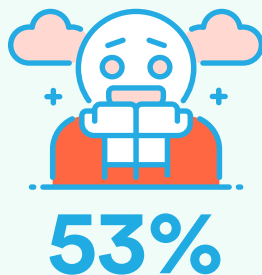
¹³ HSE (2021). Work-related stress, anxiety or depression statistics in Great Britain, 2021.

4. Foster Psychological Safety Within Teams

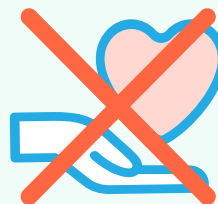
Psychological safety refers to individuals being able to be themselves at work, without fear of negative consequences. In psychologically safe organisations, employees feel accepted, respected and safe to take interpersonal risks. Recent research has found that 20% of the UK's workforce don't feel a sense of belonging at their workplace and that more than one in four workers have felt pressure to hide or change something about themselves to fit in at work¹⁴. Moreover, 1 in 5 people take a day off due to stress but 90% of these people cited a different reason for their absence¹⁵. This suggests that psychological safety is low in many organisations.

The key to fostering psychological safety is to create a safe and trusting culture where employees are valued as a 'whole person'. You should encourage curiosity, creativity and innovation and accept mistakes as learning opportunities, not failures. Moreover, by teaching employees skills such as empathy, active listening and self-awareness, you will provide them with the confidence to support themselves and others whilst enhancing their performance.

Remember leaders often 'set the tone' and therefore if the culture is not open and honest this will not create a safe space for employees. You should coach leaders in emotional intelligence to support building trust amongst employees. Encourage leaders to give and receive feedback, respect the views of others and show transparency in their responses and communication. Ultimately, we want everyone to display positive, supportive behaviours (not just people leaders), however, by setting the right examples, leaders can influence these behaviours across their teams.



53%
53% of employees would be worried about telling their employer if they had a mental health condition, in case it would negatively impact them**



On average, employees disagree that there is a positive and supportive culture at their work*



¹⁴ Randstad (2021). A workplace for everyone? 1 in 5 of UK workers feel that they don't belong at work.

¹⁵ Mind (2013). Work is biggest cause of stress in people's lives.

5. Empower, Educate and Encourage People Leaders

People managers have a key role in tackling stigma. It is estimated that 67% of line managers buy into the importance of wellbeing¹⁶ but they know that their employees are afraid to speak up about wellbeing needs. In fact, many leaders admit that they themselves may not be comfortable asking for help¹⁷.

In order for them to better support their teams and tackle stigma, they need to be given additional training and resources to support them in their role. As mentioned previously, you should help leaders to build their softer skills, such as empathy, relationship building and self-awareness, as this will help build psychological safety. You can then train them to spot the signs of ill-mental health and demonstrate how to have wellbeing conversations at work. They need to be comfortable in their knowledge and skills themselves to be able to help others, but remember that they too are human and will need a place to turn should they need support.

If you need help getting buy-in with your wellbeing strategy or showing leadership [Why Employee Health and Wellbeing Matters](#), this resource may be useful!

6. Ensure The Correct Language Is Used In All Communications

The language we use to discuss and describe mental health is key when addressing stigma in organisations. By recognising that language can unconsciously trigger our brains to think in a certain way and add to the stigma that surrounds mental health, we realise that our words matter. We should be more conscious of the language we use so that we do not add to the stigma or negatively impact those around us, especially those who may be struggling with their mental health.

You should therefore ensure that anyone with a responsibility for comms across the business is trained in the use of the most appropriate language to adopt and any key communications should be sense checked to confirm inclusivity. Weaving company values through the whole employee lifecycle (where practical) is also a great way to reinforce the right language and behaviours across the organisation.

You may find these resources useful:

- [Why The Language We Use To Discuss Mental Health Matters](#)
- [How To Talk About Mental Health](#)

49%



49% of people have avoided a conversation surrounding mental health in case they said something wrong or offensive**



¹⁶ CIPD (2021). Health and Wellbeing at Work 2021.

