



Supporting the mental health of young employees during the coronavirus outbreak

A City Mental Health Alliance and Charlie Waller Memorial Trust Guide



City Mental Health Alliance UK



The Charlie Waller Memorial Trust
Depression – let's get talking



Introduction

It has never been more important for line managers and businesses to take steps to support the mental health of their people. While this pandemic is generating a significant amount of stress for the whole workforce, there are particular pressures facing those employees in the early years of their careers. The City Mental Health Alliance and the Charlie Waller Memorial Trust have worked together to write this guide, which is specifically designed to help line managers, HR and wellbeing teams and businesses to support younger employees.

The unique pressures facing people in their early careers

Younger employees have a higher reported incidence of poor mental health

People in their early careers are reported to be more likely to live with poor mental health than other cohorts in the business. [A Deloitte Report](#) on workplace mental health pointed to a higher prevalence of mental health problems among younger people, including depression being twice as common in younger adults. The impact of the pandemic is having an impact, with [42% of 16-24s](#) already finding lockdown 'extremely difficult', while [83% of young people](#) under 25, with a history of mental ill health said their conditions have worsened since the Coronavirus crisis began. On the other hand, young people face significant mental health stigma. Just 40% of early careers job seekers in CMHA survey said they would feel comfortable discussing mental health problems with a manager.

This crisis is happening at a time in their life which is already unsettled

Starting a career can bring a host of significant life changes. This includes leaving family to live independently, adjusting to the expectations of a new job and independently managing finances, all for the first time. A CMHA survey found that 62% of early careers jobseekers were worried about the negative impact a new job might have on their mental health. So, even before the pandemic, there was a risk that mental health conditions could start, old ones could be triggered or existing ones could worsen.

Challenges with working from home

This cohort has the least experience of working as part of a team in a remote working setting. The loss of managerial and colleague support, as well as the routine of the working day, may be stressful. Younger people are also more likely to live in a house share where there is competition for desk space and broadband. Or they may live with, or have moved back to, the family home. Again, there may be less space, while family dynamics at times of stress can be difficult. Many will live on their own, so isolation could be a challenge. Even when lockdown is eased across the country, it is likely that remote working, at some level, will be happening for a significant period of time.

Stress about their job and career

There may be anxiety that their career is ending or stalling before it has begun or concerns about how their performance will now be measured. This will be felt acutely by those who have been furloughed or are on time limited training schemes.

Financial concerns

People at the start of their careers are less likely to have savings, at the same time as potentially having significant debt from college or university.



Supporting the mental health of people in their early careers

There are **FIVE** main things which line managers and HR teams can do.

1. Offer clear, regular and transparent communications

Advice for managers

Provide more opportunities for communication

- **Schedule frequent one-to-ones** – take time to check in regularly with any direct reports about how they are doing so you can pick up on any changes in their environment and wellbeing. For example, Allen & Overy has recommended that managers have contact, via phone or video, every 48 hours with a team member to have a personal check in. Ask questions to better understand their individual circumstances, for example, working environment and any additional responsibilities they might have taken on (e.g. caring for someone who has become unwell).
- **Increase work check ins** – younger employees are more likely to miss being around more experienced colleagues for advice and to pick up opportunities for work. Allow for more opportunities to discuss projects, issues, concerns, teamwork. Always take this as another opportunity to ask how they are coping and feeling.
- **Increase team meetings** – Stay connected via regular team meetings to support team collaboration and communication. Be creative about keeping in touch with each other informally or socially using multiple mediums.

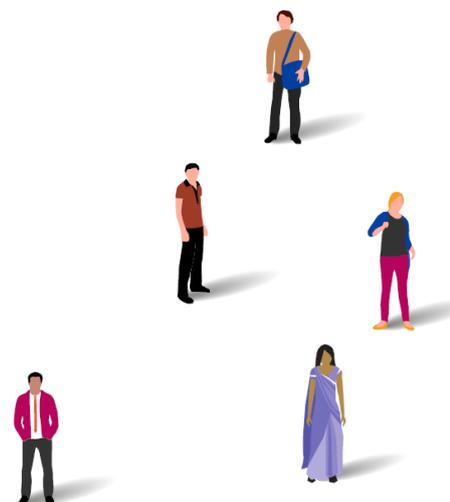
For one-to-ones, allow the person to choose the medium they are most comfortable with - video conferencing or phone call. Across all of these communications, take care to actively listen. For guidance on active listening, click here for the [CIPID guide](#) on effective listening skills.

