When support is needed

Employers

The earlier you can spot low levels of wellbeing in your staff, the better.

**Keys signs that something is wrong**

- Changes in a person's usual behaviour
- Poor performance
- Tiredness or irritability
- Increased sickness absence
- Increased use of alcohol, drugs or smoking
- Poor timekeeping
- Difficulties with relationships at work
- Tearfulness
- Headaches
- Loss of sense of humour
- Over-performance - driving themselves to excess
- Rapid changes of emotional mood

**Using ordinary management tools to identify problems and needs**

Regular work planning sessions, appraisals or informal chats about progress can all provide neutral and non-stigmatising opportunities to find out about any problems your employee may be having. It is helpful to use open questions that allow the employee maximum opportunity to express concerns in his or her own way, eg, How are you doing at the moment? Is there anything we can do to help?

If you have specific grounds for concern, eg, impaired performance, it is important to address these quickly before the situation escalates. Again, it is helpful if questions are framed in an open, exploratory way.
E.g. I've noticed that you've sometimes been arriving late recently and wondered if there was a problem.

**Engaging with someone who is reluctant to talk**

Make it clear that the discussion will be absolutely confidential.

It may be worth considering why they are reluctant.

- Is it really safe for them to be open?
- Will any disclosures be treated sympathetically and positively? If they have seen others with similar problems being discriminated against then caution may be wise.

**What you can do**
Meet the person in a private, confidential setting.
Reassure them that your door is always open.
Be clear about confidentiality and who will be told what.
Agree about how problems will be monitored.
If adjustments are being made, ask the person how they wish this to be communicated to other staff.
Suggest that the person brings an advocate, friend or family member to support them in a meeting.

Employees

Talking to your manager about stress and distress

Many people are afraid of revealing their stress or distress and will struggle on until they reach the point of breakdown.

However, the earlier the issues are tackled, the more likely it is that you can agree on support or adjustments that enable you to continue in work. When approaching your manager, remember they may also be fearful of emotional or difficult interviews.

Consider the following:

• If your manager seems anxious or reluctant to engage with you, you may need to give them a way into discussing the issues. They may be fearful about saying 'the wrong thing'. If that happens, you can gently correct them but show that you value the effort they are making.
• Are there particular actions that your manager could take that would reduce stress?
• What, if anything, do you wish colleagues to be told? Decide which colleagues and who will tell them.
• How do you think your progress/ performance should be monitored?
• How much are you prepared to disclose about any medical care?
• If there are any problems at work that involve other people, are you going to talk to the manager about this? Do you need to consult others before doing so? For example, there may be a problem with bullying or harassment.
• Are there ways in which the meeting with your manager could be made easier? For example, held in a neutral location or with a friend, family member or advocate attending?

Source: Line managers' resource, The Mental Health Foundation UK


How best to support a return to work
Returning to work

Employers

Most people with mental health problems recover completely and have the capacity to resume work successfully.

The organisation has made an investment in that individual and in most cases, a planned return to work will be more cost effective than early retirement.

Factors to consider in planning the return

- Consider with the employee any factors that contributed to their absence that could realistically be changed or accommodated
- Ensure they don't return to an impossible in-tray and thousands of emails
- Brief them on what's been happening - social life as well as work developments
- Set achievable goals Have frequent informal chats so there is an opportunity to discuss progress/problems
- Make the person feel welcomed back
- Discuss whether any reasonable accommodations need to be made to ease their return. Reasonable accommodations should be made for any employee, not just those with experience of mental illness.
- Discuss what colleagues will be told
- Consider a mentoring scheme with another employee so that the person returning can also talk to someone who isn't their manager
- Give positive and constructive feedback
- Be realistic about workloads - be aware that some people will wish to prove themselves and may offer to take on too much.

Reasonable accommodations

- A phased return to work - starting with part-time working and building up
- Identifying the training needs of an individual
- Working at home for some of the time
- Time off for attending therapeutic sessions (this should be allowed for all medical problems)
- Changing shift patterns or exploring different work options - e.g. part-time, job-share
- A later or earlier start to avoid rush hour travel
- A quiet place where they can go if feeling anxious/stressed
- Support with childcare.

Employees

How can I prepare for returning to work?

- Think about any adjustments or support that would be helpful.
- Are there particular aspects of the job that make you feel anxious? Have practical suggestions about what can be done about these.
- Would it be helpful if there were a neutral/independent person who could act as a mentor?
- Think again about what you'd like colleagues/clients to be told
- How will you describe what's been happening? How will you protect yourself against intrusive or tactless questions?
- Might it be helpful to meet up for a coffee with a trusted colleague to catch up before you return?
- Think about how you'd like your progress to be monitored. What goals are realistic?

Source: Line Managers' Resource, Mind Out for Mental Health