



# Mental health – it's worth thinking about

Having good mental health is an essential need for good daily living – as most people will tell you – and whether work is causing the health issue or aggravating it, employers have a legal responsibility to support their employees, says **Andrew Mills**, chairman of Guernsey Occupational Safety and Health Association



## MENTAL HEALTH – THE CHALLENGES

MOST of us experience poor mental health from time to time and are lucky to return to a good level relatively speedily.

But for some, it is more than a passing incapacity – it is something which consumes daily life, limits our talents and abilities and leaves us feeling down and incapable. We can't function as we'd like to. For some, it can be life-ending – suicides happen in Guernsey, more often than you may realise.

Good mental health is essential to our overall wellbeing, yet it remains one of the most stigmatised, intolerable and misunderstood topics in our society. The silence and shame surrounding mental health issues can prevent individuals from seeking help and force isolation, sometimes leading to devastating consequences.

It's time for us to break the stigma and make good mental health in our community a priority.

Mental health encompasses our emotional, psychological, and social wellbeing. It affects how we think, feel and behave. It influences our relationships, work performance and overall quality of life.

Good mental health is not just the absence of mental illness; it's a state of wellbeing that enables us to cope with life's challenges, build strong relationships and contribute positively to our workplaces and communities.

Mental health issues are more common than we think. According to the World Health Organisation, one in four people will experience the effects of a mental health disorder each year.

Depression, anxiety and substance abuse are among the most prevalent mental health issues affecting individuals of all ages, backgrounds and socio-economic statuses.

## MENTAL HEALTH AND WORK

The Health & Safety Executive has provided

some useful guidance. The causes of mental health issues can be many and varied but most commonly arise from a reaction to a difficult life event, such as bereavement, and also by work-related issues.

Work can aggravate pre-existing conditions, which can have a knock-on effect in many other areas of our lives and problems at work can bring on symptoms or make their effects worse.

Whether work is causing the health issue or aggravating it, employers have a legal responsibility to support their employees.

Like any other safety or health hazard at work, work-related mental health issues must be assessed to measure the levels of risk to staff. Where a risk is identified, steps must be taken to remove it or reduce it as far as reasonably practicable.

Some employees will have a pre-existing physical or mental health condition when recruited or may develop one caused by factors that are not work-related factors.

Employers may have further legal requirements to make reasonable adjustments.

Mental health issues can lead to increased healthcare costs, lost productivity and a higher risk of chronic diseases.

Here are some ways to help:

- Talk openly about mental health: share your experiences and listen to others without judgement.

- Educate yourself: learn about mental health issues, their symptoms and treatment options.

- Support mental health initiatives: such as with the charity Mind locally or with employers' mental health first-aider schemes.

- Practise self-care: take part in activities that promote relaxation, stress reduction and overall wellbeing.

## TAKING CARE

Taking care of your mental health requires a multifaceted approach. Here are some additional things that can help:

- Seek professional help: medical professionals will help you. Talk to your GP.

- Practise mindfulness: engage in mindfulness practices, such as prayer, meditation or yoga.

- Stay connected: with family, friends and community members to reduce feelings of loneliness and isolation and to share your thoughts and concerns.

- Take care of your physical health: exercise regularly, eat healthy food (watch your diet) and ensure you get adequate sleep.

## CONCLUSION

Good mental health is an essential element of our overall wellbeing.

Breaking the stigma surrounding poor mental health requires a collective effort to create a culture that encourages open conversations, empathy, and understanding. By taking care of mental health, we can improve our relationships, work performance and overall quality of life.

Let's work together to break the stigma and promote mental health awareness in our workplaces and in our community.

## RESOURCES

If you or someone you know is struggling with mental health issues, there are resources available:

- Mental health professionals: see your GP initially.

- Groups: join support groups, either online or in-person, to connect with others who share similar experiences.

- Hotlines: call mental health hotlines, such as the Samaritans or Mind, for immediate support and guidance.

By working together, we can create a supportive community that helps those with mental health challenges and promotes wellbeing.

■ [www.gosha.org.gg](http://www.gosha.org.gg)