

Supporting attendance at work  
**Mental wellbeing**



Care  
Anxiety  
Support Help  
Breakdown  
Empathy  
Depression  
Therapy  
Talk Stress  
Trauma  
Understanding  
Crisis



everyone fit  
for the future

## **We know supporting the health and wellbeing of their teams is important to all of our people managers and this brief guide has been developed to provide information on good practice related to health and wellbeing.**

One of the most common reasons for employee absence at Network Rail is mental health issues. It's important to understand that you don't need to be medical experts to support an employee with a mental health issue, such as depression, anxiety or a stress-related illness. Understanding how to support employees and how to have open conversations with them will facilitate employees to remain in work, and early return should they be off work.

Employees returning from sickness absence relating to mental health can feel vulnerable, anxious and full of self-doubt about how they will be able to carry out their substantive role and how their colleagues will respond to them.

As a line manager, you can play a really positive part in easing their transition back into the workplace and provide appropriate support, so that employees are able to continue in their roles, or in adjusted roles, where necessary.

It should be noted that in some instances, it's possible that an employee may feel that you, the line manager, may be a cause of their sickness absence and in these circumstances, it's advisable that you find another person to facilitate their return to work, for example another senior person who they have a positive relationship with. You should agree with the employee who this person will be.

### **Did you know?**

#### **That across the UK:**

**10.8 million** working days are lost due to stress alone each year.

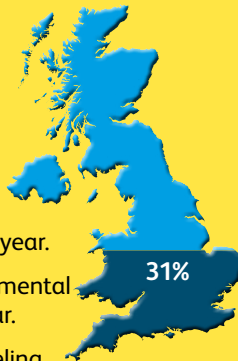
Mental health issues account for **31%** of all work-related ill health, costing **£30 billion** each year.

**1 in 4** people will have a mental health concern every year.

**9 in 10** people report feeling discrimination relating to negative stigma.

Workload is ranked the most common cause of stress, followed by non-work relationships/family, management style and relationships at work.

Based on research, communication with an employee at various stages of their absence is thought to be vital for their return to the workplace.



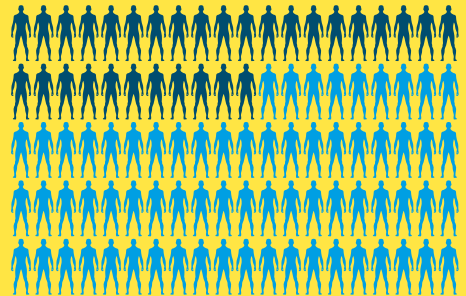
#### **That in Network Rail:**

**22.3%** of known absence relates to mental health with an average duration of **22 days per episode**.

**£4.5m** costs associated with mental health absence.

**874** occupational health referrals related to mental health in 2013/2014.

**30%** of our employees have reported experiencing a mental health issue.



# What do I need to do?

## 1 Be proactive in talking about mental health

Encourage open and honest communication on a regular basis and talk to staff about their mental health.

*Having conversations about mental health:*

[https://www.safety.networkrail.co.uk/healthandwellbeing/Mental-Wellbeing/Time-to-change/~/\\_/media/1.%20Health%20and%20Wellbeing%20Section/files/pledge%20resources/Time%20to%20Change%20%20CAMH.pdf](https://www.safety.networkrail.co.uk/healthandwellbeing/Mental-Wellbeing/Time-to-change/~/_/media/1.%20Health%20and%20Wellbeing%20Section/files/pledge%20resources/Time%20to%20Change%20%20CAMH.pdf)

## 2 Conduct a stress risk assessment

You may wish to conduct a stress risk assessment at the return to work meeting. This focuses on work aspects which may lead to stress, such as work demands, work control, work relationships, change and job role.

## 3 Refer to Employee Assistance Programme

As a line manager, you may wish to use this service yourself for advice. However, you may also wish to advise your employee to use this service. Our Employee Assistance Programme is able to provide telephone and face-to-face counselling on a range of work, health and wellbeing issues and other issues, such as legal, financial and debt advice service.

## 4 Refer to occupational health

Referral to occupational health will allow for an independent occupational health practitioner to provide an opinion on an employee's capacity to carry out their substantive role, and whether any reasonable adjustments need to be made.

