



See Me in Work Talking About Mental Health Starting the Conversation

The Power of 'are you okay?'

Many people with mental health problems don't want to disclose their experience. They may not welcome being asked about their mental health for a variety of reasons and sometimes they may not realise how their problem is affecting them and their colleagues.

Things to think about:

- ✓ They are coping fine and don't need to disclose them.
- ✓ They experience problems from time to time and manage it well when they do occur.
- ✓ They have had poor experiences in the past when they disclosed a problem – perhaps experiencing stigma or discrimination.
- ✓ Previously they weren't supported, were unfairly dismissed from a job or passed over for promotion.
- ✓ They may be experiencing stress or anxiety and not label it as a mental health problem or disability – although the law might recognise them as being disabled.

Be sensitive if you notice changes in a colleague's behaviour or performance at work. Don't be afraid to open up a conversation. If you see someone's struggling a simple 'Are you okay?' is a great starting point. You don't need to have all the answers or be an expert in mental health to really listen and show that you care.

Whether you're a manager or a colleague, little things can make all the difference.

- Be aware of common signs of stress and anxiety e.g. lack of energy, poor concentration, poor memory, timekeeping getting worse, moody behaviour.
- Ask in private, if everything is okay. Be prepared to ask again if you think they may not feel comfortable about disclosing at this time. Be sensitive about pushing for information. They may still be coming to terms with their circumstances.
- Be patient and understanding. However, if their behaviour is causing problems at work you may have to say something about this. Be gentle. E.g. "I've noticed that your timekeeping is a bit erratic and it means other staff are having to cover for you in the mornings. Is everything ok?"
- Be supportive. "Is there anything I can do?" Ask if it might help to put some time aside to have a chat. If there isn't anywhere suitable in the workplace to do this, you could make it even more informal and suggest having a chat over a coffee.
- Let them talk. They may just need to release some pressure and be reassured that they will be given the space to deal with things. Listen carefully. There may be more to the story than they are able to disclose at present.
- Ensure they know you will keep your discussion confidential.
- Make sure they know there is an open door if they want to come and discuss anything with you.



If you're a manager:

- Ask if there's anything that might help them at work.
- Offer some suggestions depending on what the behaviour is so, for example, if the issue is poor timekeeping, you could ask if it would help to have a temporary adjustment to their start time.
- Adjustments don't need to follow formal processes. And they could be made for anyone experiencing difficulties – not just for people covered by the Equality Act.
- Ask if you could put some time aside to discuss ways in which you could make adjustments that might make it easier for them and their colleagues. Develop a work-plan which you can review together to make sure you monitor progress and any changes to the adjustments.
- Watch out in case their behaviour seems to be getting worse. This might mean you have to speak to them more formally – but this can still be done supportively. Talking to them when things aren't so bad may make it easier to talk when they do need support.