Give access to peer support – consider ways to help peers to talk to each other. For example, a buddy system or an informal peer support network. Get to know what might already be available within your organization, or speak to HR about setting something informal up if one doesn't exist.

Set clear boundaries – ensure that your team knows when you are available to be contacted. This will help them feel confident about knowing when to approach you, as well as protect your own mental health. It will also role model healthy behaviours and give those you manage permission to do the same.

Linklaters: setting clear boundaries

Linklaters, staff have been encouraged to use their internal instant messenger to very clearly communicate when they are unavailable by setting status updates to include granular details such as "Having lunch with my children", "Caring for a sick family member" or "Gone for a walk". Because more senior members of staff are doing this, junior team members feel they are able to step away from their desks too.



For the business

Proactively communicate – Ensure that updates are provided regularly, even when there is not new information to share, to allay uncertainty, anxiety or unhelpful speculation.

Communications from senior management – senior management should communicate directly with this cohort, to echo, add to and reinforce the messages that is coming from line managers and the HR team. Consider different mediums other than via email or bulletins – videos, blogs with photos and webinars are helpful to bring comms to life and add a social element to them.

2. Create and promote an open culture that is supportive of positive mental health and wellbeing

Initiate conversations about mental health – You can protect your team’s mental health by talking about wellbeing and listening. Ask open questions such as “How are you managing in the new circumstances?”. Take the time to ask the question again. Also, if you feel comfortable to, share your own ups and downs. This all can create a culture where people are not afraid to have a conversation about their mental wellbeing. If the employee has a known mental health condition, take the time to check that their usual support and treatment systems are still available to them.

Signpost to mental health support – Signpost to company support, such as Mental Health First Aiders, EAP providers and mental health networks regularly. If you have an EAP or counselling service, make sure employees know how to access it. Not everyone will feel comfortable using internal resources, so also signpost to external mental health support.

Check in on reasonable adjustments – Discuss how best to support people to do their work. Those who previously did not require reasonable adjustments may need some in this new environment. It may be helpful to provide examples of adjustments available, particularly for early careers colleagues who are unfamiliar with workplace adjustments. Likewise, adjustments which are already in place should be reviewed.

Share personal experiences – Share different experiences of people from across the business, at all levels of seniority. Storytelling can help to challenge mental health stigma and normalise the situation and associated feelings. This could be via staff emails, employee webinars or internal blogs.

Allen & Overy: sharing personal experiences

At Allen and Overy, a global senior partner does a regular weekly blog where he shares his own experiences of lockdown, as well as the stories from people across the global business

Financial support – Proactively signpost to credible sources of advice, such as a financial support line that might come with the EAP, or share reputable sources of information such as [The Money Advice Service “Coronavirus and Your money” Guide](#) or the [Just Finance Foundation Coronavirus help hub](#).

Actively support the mental health of people on furlough – Employers have an opportunity to support the wellbeing of people who are on furlough – please see [the CMHA guide](#) to supporting the mental health of furloughed workers.

3. Proactively discuss changes in expectations and targets

Help to avoid anxiety by being clear about adjusting and managing professional expectations in this new environment. This could include:

- Provide clarity on how their performance will be assessed during this period to help to calm anxieties around not being visible to a manager or being concerns about being quiet at work. For example:

Performance Reviews: Oliver Wyman

Oliver Wyman has altered how consultant performance will be reviewed in 2020. As with many professional services firms, billable utilisation is considered as part of the overall performance review. In these changed circumstances, Oliver Wyman has suspended utilisation metrics to alleviate stress, whilst continuing to work with individuals to identify developmentally rich work.

- Help employees to clearly delineate between work time and home time, while remembering that leaders and managers are role models and should lead by example. If a manager has opted to work very early or late, they should be transparent about why and that they do not expect responses outside of working hours to ensure direct reports do not feel they need to mirror your schedule.

4. Support the line managers

Provide managers with clear guidance about what mental health and wellbeing support is available. Managers are being asked to quickly develop new management skills for this remote working world. They should be offered support and potentially training.

