



Cumbria, Northumberland,  
Tyne and Wear  
NHS Foundation Trust

## First Step Employment Advisor

Tel: 0300 123 9122

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### Advice and support for employers

#### How can a First Step Employment Advisor help?

First Step is part of Cumbria, Northumberland Tyne and Wear NHS Foundation Trust and provides free, talking therapies to adults (18+) in East and West Cumbria.. First Step can help with a range of common mental health problems including mild to moderate depression, anxiety disorders (such as chronic worry, panic attacks, health anxiety and obsessions), mild bulimia, anger or sleep problems.

Our practitioners help people to understand how they have been feeling and decide what sort of help might work best. Talking treatments (the commons ones being cognitive behavioural therapy and counselling) are designed to help people to understand and change their ways of thinking, feeling and acting which can then help them to do the things they want to do and live a more satisfying life in and outside of work.

Our employment advisors work alongside practitioners to provide integrated employment support for employees who have employment issues and who are absent from work due to illness or having difficulties coping at work. In situations where a facilitated discussion would resolve an employment issue our employment advisors can work with the employee and their employer to find mutual solutions or adjustments.

#### Facilitated discussion - what does it involve?

A discussion facilitated by the employment advisor can help when people are worried about returning to work or having difficulties coping with work. This is particularly relevant when people have mild to moderate depression, chronic worry or panic attacks.

If you are an employer or HR Manager faced with an employee who is either absent from work or having difficulty coping at work because of a mild to moderate mental health condition we would recommend:

- resolving any issues as soon as possible
- be willing to meet and discuss solutions
- exploring reasonable adjustments
- involving other expert support such as Occupational Health



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If you agree to a meeting between you, the employee and one of our employment advisors we will offer advice and support that:

- is completely impartial and confidential
- considers each parties views fairly
- ensures solutions are identified and agreed
- helps your business to have a better understanding about managing mild to moderate mental health conditions in the workplace.

## The business case for managing mental health in the workplace

1 in 6 workers are dealing with a mental health problem such as an anxiety disorder or depression. This can stop people performing at their best.

Organisations perform better when their staff are healthy, motivated and focused. Smart employers support employees who are experiencing mental health problems to cope and recover. The support people receive from employers is key in determining how well and how quickly they are able to get back to peak performance.

Standing by people when they experience a mental health problem is not only about keeping hold of a valuable staff member it also sends a message about your organisation's values.

All employees need to see that their organisation lives its values and treats its people well. Trust and integrity are key drivers of engagement and organisations that support staff reap the benefits in terms of loyalty and commitment from all employees.

## Workplace adjustments

Adjustments for mental health are generally simple, practical and cost-effective. This is not an exhaustive list – you should explore with employees their specific needs and be as creative as possible when thinking about how to address issues.

- Flexible hours or change to start/finish time. For shift workers not working nights or splitting up their days off to break up the working week can also help
- Return-to-work policies e.g. phased return – reduced hours gradually building up
- Relaxing absence rules and limits for those with disability-related sickness absence;
- Reallocation of some tasks or changes to people's job description and duties
- Increased supervision or support from a manager
- Extra training, coaching or mentoring
- Extra help with managing and negotiating workload
- More positive and constructive feedback
- Debriefing sessions after difficult calls, customers or tasks
- Mentor or 'buddy' systems (formal or informal)

## Useful Contacts

- **Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS)**  
Provides free and impartial information and advice. The ACAS helpline number is Tel: 0300 123 1100. It is available Monday to Friday 8am-6pm.