



Ministry
of Defence

Mental Health Awareness: Conversation Guide



Who is this guide for?

This guide has been Produced by Civilian HR in conjunction with the Defence Mental Health Network (DHMN).

This guide is for those who have undertaken some form of mental health awareness training, such as Mental Health First Aid, or an equivalent.

Its aim is to set out the role and responsibilities for those who may respond to colleagues who want to discuss issues that are affecting their mental health.

As someone who has undertaken mental health awareness training, you should have a basic understanding of mental health conditions. You should also be aware of the provision available to employees in both Defence and external organisations, so that you can signpost to professional support, where necessary.



Why is it needed?

We want to encourage peer-to-peer support. However, it is important that colleagues involved in discussions about mental health have the right skills and knowledge and understand their boundaries.

The Ministry of Defence has thousands of colleagues who have completed the 2-day Mental Health First Aid course, or an equivalent in mental health awareness.

These courses have been proven to help raise awareness of mental health across organisations – helping to break the stigma and open up conversations.

This guide is designed to help colleagues provide the appropriate advice and provide safeguarding advice.



What can you do if you want to support colleagues?

When promoting mental health awareness and supporting colleagues with mental health concerns, you should:

- Act as a role model and advocate.
- Provide a friendly, empathetic, non-judgemental, 'active listening' ear to employees and line managers.
- Offer support to employees with mental health concerns only up to your own level of competency and training.
- Signpost employees and line managers to available support (see slide 8-9).
- Signpost to expert advice where needed e.g. Employee Assistance Programme (EAP), line manager referral to Occupational Health (OH), local GP.
- Be alert and assess if there is a serious risk of self-harm or risk of harm to another individual and follow due processes.
- Have knowledge of HR policies and services
- Treat all individuals uniquely by focusing on individual need rather than imposing your own ideas.
- Adhere to boundaries, recognising that you should not give HR or clinical advice or to replace EAP / OHS provision.
- Take personal responsibility for your own mental health, opting out should you be unable to continue providing support.

What you should not do:

When promoting mental health awareness and supporting colleagues with mental health concerns, you should not:

- Offer medical advice, prescribe or suggest possible treatments to an individual.
- Make any diagnosis of a mental health condition or participate in speculation about the diagnosis.
- Undertake the role of counsellor or therapist.
- Provide ongoing and continued support to a colleague.
- Undertake conversations when you are not well enough to do so.
- Take away the line manager's role or duty of care in supporting an employee with a mental health issue.
- Sit back when colleagues demonstrate prejudice, discrimination or harmful attitudes to mental ill health.
- Make any agreement of absolute confidentiality with any member of staff. This does not support safe practice. Disclosure of information may be necessary where there is a risk to the safety of the individual or others.

What skills enable a good conversation?

- Excellent communication skills in particular an ability to listen actively.
- Strong interpersonal skills.
- Ability to develop rapport with colleagues.
- Ability to demonstrate empathy and compassion in an objective, non-judgemental manner.
- Ability to maintain composure when discussing difficult issues, including self-harm and suicidal feelings.
- Self-awareness to understand the limitations of the role, and to express these limitations in a constructive manner, providing relevant signposting.



Confidentiality

- You should understand the boundaries of confidentiality.
- Almost everything discussed between you and colleagues can be kept confidential and details should not be disclosed.
- There are however some exceptions which are as follows:
 - **The information provider has consented to the disclosure of the information they have shared**
 - **Disclosure is necessary to safeguard the individual (i.e. they have posed a threat to themselves or others), or is in the public interest.**
 - **There is a legal duty (e.g. a court order), or a statutory obligation to disclose.**



Where to signpost

- **Employee Assistance Programme:** EAP provides a complete support network that offers expert advice and compassionate guidance 24/7, covering a wide range of issues. Tel: 0800 345 7047.
- **Charity for Civil Servants:** This charity offers a range of support products for civil servants in need of mental health support.
- **Samaritans:** or 24/7 freephone on 116 123 - They support a range of mental health issues including suicidal callers and can also provide support to those who are worried about someone.
- **NHS 111:** Call the medical emergency service on 111 for medical concerns or the emergency service on 999 if the individual is at risk of self harm.
- **Mind:** Mental Health charity with advice and support online. Freephone number - 0300123393
- **Mental Health Foundation:** Information and support about mental health and national campaigns.
- **Local mental health support services:** A resource that enables you to search for local NHS mental health support services.
- **Combat Stress:** This is a 24/7 mental health helpline for serving personnel and their families. Freephone number: 0800 1381619
- **SSAFA:** they help the armed forces community by providing direct support to individuals in need of physical or emotional care. Free phone number: 03000 111 723
- **Naval Service Family and People Support on telephone:** 0800 145 6088 or email: navynps-peoplesptnsfpsptl@mod.gov.uk
- **Army Welfare Service:** on 01904 882053 or email RC-AWS-IAT-0Mailbox@mod.gov.uk

Useful Resources

- [MOD Wellbeing Portal](#) and the dedicated [Coronavirus Wellbeing Portal](#) has a number of guidance, information and tools to support mental health, general wellbeing and resilience
- The [5 Step Wellbeing Conversation guidance](#) and toolkit is designed to help managers have wellbeing focused conversations with their team members.
- [Stress Assessment and Stress Reduction Tool](#) This tool is based on information from the Health and Safety Executive website helps staff and managers to assess the risks of work-related stress within a job role and identify any areas of concern.
- [Occupational Health Policy and Procedure](#) The OHS provides medical advice to support individuals remaining at work with recommendations on workplace adjustment requirements where necessary.
- [Mental Health: A Guide for Managers](#) The guide is to equip managers with the tools to recognise and support their employees struggling with their mental health.
- [HeadFIT](#) is a set of online resources (text, image and video content) that assist the user in developing a proactive approach to mental fitness.
- [Defence Staff Network](#) The staff network groups aim to provide support and education to all colleagues interested in creating a more diverse and inclusive workplace.