¹⁷ McKinsey & Company (2021). Overcoming stigma: Three strategies toward better mental health in the workplace.

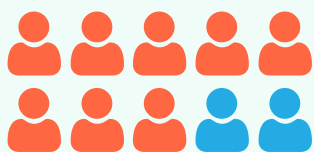
7. Focus On Equality, Diversity And Inclusion (ED&I)

ED&I and mental health go hand in hand. Many organisations are focusing on creating a diverse workforce and acknowledge the benefits this can have on employee performance and wellbeing. However, with a diverse workforce comes a diverse experience of mental health and organisations need to equally understand and address this with their ED&I and wellbeing initiatives.

Mental health is something we all have, however, the risk of developing ill-mental health is higher for particular groups (e.g. minority groups or those living in financial hardship). Moreover, cultural views towards mental health vary and stigma can lead to the exclusion of individuals with mental illness. It is therefore important that ED&I and wellbeing programmes are planned in conjunction.

All of the recommendations in this report focus on reducing stigma, which ultimately promotes inclusion. However, here are a few things you may wish to consider when it comes to ED&I and mental health:

- Educate employees on ED&I and the relationship to mental health and stigma.
- Being inclusive does not mean treating all employees in the same way. You may need to consider adapting comms or activities for example to accommodate differences.
- Don't make assumptions, if you are unclear on something, ask - if your organisation is psychologically safe then this should be welcomed.
- Ensure any policies relating to ED&I are understood by all employees and that any breaches are reported and managed appropriately.
- Educate leaders in preventing discrimination in the workplace.



80%

80% of employees have
struggled with their
mental health

**100% of employees have
mental health and our
data shows that 80% have
struggled with theirs - are you
supporting the needs of all
these employees?**



8. Offer Appropriate Workplace Adjustments

Our statistics show that **68% of employees would benefit from extra help to manage their mental health**. This might mean implementing an education programme or offering wellbeing benefits to employees, but quite often, employees would benefit most from minor workplace adjustments that have the power to make a major difference to their wellbeing.

It is important to differentiate here that reasonable adjustments are changes to the workplace or the work practices of an employee that enable them to do their job more effectively or reduce any disadvantages related to a disability. By law, under the Equality Act 2010, an employer must consider making reasonable adjustments if an employee has a mental or physical impairment, of which mental illness is included. However, all employees may benefit from adjustments to proactively support their wellbeing at work, even if they are not struggling.

Making adjustments to support the mitigation of risk factors demonstrates a robust commitment to tackling stigma and being supportive of helpful solutions. It also signals to all employees that mental wellbeing is taken seriously. Adjustments should be made on an individual basis to target an employee's specific needs, however here are some prompts you may wish to consider when exploring solutions:



Working hours or patterns

- Would flexible start and finish times be helpful?
- Do they need longer or more frequent breaks throughout the day?
- Do they need flexibility in work location - workplace and/or remote?



Physical environment

- Would a certain area be more suitable to have a workspace?
- Do they need additional resources or equipment?
- Do they need access to a breakout area or multiple workspaces?



Support with workload

- Would they benefit from any additional training?
- Do they need more time to work on projects?
- Do communication methods need to change to reduce overwhelm?



Social support

- Do they need more frequent 1:1s or opportunities to meet with colleagues?
- Would coaching or mentoring help the individual?
- Do colleagues need to be able to spot the signs of mental decline?

9. Create Conversations

A third of workers (30%) report feeling uncomfortable talking openly about their mental health¹⁸. Therefore, the first step to creating conversations is to foster an environment where employees feel safe and comfortable to do so, using the techniques discussed previously. You then need to provide them with the opportunities for these conversations to take place, both formally and informally.

You can do this by providing break out spaces, encouraging lunch breaks away from desks, arranging online 'tea and talk' sessions, virtual coffee mornings etc. Especially if you are working remotely, you need to ensure colleagues have an opportunity to talk outside of work meetings by replicating the 'water cooler' moments that are missed.

