

SG38:19

Guidance on Mental Health Wellbeing



1. INTRODUCTION TO HEAD FOR HEIGHTS

The National Access and Scaffolding Confederation *Head for Heights* campaign aims to change how mental health is approached and acted upon within the scaffolding industry and wider construction sector.

The NASC wants to break down the stigma surrounding mental health so that someone who has a mental health issue is treated exactly the same as someone who suffers a physical injury, such as a fracture following a slip, trip or fall.

The campaign aims to break down the stigma surrounding mental health, and raise awareness of the simple proactive steps companies can take to tackle these issues in a sensitive manner – and the positive impact action on this issue can have on their business and their employees wellbeing (through better motivated staff and less absenteeism for example).



Note: It is vitally important that employees are not unduly alarmed. A certain amount of pressure at work can be acceptable, but where it leads to stress then that can have a detrimental effect on the employee. Please see the reference sections for further advice and contact details for many organisations offering advice and support, including the Lighthouse Construction Industry Charity.

The NASC is keen to raise awareness of the need for greater mental health support, by developing this mental health policy guide to enable companies and their directors and managers to create a plan, the implementation of which will enable their workforce to thrive at work.



2. CREATE AN ACTION PLAN FOR EMPLOYEES TO THRIVE AT WORK

The NASC recommend that scaffolding contractors consider the following six items so that they can put in place measures to improve mental health wellbeing to ensure all staff and scaffolders have a **Head for Heights**.¹

1. Produce, implement and communicate a mental health at work plan.

- Developing a one page plan that is included in your Health & Safety Policy, as part of your drive to prevent ill-health, which is reviewed as a minimum annually.
- Consider joining an industry campaign, which provides mental health resources such as “Time to Change”.

2. Develop mental health awareness among employees.

- Hold regular advice and information sessions for all employees.
- One-to-one conversations between managers and employees.
- Ensure that if you are the Managing Director, Director or Owner that you consider your own wellbeing (we are all at risk of mental health issues).
- Consider memos, bulletins and displaying posters to develop awareness.
- Consider integrating mental health wellbeing practices into policies, training sessions, inductions, risk assessment/method statements (RAMS), formal meetings.

3. Encourage open conversations about mental health and the support available when employees are struggling.

- Directors and Managers talking to employees if concerned about them struggling (including being transparent about their own mental health issues) and ensuring they are supported.
- Consider formalising your internal support framework (you may have an employee who everyone turns to, consider giving them training and arranging support for them).
- Consider arranging for mental health champions to give support to employees.
- Consider appointing mental health first aiders to give employer and employee support.
- Consider an Employee Engagement Programme (EAP) for a more holistic approach.

4. Provide employees with good working conditions.

- Reviewing each operation – e.g. reviewing construction site works, yard work, transport operations, office work.
- Consider engaging with your employees to get feedback on their roles (which might suggest ways to restructure to alleviate stress, reduce dependence on key personnel, reduce work overload, give appropriate control back to the employee, build relationships and provide support).

5. Promote effective people management.

- Directors and Managers arranging for all teams to meet up regularly to ensure that the competition is healthy, friendly and enjoyable.
- Leaders to ensure they act professionally and communicate through all levels, show appreciation for good work and to make everyone in the group/company feel supported and valued.

¹ The NASC have taken these six principles from the publication: *Thriving at Work; The Stevenson / Farmer Review of Mental Health and Employers (October 2017)*:
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/658145/thriving-at-work-stevenson-farmer-review.pdf

- Encourage staff at all levels to speak to their immediate line manager or director or company head regarding potential issues such as stress as early as possible, with an emphasis on ensuring that the workplace promotes harmony and healthy behaviours.
- Consider training or coaching for staff.
- Consider formal processes (including stress management, anger management, anti-bullying, etc).



6. Routinely monitor employee mental health and wellbeing.

- Recording and monitoring absenteeism.