It's well known that early referral to occupational health results in better outcomes for the employee. It's advisable to refer an employee within the first few days of absence relating to mental health, if possible and appropriate.

## 5 Make and maintain contact

Should the employee be off work, you should make and maintain regular contact with them.

<https://www.safety.networkrail.co.uk/healthandwellbeing/HelpingOthers/Supporting-wellbeing-at-work/Supporting-attendance-at-work>



If an employee notifies you that their sickness absence is stress-related, it's advisable that contact is made as soon as possible to establish the reason for stress and to try to resolve before it becomes a longer term concern. Let the employee know that you and the team are there for them and that you want them to get better through support. It will be unlikely at this stage that they are willing to discuss a return to work and you may need to use discretion. Bear in mind that the employee may not wish to discuss work at all at this stage.

It's advisable to agree with the employee exactly what they want to disclose to colleagues in relation to the reason for their sickness. If it's usual practice to acknowledge sickness absence from the team, ensure that an employee who is absent from work related to mental health receives the same acknowledgement as for a physical reason, like a broken leg – for example, cards or flowers.

## 6 When the employee is due to return

To ease their return to the workplace, the employee can be:

- Invited to work events, such as team meetings or social activities.
- Given information on events in the workplace that are not specifically linked to their job.
- Brought up to speed on what has happened in their absence.
- Offered reasonable adjustments, for example reduced workload, flexible working, and/or working from home.

You may also consider partnering or 'buddying' them up with a colleague for their first few days back into the workplace, and whether a phased return to work would be appropriate.

## 7 Conduct a return to work meeting

The aim of this type of meeting for an employee who has been absent from work, is to establish what can be done to facilitate and ease their transition back into work. It will also allow for any potential reasonable adjustments to be discussed in order to support them back into the workplace.

*Conducting a sensitive conversation:*

[www.safety.networkrail.co.uk/healthandwellbeing/HelpingOthers/Supporting-wellbeing-at-work/How-to-have-sensitive-conversations](http://www.safety.networkrail.co.uk/healthandwellbeing/HelpingOthers/Supporting-wellbeing-at-work/How-to-have-sensitive-conversations)

*Conducting a return to work meeting:*

<https://www.safety.networkrail.co.uk/healthandwellbeing/HelpingOthers/Supporting-wellbeing-at-work/Supporting-attendance-at-work>



## 8 Medication advice

Should the employee be on medication, whether prescribed or over the counter, they must phone the medication advice service.

<http://connectdocs/NetworkRail/Documents/CorporateServices/HR/InformationCentre/OccupationalHealth/Medication%20Enquiries%20FAQ.pdf>

## Recap

**Conduct a stress risk assessment:** this support will facilitate their return to work and identify what appropriate adjustments need to be made.

**Refer to Employee Assistance Programme:** counsellors are available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year to support, give advice and counselling on any workplace or personal related issue.

**Refer to occupational health:** to further identify what support you can put in place for the employee.

**Facilitate a return to work:** this support will assist a return to work and identify what appropriate adjustments need to be made.

## Supporting attendance at work

At Network Rail there are various resources and support mechanisms available to you if you are concerned about your employees' mental wellbeing.

### 1 Employee Assistance Programme

Call 0800 358 4858 or  
0330 332 9980  
[www.validium.com/vclub](http://www.validium.com/vclub)

### 2 Occupational health provider

<https://safety.networkrail.co.uk/healthandwellbeing/HelpingOthers/Supporting-wellbeing-at-work/Occupational-Health>

### 3 Health and Wellbeing Portal

<https://www.safety.networkrail.co.uk/healthandwellbeing>

### 4 Flexible Working Policy

<http://connect/CorporateServices/HRonline/WorkingArrangements/flexible-working.aspx>

### 5 Reasonable Adjustments Policy

<http://connectdocs/NetworkRail/Documents/CorporateServices/HR/InformationCentre/EmployeeHandbook/ReasonableAdjustmentPolicy.pdf>

### 6 Reasonable adjustments guidelines

<http://connectdocs/NetworkRail/Documents/UsefulResources/DisabilityIssues/Everyone-Managing-Disability-in-the-Workplace-Reasonable-Adjustment.pdf>