You should also ensure that managers are asking about employee wellbeing regularly, this could be indirectly or directly. For example, we know that certain factors impact wellbeing (e.g. technical difficulties, social support, work-life balance, workload etc.) so asking about these factors can help give insight into an employee's wellbeing. This can be particularly useful for individuals who may not be as comfortable discussing their mental health yet. Equally, managers should directly ask about wellbeing in 1:1s and offer support where needed so that it is clear to employees that they care. By showing regular interest in employees as a 'whole' person, they will be more likely to engage in these conversations when they arise, as they will trust their manager and be more open with them.

You could also try adopting a 'reverse mentoring' programme where leaders can learn from junior colleagues. This is all about seeing things from others' perspectives and learning something new. This in itself helps build trust and strengthens relationships, therefore encouraging employees to have meaningful conversations with senior leaders outside of the programme.

P.S. our [Ask Twice](#) poster is a great resource to display and share with your employees to get the conversation started!



On average, employees disagree that they feel empowered to talk to someone at work about their mental health and believe they cannot clearly communicate how they feel to others*



¹⁸ Randstad (2021). A workplace for everyone? 1 in 5 of UK workers feel that they don't belong at work.

10. Share Stories

Research shows that knowing someone with a mental illness is one of the best ways to reduce stigma. Why? Because it becomes real and relatable. This is why the sharing of personal stories can have such a positive impact on employees and is something we are passionate about at Everymind at Work.

When others humanise stigmatised conditions, it is an evidence-based approach to education that enables people to feel understood and accepted. In turn, it gives others permission to share their stories and find strength in vulnerability. It doesn't matter where someone is on their journey, whether they have overcome a mental health struggle, or still facing adversity; it is the fact they are open and honest that reduces stigma.

Encouraging employees to share their experiences can therefore have a powerful impact, especially when those who share are in leadership roles. This is an under-tapped channel with **only 24% of employers using their C-suites to communicate about mental health**¹⁹. This can also be said for using wellbeing champions as your advocates for change across the business, as those who share their stories will become more approachable and thus increase mental health conversations in the workplace.

“Organisations of all sizes will have policies, processes and guidelines for supporting employees with poor mental health, however it's key to never lose sight of the person and their individuality. Policies, processes, guidelines are there to give guidance, they should never replace compassion and empathy for the person in front of you.”

Martin Roberts

Mental Health Lead at one of the UK's largest Financial Institutions and Founder of Keep In Mind Ltd



¹⁹ McKinsey & Company (2021). Overcoming stigma: Three strategies toward better mental health in the workplace.

The Everymind Approach to Tackling Stigma in The Workplace

“Tackling mental health stigma in the workplace has been at the heart of Everymind at Work’s approach since day one.”

Paul McGregor



At Everymind at Work, we are on a mission to help employees feel safe to talk about mental health in the workplace. We understand that stigma is not easy to tackle all on your own. Our personal approach acts as a catalyst for change in your organisation, turning old perspectives around when it comes to mental health and wellbeing. Our unique partnership focuses on proactive support across the full wellbeing lifecycle, in the form of:



A 12-month personalised wellbeing roadmap



Wellbeing webinars to tackle areas of concern



Training workshops to inform, educate and provide key skills to leaders, managers and employees



Check-in sessions to support your Champions, Managers and/or MHFA's



Your very own Wellbeing Business Consultant



The Everymind at Work wellbeing app



Insights into how other businesses are improving wellbeing



The Everymind Champions Course

With a 16% rise in mental health costs for UK employers²⁰, more employees than ever are struggling and reaching burnout. It's time to shift from a reactive to a proactive approach to workplace wellbeing.

We're here every step of the way to support you.

To learn more about how we can help you, please visit everymindatwork.com and to reach out to the team, simply email info@everymindatwork.com.

20 Deloitte (2020). Poor mental health costs UK employers up to £45 billion a year.

Our survey was conducted on 1,907 employees from over 40 organisations across a range of industries between 2021 and 2022.

*This data was collected via questionnaires on The Everymind at Work app between 2021 and 2022.

**This data was collected via a LinkedIn poll in March 2022.