3. AFFECTS ON THE INDUSTRY AND INDIVIDUAL FROM MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES

The United Kingdom Department of Health and the Confederation of British Industry have estimated that 15-30% of workers will experience some form of mental health problem during their working lives. In fact, mental health problems are a leading cause of illness and disability.

The European Mental Health Agenda of the European Union (EU) has recognized the prevalence and impact of mental health disorders in the workplace. It has been estimated that 20% of the adult working population has some type of mental health problem at any given time. In the United Kingdom, for example, 24 working days are lost every year per case due to mental illnesses, making a total of 25.7 million working days lost per year, costing employers £2.9 billion in 2016/17. Males working in the lowest-skilled occupations had a 44% higher risk of suicide than the male national average; the risk among males in skilled trades was 35% higher.²

The construction industry lifestyle is undoubtedly both challenging and stressful. Long and demanding working hours, working away from home on site for weeks at a time and the lingering unease in the industry. These are just some of the factors contributing to poor mental health.

In a workforce that is predominantly male, specific risks associated with male mental health also need to be considered. The “tough guy” image widespread in the construction industry is very much to blame. Asking for help and opening up about emotions are just not things that come naturally to many of those working in the industry. The combination of these factors results in many suffering in silence.

² Information is from two reputable websites: https://www.who.int/mental_health/media/en/712.pdf and <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/deaths/articles/suicidebyoccupation/england2011to2015>

4. WHAT DO WE MEAN BY MENTAL HEALTH WELLBEING

Mental health is defined as a state of well-being in which every individual realises his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to her or his community.

5. WHAT IMPACTS ON YOUR MENTAL HEALTH

We all will experience mental health problems during our lives, just because you experience a mental health problem does not mean this will develop into a mental illness.

We all deal with mental health problems differently, your mind is quite clever at developing its own coping strategies, but sometimes these strategies can get overloaded and affect your ability to function normally.

The following are some issues that may have an impact on YOUR mental health:

- bereavement (losing someone close to you).
- unemployment or losing your job.
- financial problems.
- homelessness or poor housing.
- use of recreational drugs.
- having an ongoing (chronic) medical condition, such as diabetes.
- being a long-term carer for someone.
- excessive alcohol use.



The list is not exhaustive.

The following are work related issues that the HSE (Health and Safety Executive) has identified as being the primary cause of work-related stress:

- Demands of the job.
- Lack of control over the work, how and when it is done.
- Lack of support from managers and colleagues.
- Failure to build suitable relationships at work.
- Lack of understanding as to how the individual's role fits within the organisation.
- Inadequate change management.

6. EARLY WARNING SIGNS

Typical early warning signs can include:

- Pulling away from people and usual activities.
- Having low or no energy.
- Feeling numb or like nothing matters.
- Having unexplained aches and pains.
- Feeling helpless, hopeless, overwhelmed, unable to cope.
- Smoking, drinking, or using drugs more than usual.
- Feeling unusually confused, forgetful, on edge, angry, upset, worried, or scared.
- Yelling or fighting with family and friends.
- Experiencing severe mood swings that cause problems in relationships.
- Having persistent thoughts and memories you can't get out of your head.
- Hearing voices or believing things that are not true.
- Thinking of harming yourself or others.
- Inability to perform daily tasks like taking care of your kids or getting to work or school.
- Eating or sleeping too much or too little.



7. SUPPORT

Once you've opened up a dialogue with your employee about their mental health, the priority is to develop positive steps to address the key issues they're struggling with. Clear policies on workplace adjustments are crucial in supporting staff to cope and their recovery. Adjustments for mental health are generally simple, practicable and cost effective. This is not an exhaustive list, employers should explore with the individual their specific needs and be as creative as possible when thinking about how to address these issues.



Changes to how people perform their role.

