



## First Step Employment Advisor

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## Conversations regarding mental health

### Approaching a sensitive conversation regarding mental ill health

Every conversation a manager has with a team member who may be experiencing mental ill health will be different.

Sometimes, a team member may feel able to be very open with their manager from the very first meeting.

In other situations, it may be difficult for the team member to open up and might take several conversations.

Below are a few tips and considerations for a manager to think about when approaching a conversation with a team member.

- Before the conversation takes place choose an appropriate place. It should be in private and usually be one-to-one. Consider what you have observed that concerns you and make a note of examples.
- Keep the meeting as informal and relaxed as possible. Make it clear anything discussed will be kept confidential unless agreed otherwise.
- Approach the conversation in a sensitive and calm manner and manage emotions carefully. Ask how they are doing. Explain the reason for the conversation. Remember to ask simple, open and non-judgmental questions.
- Listen carefully. Don't make assumptions. Reassure them that you are there to try to help. Be patient and don't try to force them into talking if they do not want to.
- Discuss whether there are any parts of their role they are struggling with or feel unable to do.



### If the staff member disclose they are experiencing mental ill health:

- Check if they have been to the GP and if so, what they recommended and whether any medication has been prescribed that may affect their performance or make it unsafe for them to perform certain duties.
- If they become angry or distressed adjourn for a break to think through what has been discussed. If the seriously unexpected arises stay calm. Reassure them, that you are only trying to help them and as their manager you are responsible for ensuring they are coping.
- Encourage the team member to talk to their GP to get an expert opinion. Highlight sources of support within the organisation such as a mental health champion and outside the organisation such as mental health charities. Agree what will happen next, such as whether they will be referred to occupational health or if a further meeting will be arranged to discuss support options.
- Monitor the situation, and if you still have concerns consider seeking advice from sources such as your human resources team, senior management and Occupational Health. Be available and approachable in case the staff member wants to talk to you at a later point about their health.

### Useful Contacts

- Mindline Cumbria Tel: 0300 561 0000 Mon-Fri 12 noon-11 pm, Sat-Sun 5 pm-11 pm
- Cumbria Health on Call Tel: 03000 247 247
- NHS Tel: 111
- Samaritans Tel: 116 123