

# Understanding Mental Health and Wellbeing

## Skills Guide

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## Foreword

Over the last few years, we have seen increased recognition across the board that more needs to be done to support everyone to have good mental health at work. The independent *Thriving at Work* review of mental health and employment commissioned by Government in 2017 sets out core standards that all employers can adopt to better support the mental health of their staff.

But despite the best of intentions, many employers aren't quite sure where to start. Therefore, we welcome the CIPR taking action on this issue by developing a guide to increase understanding of mental health across the PR industry.

It includes guidance for organisations and managers on how to promote an open culture by removing the stigma around mental health and implementing practical steps to support the wellbeing of employees.

It also includes information for individuals working in PR so they know how to take care of their mental health while working in this industry. It focuses on people working freelance who often experience additional challenges around feeling isolated and maintaining healthy working behaviours and routines.

Following these simple measures are a great first step. We believe that everyone should have their mental health and wellbeing supported at work – whoever you are and whatever you do. The day-to-day demands and pressures of work should not be a barrier to good mental health.

**Emma Mamo**, Head of Workplace Wellbeing at Mind



## Understanding mental health and wellbeing

According to the CIPR's 2018/2019 State of the Profession report, the current nature of PR work – including unrealistic deadlines, constantly shifting priorities and a failure by line managers to address employees' mental health concerns – contributes directly to poor mental health amongst practitioners.

The majority of practitioners found the industry stressful, with 'workload', 'unsociable hours' and 'unrealistic expectations' driving stress. 63% of respondents rated the stressfulness of their job at 7 out of 10 or above.

To support CIPR members, this guide provides information to develop understanding of mental health and wellbeing as well as guidance to help build a working environment that supports positive mental health.

## Mental health in the workplace – an overview

According to Mind, "[g]ood mental health means being generally able to think, feel and react in the ways that you need and want to live your life. But if you go through a period of poor mental health you might find the ways you're frequently thinking, feeling or reacting become difficult, or even impossible, to cope with. This can feel just as bad as a physical illness, or even worse."

The World Health Organisation describes mental health as "a state of well-being in which every individual realises his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully and is able to make a contribution to her or his community."

In the same way that we all have a state of physical health, we all have a state of mental health. According to Mind, mental ill health affects one in four people each year and can range from common problems such as anxiety or depression to rarer problems like bipolar disorder.

In 2017, the government commissioned Lord Stevenson and Paul Farmer (Chief Executive of Mind) to independently review the role employers could play in better supporting people with mental health conditions in the workplace. They concluded that the UK is facing a mental health challenge at work, much larger than previously thought, resulting in human as well as economic, social and government impacts. The human cost translates as "300,000 people with a long-term mental health problem los[ing] their jobs each year, and at a much higher rate than those with physical health conditions." The financial cost of poor mental health to the economy as a whole is between £74 billion and £99 billion per year (*ref link: Thriving at Work, p5, Exec Summary*).

The report – 'Thriving at work; a review of mental health and employers' – highlights, there is still a stigma around mental health, preventing open discussion on it.

The outcome of this review sets out a framework of actions, called 'Core Standards', which the reviewers recommend are adopted by employers. These standards are designed to help employers improve the mental health of their workplace and support individuals with mental health conditions.

These standards include:

1. Produce, implement and communicate a 'mental health at work' plan
2. Develop mental health awareness among employees
3. Encourage open conversations about mental health and the support available when employees are struggling
4. Provide your employees with good working conditions
5. Promote effective people management
6. Routinely monitor employee mental health and wellbeing

## CIPR position on mental health

In the CIPR's 2018/19 State of the Profession report, Rachel Royall, Chair of the [CIPR Health Group](#) said, "[t]he CIPR Health group calls on employers to do more to recognise, support and nurture the mental health needs of their employees. Talk openly about mental health and act today to adapt the work environment to meet the needs of staff. It is in everyone's best interests to support good mental and physical health: a happier and healthier workforce will be more productive, have reduced sickness and retain skilled talent. We owe it to ourselves to look after each other."

## Guidance for organisations, managers and individuals – including independent practitioners

### Organisations and managers

There are a number of steps that organisations and managers can take to support employees' mental health at work.

