**Mental health in the workplace**

Mental health awareness week fell on the 13<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> May 2019. In honour of the occasion, we wrote a piece on how employers can support their staff members experiencing mental health struggles.

In terms of the workplace, a Mentalhealth.org study found that up to one in four people will experience some form of mental health problem. [Mind UK estimates that one in six workers](#) are also currently dealing with one.

Such issues cost businesses 17.6 million working days and £30 billion every year through lost productivity, recruitment problems and absences. Clearly, mental health is a common and important issue often overlooked in the modern business world.

However, many employers are starting to realise the role that it plays in various aspects of a business. From employee productivity to engagement, loyalty, and commitment—it's essential you pay attention, too.

This article explores the legislation that protect workers' mental health. We'll also suggest how you can implement initiatives to encourage the conversation on mental health.

**Mental health and employment law**

There's legislation in place that seeks to protect the health and wellbeing of staff members.

The Equality Act 2010 supports employees to reduce risk of discrimination. The protection is based on [certain protected characteristics](#), including disability.

The legislation outlines the circumstances under which mental health conditions may be considered as a disability, if it has long-term, and substantial effects on an individual's ability to carry out day-to day tasks.

To be entitled to be considered for this protection, employees must show their mental health problem by identifying its long-term effects. They may need a doctor's note to support their claims.

But as an employer, [you have a duty of care for your employees](#). You must consider making reasonable adjustments to the workplace or work practices for your disabled employees.

It's important to remember employees may contact the employment tribunal to make a case against you if they believe you're not meeting these requirements, and if a case arises an employer must justify actions taken (or not taken)

**5 tips for promoting a positive attitude towards mental health**

Stress, anxiety, and depression are all symptoms of mental health issues. Employees experiencing any of these should feel comfortable talking about it with their manager or colleagues without the fear of discrimination.

To facilitate this process, here are some suggestions for encouraging openness about mental health:

**Understand mental health**

Educating employees and managers [to better understand mental health means employees can ignore the stereotypes and stigmas associated with it](#) and embrace the facts.

One of which is that mental ill health is extremely common. Understanding it also contributes to increasing productivity, employees with positive mental health are likely to be more productive and engaged with their employers and colleagues.

**Identify high-stress risk areas**

Stress, anxiety and depression are signs of ill mental health and if left unaddressed they may develop into other issues.

Identifying and addressing areas within the workplace that may cause issues can help to drastically reduce the costs associated with staff turnover, sickness leave, and reduced performance.

**Company culture**

Creating a culture of openness where you're engaging with your workers (individually or as a team) about how they are and to reflect on anything that may be causing them stress in their work or personal life.

**Work-life balance**

Promoting a healthy balance between work life and home life can make all the difference in terms of engagement and productivity.  [Working longer hours may seem manageable in the short-run but it can quickly lead to stress and burnout](#).

Encourage employees to work only their allocated hours, take their full breaks, avoid working over the weekends and to use their full holiday entitlement.

You could also consider introducing flexible working options and its numerous benefits to productivity, absences, company culture, and mental health.