



Recognising and dealing with mental health at the workplace

— Information pack —

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1. What is mental health?

WHO defines 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’. Mental health is not a state but a continuum, an accumulation of both what is helpful and unhelpful. The more resilient one is, the healthier one can be.

2. What causes mental health issues?

Various things can trigger off mental health difficulties. These include:

- Childhood abuse, trauma or neglect
- Experiencing discrimination
- Domestic violence or abuse
- Social isolation
- Loneliness
- Current personal life and relationships
- Bereavement
- Health condition
- Substance misuse
- Work
- Financial
- Life changes (work, relocation, moving house)

3. What symptoms can indicate that someone is experiencing mental health difficulties?

Behavioural indications

- Loss of organisation
- Social withdrawal & isolation
- Decreased personal care
- Absenteeism
- Reduced productivity
- Reduced ability to maintain a relationship with colleagues
- Aggressive behaviour
- Dramatic changes in eating or sleeping habits
- Sudden changes to routines
- Risk-taking & addiction (including work)
- Talking about unusual or disturbing thoughts

Cognitive indications

- Distraction
- Lack of concentration
- Difficulty retaining information
- Sense of confusion
- Memory problems (e.g. forgetting)

Emotional indications

- Getting very emotional
- Erratic reactions
- Long-lasting sadness or irritability
- Extremely high and low moods
- Anger outbursts
- Panic attacks
- Excessive concern, worry or fear
- Reduced motivation
- Numbness

Physical indications

- Shaking
- Sweating
- Increase in breathing rate or shallowness
- Increase in heart rate
- Sleep problems
- Headaches
- Muscular tension
- Gastrointestinal problems
- Sexual problems (these have relational repercussions)

4. What about stress?

Stress is not a mental health diagnosis. It affects everyone. It's an emotional, physical or mental response to events that cause bodily or mental tension. Too little stress can be a problem. But so is too much or when it is prolonged over a long period of time.

5. What about depression?

Depression is when one is feeling sad or fed up for a long period of time (most days for at least 2 weeks). At its mildest, everything is more challenging to do. In its most severe form, it can make a person feel suicidal. It includes specific forms, like Seasonal Affective Disorder and prenatal and postnatal depression (affects both men and women).

Symptoms of depression include:

- Reduced ability to control emotions like anxiety, guilt, anger and sadness
- Increased irritability
- Reduced ability to experience pleasure
- Reduced pain tolerance
- Loss of interest and motivation
- Lowered energy levels
- Problems with concentration and memory
- Changes in body weight or appetite
- Changes in sleep patterns
- Reduced or absent sex drive
- Increased use of alcohol or drug use
- Low self-esteem or self-worth
- Thoughts of hopelessness
- Suicidal ideation

6. What about anxiety?

It is normal to feel anxious in high-pressure situations. However, it becomes a problem when it becomes pervasive and protracted (most days for 6 months). Anxiety stops you from focusing on the present, and focuses on the future while looking at the past.

Symptoms of anxiety include:

- Fatigue
- Irritability
- Sleeping difficulties
- General restlessness
- Muscle tension
- Upset stomach
- Sweating
- Difficulty breathing
- Frequent or excessive worry
- Poor concentration
- Specific fears or phobias e.g. fear of losing control
- Procrastination
- Avoidance
- Difficulty making decisions
- Social withdrawal

7. What about bipolar disorder?

Bipolar disorder involves a person cycling between elevated (manic) and depressed moods. During the manic phase they become highly energetic and creative, but actual productivity suffers. During the depressive phase they may exhibit depressive symptoms like in depression.

Symptoms of bipolar disorder include:

- Increase in energy
- Decreased need of sleep
- Impulsive behaviour
- Racing thoughts, heart and speech patterns
- Self-aggrandising behaviour
- Disruptive
- Makes mistakes in judgement
- Overly aggressive behaviour
- Loss of interest in activities
- Loss of energy
- Feelings of worthlessness
- Extreme sadness or overwhelm

8. What about Obsessive Compulsive Disorder?

OCD is not the same as wanting some structure in life. Instead, it interferes with one's life. It consists of recurrent thoughts and/or behaviours that are *negative* and *intrusive*. One can have either obsessions or compulsions, but they often occur together. Obsessions are involuntary thoughts, doubts, images or urges that are frequent, difficult to control, and upsetting or distressing. They are always inconsistent with an individual's values. e.g. fear about contamination. Compulsions are behaviours carried out to reduce the anxiety of the obsession or because it feels just right. These are *repetitive* and *stereotyped* actions that the person feels obliged to carry out. Performing the compulsion causes the urge to perform it again to become stronger each time. E.g. excessive washing and cleaning.