- Flexible hours or change to start/finish time.
- Change of work space e.g. quieter, more/less busy.
- Working from home (although it's important to have regular phone contact so people remain connected and don't feel isolated).
- Changes to break times.
- Provision of quiet rooms.
- 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.
- Agreement to give employee leave at short notice and time off for appointments related to their mental health, such as therapy and counselling.

Changes to the role itself (temporary or permanent)

- Reallocation of some tasks or changes to people's job description and duties.
- Redeployment to a more suitable role.
- Training and support to apply for vacancies and secondments in other departments.

Extra support

- Increased supervision or support from manager.
- Extra training, coaching or mentoring.
- Extra help with managing and negotiating workload.
- Mentor or 'buddy' systems.

- Mediation which can help if there are difficulties between colleagues.
- Mental health support group or disability network group.
- Identifying a 'safe space' in the workplace where the person can have some time out, contact their buddy or other sources of support.
- Encourage people to work on building up their resilience and doing things that support good mental health such as exercise, meditation or eating healthily.
- Encourage people to be more aware of their mental health state and reflect on what factors affect it in the workplace.
- Provide regular opportunities to discuss, review and reflect on people's positive achievements – this can help people to build up positive self-esteem and develop skills to better manage their triggers for poor mental health.

8. COMMUNICATION / CAMPAIGNS / DESTIGMATISING

Communication/Campaigns

Celebrating your company's commitment to ending the silence around mental health at work, and promoting positive mental health wellbeing, will be a key motivator to encourage employees to join your campaign. This can be achieved by a variety of communication activities both internally and externally.

- It can be a good idea to hold regular advice and information sessions to ensure that employees are aware of the campaign's progress, and the potential opportunities to contribute to the campaign that might be available to them. Including advice in induction and staff handbooks can ensure that new joiners are aware too.
- Selecting an internal senior champion to lead these sessions and act as a main point of contact for informal advice can be beneficial. Open events also provide ideal opportunities to share details with employees on the wellbeing support that is available to them.
- Regular internal communications channels such as blogs and newsletters can also be a good way to ensure that the company is kept updated on the campaign's progress. It also offers an ideal opportunity for employees across the organisation to contribute, through written Q&As, on managing mental wellbeing and case study write-ups, for example.
- Make sure that all the progress of the campaign and your organisation are given high profile status on your company's website through newsfeeds and any newsletters that are regularly distributed to internal and external stakeholders.
- It can also be a good idea to try and engage external partners and suppliers with the campaign. Not only will this help ensure that you are receiving maximum recognition for your work, but closer existing ties with other organisations offers an ideal opportunity to try to encourage them to join the campaign as well. Don't underestimate the potential in engaging your supply chain and building on existing relationships with likeminded organisations who may also be keen to contribute, and position themselves as progressive employers.
- Lastly, making sure that line managers are kept informed and able to speak with authority on the company's offer around mental wellbeing is crucial.

Destigmatising

Most people who live with mental illness have, at some point, been blamed for their condition. They've been called names. Their symptoms have been referred to as "a phase" or something they can control "if they only tried." They have been illegally discriminated against, with no justice. This is the unwieldy power that stigma holds.



All of us in the mental health community need to raise our voices against stigma. Every day, in every possible way, we need to stand up to stigma. If you're not sure how, here are eight ways you can respond to the question: **“How do you fight stigma?”**

- Talk openly about mental health
- Educate yourself and others.
- Be conscious of language.
- Encourage equality between physical and mental health illness.
- Show compassion with those who have mental illness.
- Choose empowerment over shame.
- Be honest about treatment.
- Don't harbour self-stigma.

9. FURTHER ADVICE

For further advice, please consult the following:

- Your GP (NHS General Practitioner) or Hospital A&E in an emergency.

