



Supporting colleagues with mental health issues

As Head of Department you need to balance the support you can give a colleague who is managing a mental health condition between your role as their manager and what you can realistically do. There are a whole range of mental health issues that teachers can face: anxiety, bereavement/grief, depression, low mood, panic, obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD) and many more. Some will be short term, others long term. As a manager you can realistically - Listen, Signpost, Check-in...

Listen (without solving)

An effective action you can take is to listen to a teacher about how their condition affects their everyday lives and what they do to manage it. Sit and listen without judgement in a neutral quiet space where you are unlikely to be disturbed. As a manager, listening can make a huge difference to a teacher who is dealing with a mental health issue. Just having shared with you, having someone know at work, will make a difference.

If a teacher is recently diagnosed with a mental health illness, they will still be learning how to manage their condition and maybe trying different medication or therapies to help them. If a teacher has a long-term condition, they will be experienced at managing it. They will know their signs, triggers, and strategies for managing it. Some may have a Mental Health Action Plan for what they need to do to stay healthy and what to do in a crisis.

Three useful questions to considering asking might be:

- Do you have support at home (family, partner, friends)?
- Do you have professional support (GP, counsellor, therapy)?
- Is there anything we can do to make things easier at work?

Signpost

Instead of trying to solve your colleagues' issues (an impossible task!), you may wish to sign post them to expert help. There are several sources of support for teachers who are dealing with mental health issues:

- Emergency – the person is highly distressed and at risk of harming themselves.
- Support from within the school – know what support is available within your school
- Support from outside the school – use signposts of support for external organisations.

Check-in

Regularly check in with your colleague. Pop in to ask how they are, arrange time for a coffee and chat, agree a time that you will check in each week for a while. Some teachers find being able to let someone know they are having a bad mental health day helpful, for example, just sending an email to their manager to say 'Having a bad day / wobble – no action needed' is enough to get them through the day. Always respond with something 'Thanks for letting me know. Hope the days goes ok. If you need anything, let me know.'

Other Actions

Learning about a specific mental health condition. Mental health conditions still have stigma associated with them due to misconceptions about the condition. Many teachers teach successfully with diagnosed and managed mental health conditions. MIND [<https://www.mind.org.uk>] has excellent resources on the symptoms, management and support for a range of mental health conditions. Other Resources include [Spotting and supporting stressed colleagues](#) from the Royal Society of Chemistry and the website [Mental Health at Work](#).