Symptoms of OCD include:

- Fears of contamination or dirt
- Fears of acting out violent thoughts or impulses
- Needing things orderly and symmetrical
- Having a lot of difficulty of tolerating uncertainty
- Very strong fear of losing control
- Excessive washing and cleaning
- Checking
- Unpleasant sexual images
- Counting
- Repeating words or phrases (mental rituals)
- Following a rigid routine

9. What about Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder?

Trauma can consist of either a major event or an accumulation of small ones. Usually it activates the flight or fight response. But sometimes the memory gets stuck in our brain and we continue reacting to it as if it was happening today. If this reaction lasts for more than a month, we call this PTSD. A stress response can remain dormant and re-emerge many years later.

Symptoms of PTSD include:

Intrusions

- Vivid flashbacks (feeling like it's happening now)
- Intrusive thoughts or images
- Nightmares
- Intense distress at reminders of trauma
- Physical sensations such as sweating, pain, pounding heartbeat, nausea, muscle tension or trembling

Alertness

- Feeling on edge
- Easily upset or angry
- Extreme alertness
- Sleep problems
- Irritability or aggressive behaviour
- Being easily startled
- Difficulty concentrating

Avoidance

- Avoiding anything that reminds you of the trauma
- Feeling numb or detached from body
- Being unable to express affection
- Reckless or self-destructive things

Difficult feelings

- Feeling you cannot trust anyone
- Feeling like nowhere is safe
- Blaming oneself for what happened
- Overwhelmed feeling of anger, sadness, guilt or shame

10. What about psychosomatic disorder?

Our societies are very cognitively oriented. However, stress always impacts the body. In some cases, we can end up experiencing physical symptoms that we cannot explain under medical examinations.

Symptoms of psychosomatic disorder include:

- Stomach pain
- Headaches
- Chest pain
- Fatigue
- Limb pain
- Back pain
- Difficulty breathing
- Worry about health

11. How do I deal with employees suffering from mental health difficulties?

Talk with them:

- Choose a suitable time and place for both.
- Check you have enough time or arrange a time for it.
- Ensure you minimise disruptions (e.g. phone or notifications).
- Talk about changes you noticed and ask if they noticed anything.
- Encourage them to talk and accept that they might not want to right now.
- Listen and show that you're listening.
- Don't jump to conclusions.
- Check if they're ready to look for help and if you can help them.
- Check in with them after a few days.

Engage in active listening:

- Maintain eye contact
- Keep an open posture
- Acknowledge with nods and check you understood well
- Ask direct but clear questions
- Recap what was discussed and agreed at the end
- Do not rush to suggest solutions

If they're off work:

- Ask what they want you to tell colleagues.
- Invite them for staff leisure time even if they will decline.
- Call them on a regular basis if they're away from work.
- Introduce them gently back to work.
- When they're back, don't assume they need special treatment but don't assume everything is just fine.

In case of disciplinary or competence processes:

- Keep in mind that mental health could be part of it and person might not be disclosing it until job is on the line.
- Unacceptable behaviour must be addressed but one needs to factor in mental health.
- Be truthful, but in an open rather than judgemental way.
- Agree how to handle continuing problems to avoid future crisis.

12. Where can I refer people for further advice or help?

General advice (with links) on mental health in Copenhagen

- <https://www.psykiatri-regionh.dk/psykinfo/Sider/default.aspx>

Anxiety

- Angstforening: 70271320
- Angsttelefonen: 70279294

Depression & Bipolar

- Depressionslinien: 33124774

Suicide

- Livslinien: 70201201

Eating disorders & Self-harm

- Landsforeningen mod spiseforstyrrelser og selvskade: 70101818

Advice lines

- Sinds psykolog rådgivning (København): 35360904
- Sinds psykolog rådgivning (Frederiksberg): 35340080
- Marhaba (English, Arabic, Danish): marhaba.liniens.dk

Addictions

- AA Hotline (alcohol): 70101224
- Benzorådgivningen (anti-anxiety or sleeping medication): 70262510
- Dansk center for alkoholisme og andre afhængighedssygdomme (alcoholism and other addictions): 33233303

13. How can we help prevent mental health issues within the company?

- Make mental health self-assessment tools available. Ensure anonymity.
 - CORE (10-score is enough)
<https://www.coresystemtrust.org.uk/instruments/>
 - My Compass
<https://www.mycompass.org.au/>
 - National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health
<https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/workorg/detail088.html>
 - Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale
<http://www.cd-risc.com/>
- Provide employees with stress-management training like mindfulness, breathing exercises, meditation, and nutrition.
- Have a dedicated relaxation space.

- Always discuss how to cater for one's wellbeing when discussing new work tasks.
- Have regular informal conversations

14. How can I take more care of my own mental health as a manager?

- Identify health risks in relation to your body:
 - How does my body respond to stress?
 - Where in my body do I hold tension?
 - When do I know that I'm at my limit?
 - Find stress cues.
 - Conduct regular (mental) body scans.
- Reduce stress
 - Engage in self-care activities (e.g. yoga, massage) – something sensorimotor.
 - Have a coach, mentor or confidante.
 - Prioritise good quality sleep, regular physical activity, good nutrition.
 - Seek help when you notice changes.