

Employee Mental Wellbeing

Employee wellbeing is important now more than ever and we have written the below to help employers with some of the new challenges everyone is facing at this time.

It is vital for employers to be aware of how their employees are feeling. As we navigate through this pandemic there are significant challenges for employers, with many staff working remotely or being furloughed, and for those key workers that continue to attend their place of work.

Understandably, anxiety and stress are being felt more than ever. With this in mind, here are some of the warning signs that both employers and their employees should be looking out for.

- **Low energy levels:** People suffering with depression will commonly feel sluggish and exhausted. Just feeling a bit tired is not always a sign of a more complex issue, but it should be noted as a trigger for employers if someone seems to be constantly fatigued and should be monitored to see if other symptoms arise.
- **Sleeping issues:** Mental health issues can often cause disruptions to normal sleep patterns. Insomnia is often associated with severe depression. Significant changes to a person's sleeping patterns are an indicator that an underlying mental health issue may be present.
- **Appearance:** When working remotely, it is understandable that some people will adopt a more casual appearance. However, attention should be given to anyone who appears consistently unkempt and seems tired and miserable.
- **Panic attacks:** These are commonly a sudden rush of stress and anxiety that can completely disable a person. The trigger points for a panic attack are generally a significantly elevated heartbeat, weakness, dizziness and chest pains.
- **Sudden outbursts:** People suffering from stress can be prone to an angry outburst. These are rarely out of genuine anger and are more commonly linked to frustration at feeling helpless. Sudden outbursts are not always verbal and can sometimes be in the form of a curt or aggressive email or instant message.
- **Distracted:** Typical signs would be experiencing difficulty when trying to concentrate on tasks, missing work deadlines or not appearing to be fully engaged in team voice calls. The person might also be suffering from memory lapses, such as forgetting things that have been said and done and confusion with general knowledge.
- **Unusual behaviour:** Typical indicators would include increased risk-taking, alcohol and drug use, or changes in attitude. The risk for someone who is suffering and does not know where to seek help is that they start to lash out at others or self-medicate.
- **Absence:** Signs that this may be linked to the onset of mental health issues can be where a person is absent more than usual. This could be taking unauthorised or short-notice annual leave.

- **Burnout:** Burnout was added last year by the World Health Organisation (WHO) to the international classification of diseases. It is a state of emotional, physical, and mental exhaustion caused by excessive and prolonged stress, often the result of workplace stress that has not been managed effectively. Long-term homeworking may be creating a culture of 'e-presenteeism', whereby employees feel obligated to be online as much as possible, even outside of work hours and when they are feeling unwell. Surveys have shown that individuals are working an average of 28 hours a month more since being required to work from home due to the lockdown (1).

(1) Source: hrgrapevine.com 14 May 2020

How to help

Employers have statutory obligations under the Health & Safety at Work Act (1974). This is a duty of care for employee wellbeing, including mental health. This involves minimising risk such as workload, job role and expectations, identifying issues by monitoring absenteeism and presenteeism.

Recognising the above signs would be the first step for employers and employees on the way to helping to mitigate and manage mental health related conditions.

Where risks are identified, there are several preventative strategies that can be put in place by creating a culture of wellbeing. This can include the following:

- Achievable workload / targets.
- Managing performance and encouraging a culture of disclosure, so that any issues can be identified and adjustments can be made.
- Employees should be provided with suitable support and training.
- Encourage employees to take breaks away from the desk. The obligations of homeworking can result in employees working all the hours that they can, which can result in burnout. Employees should be encouraged to set themselves rules that include effective rest, such as a 5-minute break every hour. This should ideally be doing something completely different to work, such as meditation and relaxation, or listening to music or going for a walk.
- Factor in physical activity, such as lunch time walks and manageable exercise routines. This can help to improve mood, sleep, concentration, wellbeing and the immune system. Employees should be encouraged to create a sensible exercise plan that is easy to implement and maintain.
- Remind employees of their work-life balance. Encourage employees to switch off when they are not working. Employers should make it clear to employees when they are and are not expected to reply to emails.
- Ensure good sleep habits and have a wind-down routine before bed. This should include activities that have no connection with work.

- Provide professional assistance. Employers should not feel it is their sole duty to counsel employees. An Employee Assistance Programme is essential for businesses of all sizes and can provide support and guidance to both employers and employees on a wide range of mental health and wellbeing issues. Qualified counsellors are on call 24/7 to provide vital support whenever it is needed.

We hope the above is useful in supporting your employees during this challenging time.

Additional information to support you and your employees

Corona Virus Job Retention Scheme FAQ

<https://www.pkgroup.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/02.04.20-Coronavirus-Job-Retention-Scheme-FAQs.pdf>

Salary Sacrifice Pensions Furlough

<https://www.pkgroup.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/06.04.20-Salary-Sacrifice-Pensions-and-Furlough.pdf>

In addition to the above we have created documents to help employees with some of the questions they may have at the moment including:

- Scheme specific investment market and default fund support
- A guide to the run up to retirement
- Reminders and reinforcing the additional benefits available through their Employee Benefits, like GP services through Private Medical Insurance schemes
- Useful guides and factsheets on topics like Lifetime Allowance or Pension Tax Relief

Our investment team also host regular investment seminars to discuss what is happening in the investment markets - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1SPzwOSawhM&feature=youtu.be>

If you would like any additional information on the services and support PK Employee Benefits can provide, or have any questions then please contact us.



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We hope you stay healthy, and stay safe.