For further advice, please consider consulting the following organisations and websites:

- Lighthouse Construction Industry Charity:



Construction
Industry Helpline 
0345 605 1956



www.constructionindustryhelpline.com

- www.matesinmind.org/
- www.buildingmentalhealth.net/
- www.mentalhealth.org.uk
- www.mind.org.uk
- www.time-to-change.org.uk
- www.helpforheroes.org.uk/get-support/mental-health-and-wellbeing/improving-your-mental-health/
- www.samaritans.org/

10. REFERENCES AND FURTHER GUIDANCE

Legislation:

The Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974

The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999

NASC Safety Guidance, with emphasis on health:

- SG1 Control of Substance Hazardous to Health in Scaffolding (COSHH);
- SG2 Asbestos Licences and Ancillary Work Involving the Scaffolding Contractor;
- SG6 Manual Handling in the Scaffolding Industry;
- SG11 Noise;
- SG13 Health Surveillance in Scaffolding;
- SG15 Drugs and Alcohol.

HSE website and its publications:

- www.hse.gov.uk/health-surveillance/
- www.hse.gov.uk/stress/resources.htm/
- HSE Management Standards;
- INDG424: Working together to reduce stress at work; A guide for employees.

Government Publications:

Thriving at Work; The Stevenson / Farmer Review of Mental Health and Employers (October 2017):
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/658145/thriving-at-work-stevenson-farmer-review.pdf

Information on Mental Health Issues:

Nations for Mental Health – gives information on the issues:

https://www.who.int/mental_health/media/en/712.pdf

Office for National Statistics – gives statistical information on the issues:

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/deaths/articles/suicidebyoccupation/england2011to2015>

Useful Links for further help and advice:

Young Minds – offers support and advice for young people and parents on a wide range of issues.
http://www.youngminds.org.uk/for_parents/worried_about_your_child/depression

Mind – support and information about various mental health issues
<http://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/types-of-mental-health-problems/depression/#.Vguf9rRqfTQ>

Royal College of Psychiatrists – leaflets and advice on various mental health issues.
<http://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/healthadvice/parentsandyouthinfo/parentscarers/depression.aspx>
<http://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/healthadvice/parentsandyouthinfo/youngpeople/depressioninyoungpeople.aspx>

Helpguide – guides about various mental health and wellbeing issues
<http://www.helpguide.org/home-pages/depression.htm>

Depression Alliance – UK charity for those impacted by depression. www.depressionalliance.org

Papyrus – Prevention of Young Suicide – organisation that provides support and advice for young people and anyone concerned about them.
<https://www.papyrus-uk.org/about/our-work>
Helpline: 0800 068 41 41 (Mon-Fri 10am-10pm, weekends 2pm-10pm)

NHS out of hours crisis team: 0300 456 83 42 (Mon-Fri 5pm-9am, 24 hours weekend)

Construction Industry Helpline App – A free mental health app providing vital information, advice and guidance on many wellbeing topics including stress, anxiety, depression, anger and suicidal thoughts:
<https://www.lighthouseclub.org/helpline-app/>

Mental Health Foundation – UK charity in health research, policy and service improvement
<http://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/help-information/mental-health-a-z/D/depression/>

Relate – what you can do to support young people with depression
<http://www.relate.org.uk/relationship-help/help-family-life-and-parenting/parenting-teenagers/mental-health/teen-depression>

NHS – mental health self-help guides
<http://www.ntw.nhs.uk/pic/leaflets/Depression%20A4%202015.pdf>
<http://www.ntw.nhs.uk/pic/leaflets/Depression%20and%20Low%20Mood%20A4%202015.pdf>

The Recovery Letters – letters written by people who have experienced depression to try and help others currently going through it. therecoveryletters.com/about-the-letters

Living with a Black Dog <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2VRRx7Mtep8>

I had a Black Dog <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XiCrniLQGYc>



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Whilst every effort has been made to provide reliable and accurate information, we would welcome any corrections to information provided by the Writer which may not be entirely accurate, therefore and for this reason, the NASC or indeed the Writer, cannot accept responsibility for any misinformation posted.



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