



Support for Science Leaders

Look after yourself, then others

Being a middle manager can have its challenges: you have pressures from above and responsibilities for those in your department. You need to ensure that you can work sustainably and protect your own wellbeing, mental health and emotional needs. The situation in your department will determine what you do sustainably and how much support you will need in making changes in your department.

Some general considerations.

- How are you? What are your needs?
- Who is in your professional support network? How much do you draw on this network?
- Who do you have to support you within the department?
- Do you have a line manager or senior leader who is supportive?
- What, if anything, needs to change?

(Further ideas and support can be found in the [ASE SOS document](#))

Some general strategies for supporting others, but protecting yourself

- **Listen, don't necessarily solve.** Use the 'Listen, Signpost, Check-in' approach when your staff talk to you. Genuine listening, compassion and understanding go a long way. You don't have to solve the issue, and even if it something you can solve, you don't usually have to do it immediately. Take time to think before over-promising or over committing. [Link - Supporting colleagues with mental health issues]
- **Compartmentalising.** As a leader or manager, you have to keep a professional distance from your team. This also extends to dealing with their personal issues and emotional work issues. There is only so much you are responsible for and can do. Listening and signposting are two things you can do as a manager, but often that is the limit of your responsibility. If you are dealing with issues that impact your wellbeing or mental health, you may need to get support yourself.
- **Supervision.** Listening to, supporting and managing other people can be very rewarding but can have an emotional cost on your own needs and wellbeing. Sometimes it is important to 'download', 'decompress', 'hand over' at the end of a day before going home. Many caring professions have 'supervision' where they have a colleague they can talk to at the end of a day to deal with anything that may have impacted them. Who could that be for you? Another member of the science department? Another subject leader? Your line manager? If you are affected by what you deal with at work, talk to someone, you should not feel you have full responsibility.
- **Passing on.** As a manager, you cannot be responsible for everything. Somethings, there are others who are better placed to take on, so that you can focus on your main priorities. This is why having a good understanding of your professional network within school (and beyond it), so you can sign post people effectively or hand over issues that need some else to deal with. This structures are usually overtly in place for students, but not necessarily for staff.

Your needs in context

From your ASE RISE Autumn Survey Analysis and Action plan [Link ASE RISE Action Planner Notes] you will have identified with in part one or two of these scenarios. Each of these will have different priorities and levels of support required.

- **Scenario one:** The department are generally happy, with a reasonable level of wellbeing and mental health. One or two members of staff may need individual attention. There is one main area of concern that can be addressed easily.
- **Scenario two:** The department is mostly functioning, though there is a specific issue with one or two areas including a lot of stress/poor



mental health, a mix of perceptions on work-life balance, poor relationships between some members of staff within the department, poor relationships with senior leaders/school, moderate turnover or another key issue concerning wellbeing, job satisfaction or career intentions.

- **Scenario three:** The department is barely functioning, there are many issues including a lot of stress/poor mental health, a mix of perceptions on work-life balance, poor relationships between some members of staff within the department, poor relationships with senior leaders/school, high turnover.

Your personal and professional circumstances.

Before dealing with any of these, you need to consider your personal and professional circumstances. How much emotional capacity do you have to deal with these things? Are you already dealing with other emotional issues in your personal life? Are you managing your own mental health, do you need support before you can help others? Establish what emotional and professional capacity you have to make changes and maintain them before you decide on a list of unsustainable actions.

The three scenarios above have differing amounts of emotional and professional cost associated with them. Scenario one is fairly easy to manage. Scenarios two and three require more time, resources and emotional energy. Consider carefully the strategies you select, how you will compartmentalise, pass on and be supported yourself.

Other strategies

- **Small changes, big impact:** When considering what changes that you want to make, consider what will have a big impact. Often small changes, for example [improving acknowledgment of staff](#), will make a big difference.
- **Delegate:** Could the wellbeing, work-life balance or retention initiative be delegated to someone in your department? Is there someone that would relish the opportunity to led the initiative and be supported by you in doing so? Are there aspects of the ASE RISE action plan that can be done by different members of staff? Could a small group of colleagues be working on this? Or perhaps a whole department initiative? By encouraging working [together as a team](#) to tackle wellbeing-related issues you can take pressure off of yourself.