



INVESTING IN FIRST AID FOR MENTAL HEALTH

*Employment Law Advisory Services
White Paper 2019*



Part of the **ELAS** group of companies





Introduction

Mental health is never far from the headlines - and with good reason. Figures from the mental health charity, [Mind](#) show that as many as one in four people in the UK experience a mental health problem each year, with anxiety, depression and post-traumatic stress disorder among the most common.

However, despite its prevalence, mental health is often not considered as something in need of 'first aid'. This is a term that conjures up images of a small green box you'd typically find in your bathroom cabinet at home, or a special kit on the wall of the office that's rarely touched.

First aid for mental health is just as important as having various plasters, gauzes and antiseptic creams to hand - and if not more so. For employers, it is well worth investing in, not least for the improvements it can bring to general wellbeing in the workplace, but also a company's bottom line.

In this white paper, *Investing in First Aid for Mental Health*, we'll consider exactly what first aid for mental health is, and why it is something that you as a business owner cannot afford to overlook.

**“ONE IN FOUR PEOPLE
IN THE UK EXPERIENCE
A MENTAL HEALTH
PROBLEM EACH YEAR”**

WHAT IS FIRST AID FOR MENTAL HEALTH?

First aid for mental health works in much the same way as physical first aid; it is a course that offers professional advice on how to identify and understand mental health issues.

This is applicable to people who are developing a mental health problem or who are already suffering - the idea is that steps can be taken at an early stage to prevent a situation from getting worse.

In the UK, first aid for mental health remains at the discretion of managers. The [Health and Safety Executive \(HSE\)](#) advises that it “cannot tell you what provision you should make for first aid”, as this needs to be considered on a case-by-case basis.

In respect of mental health, the HSE states:

“You should consider ways to manage mental ill health in your workplace which are appropriate for your business, such as providing information or training for managers and employees, employing occupational health professionals, appointing mental health trained first aiders and implementing employee support programmes.”

Why is it so Important?

Mental health in the workplace should be given the same level of priority as physical wellbeing. It is a growing problem across UK businesses, making it more critical than ever to take action.

However, this might not be something that comes easy to business owners. A [CBI survey](#) found that 71% are reluctant to take action because they are unclear on what strategies are most effective, or they haven't seen the benefits for others that have invested in workplace health and wellbeing.

Gaining an understanding of employees' wellbeing is essential if they are going to fulfil their potential at work. Simply assuming that everyone is 'ticking along just fine' is no longer an option for managers, especially now mental health is not the taboo subject it once was.

First aid for mental health is just one of the tools that managers have at their disposal. It's a proactive, interactive way of creating a culture of openness that so many people have come to expect from their employer in the modern workplace.

An Open Mental Health Culture

A recent [CIPD study](#) found that reported common mental health conditions increased from 41% to 55% between 2016 and 2018, which could partly be due to creating a more open culture when it comes to mental health.

As a result, this has led to 51% of businesses increasing awareness of mental health issues across their operations - that's a 20% rise from two years earlier.

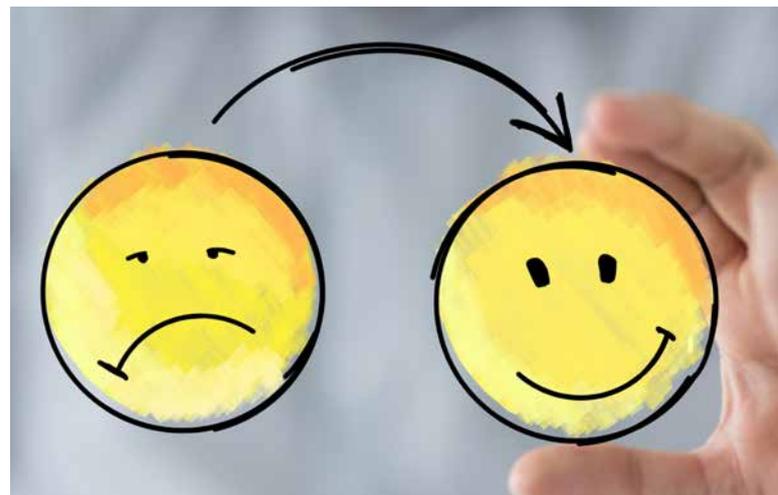
There is some gender disparity when it comes to reporting mental health at work. Figures from the [Office for National Statistics](#) show that:

8.1% OF WOMEN AND 5.7% OF MEN CITE MENTAL HEALTH CONDITIONS AS THEIR REASON FOR BEING ABSENT FROM WORK.

