Looking out for friends and colleagues at work

Good Thinking's quick guide to supporting people you work with who may be struggling with their mental health.

In these challenging times, it's important to be kind and look out for those around you. Here at Good Thinking, London's digital mental wellbeing service, we have created this practical guide with three simple steps to help you check in with your colleagues and friends at work on a regular basis and see how they are – the more open everyone can be about their feelings, the better.

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Spot the signs

It can be difficult to know if a colleague is struggling with their mental health, particularly if you don't know them very well or if you don't see them in person very often (e.g. because you or they work remotely, work shifts or have to travel regularly for work), but there are a few things you can look out for.

- Do they seem particularly sad, worried or overwhelmed or have they talked about feeling unhappy, hopeless or trapped?

- Are they often tired or lacking energy or are they frequently late for work?

- Do they find it hard to control their emotions (e.g. are they often irritable, restless, tearful or extremely happy or excited)?

- Are they calling in sick on a regular basis and reporting the same physical symptoms (e.g. headaches and tummy aches)?

- Do they seem more distant than usual (e.g. not replying to emails or phone messages, not wanting to talk to or be around people, avoiding virtual meetings if they work from home)?

- Have their behaviour or habits changed (e.g. are they eating more or less, avoiding socialising during breaks or mentioning that they are having trouble sleeping or waking up)?

- Have there been any changes in their level of focus or quality of work?

Use Good Thinking to learn more about the symptoms of stress, anxiety, mood disorders and sleep disorders.

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STEP 2

Check in and let them know you care

It may not always be possible to spot the signs so it's really important to check how people are feeling and to create a safe and supportive space for them to open up.

You might want to do the following:

- Use **Thrive LDN's guide to talking about mental health** to help you start a conversation that is less about work and more about wellbeing. Many people find it difficult to talk about their feelings so this guide provides tips, prompts and example questions if you aren't sure where to start.

- Check if your organisation provides guidance on supporting employee mental health and use this to help you begin the conversation.

- Be patient, listen and give your colleague space to respond – don't feel you have to fill any silences or offer solutions immediately.

- If someone is reluctant to talk, reassure them that you are there for them if they ever want a chat. They may prefer to talk to someone who isn't directly involved in their day-to-day work, so check whether there are any services or teams within your organisation you could direct them to (e.g. Mental Health First Aiders, HR, occupational health and staff wellbeing) or an Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) helpline that they could call in confidence.

If you are a line manager or supervisor:

- Check in regularly with your team members on a one-to-one basis and build in questions about how they are doing in general rather than simply asking about work.

- Make yourself aware of the mental health and wellbeing support offered by your employer, such as staff networks, counselling services, occupational health and access to Mental Health First Aiders.

- If possible, discuss whether any adjustments can be made to the person's workload, schedule or work environment to support their wellbeing.

Remember that it's important to look after yourself too. If supporting your colleague is affecting your own wellbeing, it's ok to take a step back.

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Help them get the support they need
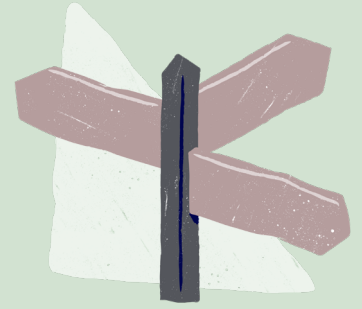
If your colleague chooses to confide in you, the most important thing you can do is show them that you care for them and want to help.

Good Thinking has a great range of advice, tools and support which are free and available 24/7 – for example, you could:

- Take a look at the **Good Thinking Employer Toolkit** – it contains lots of mental health tips and other resources that you can use for free to support your employees' mental wellbeing.

- Suggest that they incorporate something from the **Five ways to good mental wellbeing** in their daily life.

- Search **Good Thinking's library of expert advice articles** where you'll find short guides with tips and resource recommendations to help you with a range of concerns, including dealing with uncertainty, coping with money worries and getting enough sleep.

- If they have lost a loved one, share **Good Thinking's bereavement advice** with them.

- Encourage them to try one of **Good Thinking's free NHS-approved apps** to help with lowering stress and anxiety, improving sleep and boosting mood, such as:

  A cognitive fitness programme to improve your resilience to stress

  Personalised learning modules which teach you coping mechanisms for stress and anxiety

  A mindfulness course which helps with management of stress, anxiety and depression

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Urgent support and professional help

If your support doesn't seem to be having much impact and changes in your colleague's emotions and behaviour start to affect how they live and work, don't worry — it's not your fault.

Sometimes people need professional support so perhaps you could suggest that they:

- Make an appointment with their GP.

- Make a self-referral to an NHS Talking Therapies service.

- Contact a mental health charity via a phone helpline or online forum (e.g. Mind or Samaritans).

- If your colleague is very distressed, call their local 24/7 NHS mental health helpline, NHS 111 or 999.

- Use Good Thinking's self-assessment tool for a guiding diagnosis and, if necessary, relevant treatment advice.

Visit www.good-thinking.uk/urgent-support for a range of urgent support services and helplines available 24/7.

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