



The Mental Health at Work Commitment for Employers, through a COVID-19 lens

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Mental health has come to the forefront, along with physical health, in efforts to protect the health and wellbeing of the nation during the COVID-19 pandemic. Employees are likely to be experiencing anxiety from a complex set of interconnected issues including concerns over finances, caring for the vulnerable, loneliness and isolation through social distancing.

The [Mental Health at Work Commitment](#) is a simple framework that is evidenced based, integrating and aligned with existing pledges and charters, developed by Business in the Community (BITC). We have now updated the six key commitment actions below considering the COVID-19 pandemic, as we recognise that its effects will be felt for years to come. We have provided a simple overview of actions that enable employers to support the mental health of their employees during this time and beyond.

COVID-19: Mental Health at Work Commitment Actions for Employers

- 1. Prioritise mental health in the workplace by developing and delivering a systematic programme of activity**
 - Position mental health as a strategic boardroom issue on a parity with physical health.
 - Survey and monitor [employee mental health risks](#) and create a systematic programme of activity based on employee needs (take a look at what [Santander](#) and [National Grid](#) have done during the pandemic).
 - Take a whole-person approach using the [COVID-19 Wellbeing Toolkit](#), which takes a holistic approach to physical, mental, financial and social wellbeing.
- 2. Proactively ensure job design and organisational culture drive positive mental health outcomes**
 - Be proactive and focus on prevention. For example, take an inclusive approach to homeworking. Some employees will need support with working from home for the first time, others might need management to set clear expectations of the outputs expected to reduce anxiety.
 - Give permission to have a work-life balance and to work flexibly, displaying empathy with employees who have demands such as [caring responsibilities](#).
 - Encourage [digital social connection](#) to reduce social isolation such as regular team meetings, virtual coffees and buddy systems.





3. Promote an open culture around mental health

- Role model positive health and wellbeing behaviours including empathy, honesty and compassion.
- Acknowledge and support employees experiencing poor mental health, whatever the cause, such as [domestic abuse](#).
- Develop active listening and acknowledge high levels of anxiety, recognising that it's OK not to be OK. Line managers should have regular conversations with employees and ask, 'how are you?' at the start of each meeting. [See handling sensitive conversations in the BITC/ Public Health England Mental Health Toolkit, page 41.](#)

4. Increase organisational confidence and capability

- Upskill leaders and line managers on supporting employees through COVID-19 (see resources and online events on the [BITC event webpage](#)).
- Understand the [role of responsible business](#) during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Prioritise upskilling in 'at risk' areas of health and wellbeing using the [BITC Wellbeing toolkit](#), e.g., employees who have underlying physical and mental health conditions, or suffer a bereavement.

5. Provide mental health tools and support

- Develop active listening and communication skills and make adjustments and modifications where possible.
- Tailor in-house resources and promote access to a diverse range of inclusive health and wellbeing services to equip employees to better manage their wellbeing, such as to employee assistance programmes, [NHS resources](#) or occupational health.
- Train line managers to prepare for the recovery phase through encouraging empathy and compassion in line management.

6. Increase transparency and accountability through internal and external reporting

- Communicate clearly and be open about job security and organisational changes.
- Report and monitor employee mental health internally through methods such as pulse surveys.
- Support the national effort through sharing best wellbeing practice through [BITC](#).

Sign up to the [Mental Health at Work Commitment](#) to demonstrate your commitment to transforming the nation's mental health at work for the long term.

For more information, please contact: info@bitc.org.uk