Supporting line managers: The Bank of England

The Bank of England is encouraging managers to undertake online courses on managing virtual teams, as well as introducing resources around empathetic leadership.

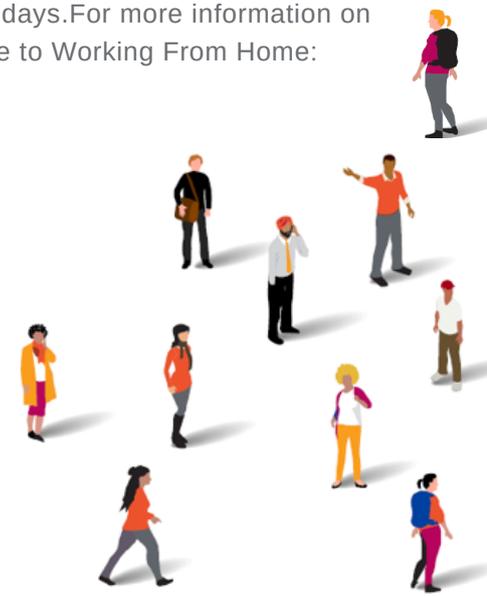
5. Encourage people to achieve their Five Ways to Wellbeing

Promote self-care. Consider how you can help people achieve the Five Ways to Wellbeing (Give, Keep Active, Take Notice, Connect and Learn). This is important at a time when everyone has less access to their usual ways to wellbeing – such as the gym, family and friends and holidays. For more information on ways to wellbeing, click here for the Charlie Waller Memorial's Trust's Guide to Working From Home:

[Your Wellbeing Action Plan.](#)

The Five Ways to Wellbeing: Deloitte

Deloitte has developed a campaign called The Wellbeing Movement, which is a daily timetable of virtual events, classes and drop-ins to help people look after their health and wellbeing and that of others. Sessions include exercise, mindfulness and singing sessions with the Deloitte choir.



Quotes from the CMHA and CWMT

Farimah Darbyshire, Early Careers Health Programme Lead, CMHA:

“Employers and line managers are well placed and have a clear opportunity to support the positive mental health and wellbeing of people in their early careers at this challenging time. Regular engagement, thoughtful communications and offers of support through this crisis will not only positively impact on their mental health today, but on how well and mentally healthy they are in the coming months and years.”

Dr Nargis Islam, Clinical Psychologist, Workplace Trainer, Charlie Waller Memorial Trust:

“The Covid-19 global pandemic, social distancing and lockdown continues to have profound immediate and long-term impacts for all. For young adults who were about to embark on their early career experiences, the current situation is particularly difficult when trying to plan and engage in career influencing choices and activities. [We know that young adults in pre- COVID 19 times were especially vulnerable to experiencing anxiety and other mental health difficulties in their first employment roles.](#) It is now particularly important we understand the needs of employees on graduate training programmes and schemes, and in early career posts. Remaining protective of their mental health and well-being both during this crisis and the months of rebuilding and recovery that will follow is crucial, whether they are from home, on reduced hours or being furloughed.”

Resources

External mental health support

- [NHS Every Mind Matters](#)
- [The Samaritans](#)
- [Shout](#)
- The CMHA Thriving From The Start Network: [Click here](#) to join the mental health network for people in their early careers, working in financial, legal and professional services.

Workplace coronavirus resources

- [CMHA guide to managing remote teams](#)
- [Mental Health At Work](#)
- [CMHA guidance to supporting the mental health of furloughed workers](#)
- [Charlie Waller Memorial Trust guide for line manager's during the Coronavirus Crisis](#)
- For information about CMHA training for early careers line managers, to support them during this crisis, please contact cmha@citymha.org.uk

Suggested resources for people to achieve the Five Ways to Wellbeing

- [Salesforce's "Sanity Savers"](#)
- [Free online courses from international universities](#)
- [National Theatre At Home](#)
- [NHS Fitness Studio Workouts, for home](#)



Website: www.citymha.org.uk
Email: city@citymha.org.uk
LinkedIn: [City Mental Health Alliance](#)
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The Charlie Waller Memorial Trust
 Depression – let's get talking

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