1. **Follow the 'Core Standards' of the 'Thriving at Work' report (see above).** It is worth noting that some of these standards, such as providing employees with good working conditions, should be best practice approaches in organisations. Mind has produced a comprehensive [guide](#) to implementing the Core Standards.

To improve the culture and ways of working across the PR industry, the following steps should be a priority.

2. **Provide managers with training around mental health** – training staff as mental health first aiders, will help to identify early signs and signpost employee support appropriately. This will help to address the State of the Profession report findings, where almost a quarter (23%) of respondents said that after discussing concerns about their mental health with a manager, nothing happened as a result of those conversations.
3. **Promote a culture of open and supportive conversation** – so people are encouraged to speak up when they're experiencing a problem and hopefully access support as soon as possible.

- 4. Sign up to the Time to Change Employer Pledge** – this helps to reduce the stigma around mental health in the workplace by raising awareness across organisations. Already signed by over 1200 employers, it demonstrates a commitment to changing how organisations think and act about mental health in the workplace. It provides a framework action plan to help organisations to develop a mentally healthy workplace.
- 5. Promote and role-model an effective work-life balance across organisations, to help employees stay healthy, engaged and productive** – this will help to address the findings highlighted in the CIPR State of the Profession report that more than a fifth (21%) of respondents said they had a diagnosed mental health condition and over half (53%) said work contributed highly to their diagnosis, with unrealistic deadlines and unsociable hours cited as common causes.

### Individuals – including independent practitioners

- 1. Look after yourself** – working remotely can often feel isolating. So, establishing – and sticking to – a self-care routine that includes getting outside, exercising, staying hydrated and speaking to people daily, is key.
- 2. Establish structure in your working day as much as possible** – the challenge of uncertainty and inconsistency that independent practice can bring – for example, not knowing where your next client, and your income, is coming from – can create anxiety. Where you can, structure your working days so you can free up some time to network with potential clients and keep in touch with existing clients. Block out time in your calendar and stick to it. Research technology solutions that can help with this. Seek help with your financial planning – talk to your accountant or bank to begin with.
- 3. Buddy up** – find fellow independent practitioners who you can buddy with and share experiences. The cliché of ‘a problem shared is a problem halved’ isn’t a cliché for nothing. We are social beings and talking with others often helps. CIPR’s Independent Practitioner Network can be found online [here](#).
- 4. Get your work-life balance in check** – this can sometimes get completely side-lined and you can feel like you’re ‘always on’. In addition to delivering client work for example, you have accounts and your own marketing to do. But, find something else to do (ideally physical rather than mental) that takes you away from your desk and devices – you will feel more refreshed when you come back to it. If you can close the door on your workspace at the end of the day, even better. If that’s not possible, then make sure you switch off or close your laptop to mark the end of your working day.
- 5. Switch off social media when you’re having a bad day** – unless you need to look at social media for work, switch it off. It can lead to unhealthy comparisons with others and you can lose valuable hours being distracted! Sleep experts recommend that you keep off devices like phones and tablets at least one hour before bedtime to encourage better sleep.

## Resources

### CIPR's webpage on PR and Mental Health

#### Mental Health at Work Gateway

This site created by the charity, Mind, provides access to a wide range of resources to support mental health at work.

#### Time to Change

Led by Mind and Rethink Mental Illness, this organisation focuses on changing attitudes to mental health problems. They have a range of useful materials, including research in this area to help individuals and employers.

#### Mental Health Foundation

The Mental Health Foundation is the UK charity for mental health. They provide useful guides and information on various topics, including mental health in the workplace.

#### People Manager's Guide to Mental Health

This guide developed by Mind and the CIPD helps anyone involved in people management and includes information, templates and practical advice to help managers facilitate conversations about stress and mental health issues.

#### Mental Health Toolkit for Employers

This toolkit from Business In The Community, signposts the stages for establishing mental health support programme in the workplace.

#### Support mental health

Guidance for employers from NHS Scotland to support the health and wellbeing of employees.

#### The Stevenson / Farmer report of mental health and employers

The full report of the findings from the Stevenson / Farmer review, published in 2017.

#### Bryne Dean

Bryne Dean is a leading provider of workplace training and HR / ER support services on mental health and more.