Statisticians revealed that men are typically less likely to seek medical help for these conditions than their female counterparts. What's more, medical professionals are more likely to diagnose women with mental health problems.

Although a lot of progress has been made over recent years, there can still be a stigma associated with mental health. Employers can help to overcome this by encouraging staff to be forthcoming about their issues and by offering opportunities to discuss their problems, such as with a dedicated first aider for mental health.

This can only be of benefit, not least because it helps employers be more aware of the medical issues their staff are facing and means they can take practical steps to offer help. Simply letting sickness absence build up isn't an ideal solution for any business, which is why an open workplace culture can make a big difference.



BENEFITS OF FIRST AID FOR MENTAL HEALTH

If you are a business owner, you might be questioning why first aid for mental health deserves your investment. In order to be effective, it needs to form part of a wider wellbeing strategy. Mental health impacts on so many areas of a business that it simply isn't possible to consider it in isolation - long-term cultural and behavioural change is needed for any strategy to be truly effective.

Every workplace is different, but these are just some of the reasons why first aid for mental health can make practical and financial sense for your business.

Promoting Equality

Employers cannot be shown to be discriminating against staff who suffer from mental health problems. There are a growing number of campaigns across the UK to give mental health the same level of priority as physical health, including the [It's OK Not To Be OK](#) initiative and [Mental Health Awareness Week](#).

By adopting the open workplace culture already discussed, and offering a provision of first aiders for mental health, business owners can clearly demonstrate to their staff they are serious about their wellbeing, whether physical or mental.

Cutting Down on Sickness Absence

Official [figures](#) show there has been a rise in the number of people taking sick days attributed to mental health issues, especially among those aged 25 to 34. In 2017, 9.6% said their sickness absence was a result of a mental health condition - that's a rise of 2.4% from 2009.

[PwC](#) estimates that sick days cost UK businesses as much as £29 billion a year. The group also emphasised that “forward-thinking companies” are investing more in their employees' wellbeing in order to tackle issues before they have the opportunity to affect their bottom line.

First aiders for mental health are trained to be both proactive and reactive. This provides the opportunity for mental health problems to be addressed as early as possible, enabling workers to get whatever help they need.



Combating Presenteeism and Encouraging Productivity

One concept that has arisen over recent years is that of presenteeism. This is when an employee turns up to work, even when they are not well enough to perform their duties to their full potential.

In many cases, presenteeism can be just as damaging as absenteeism. The [Centre for Mental Health](#) estimates that presenteeism relating to poor mental health costs businesses twice as much as sickness absence. This is further exacerbated by the number of people who leave their jobs as a result of poor mental health, putting hiring strain on the company.

A first aider for mental health will be trained to identify where this is the case. A worker may be particularly distant, their attention span limited, or tasks might be taking longer than usual to complete. This can particularly hinder productivity at a business, which understandably has an impact on its bottom line.



Staying on the Right Side of the Law

Although there is no legal requirement at present to provide first aid for mental health, employers do have a duty towards their workforce to provide a safe working environment.

Under the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974, employers have to take reasonably practicable measures to ensure the safety and welfare of their staff. This isn't the only piece of legislation to be aware of; the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 state that employers must assess workplace health and safety risks for their employees.

Staff Retention

These days, staff look for more than just a decent salary when they go in search of a job. Instead, other factors such as the working environment are playing an increasingly critical part in choosing where to work.

Employers that invest in first aid for mental health are demonstrating a commitment to their workforce, showing they care about their staff. This should pay dividends in terms of employee retention, especially at a time when workers are generally more mobile than at any other time in the past.

[Mind](#) recently released research showing that 48% of the UK workforce have experienced a mental health problem in their current job. Only half had discussed the issue with their employer, so by opening up opportunities for discussion, it's possible that some of these issues could be overcome, making staff less likely to go in search of a new role.

IMPLEMENTING FIRST AID FOR MENTAL HEALTH

What Characteristics Make a Good First Aider for Mental Health?

First aiders are trained to listen to people's concerns, offer reassurance and respond wherever necessary. It's not a position that will be perfectly suited to everyone, which is why it is important to think carefully about the employees who are best suited to the role.

Your first aiders will be equipped with the necessary knowledge to recognise warning signs, while also having the confidence to approach or support someone who might be suffering.

There is no strict rule as to who can and who cannot become a first aider for mental health. However, they must be prepared to gain a deep understanding of the issues at hand, while being observant enough to identify specific triggers.

Some of the key characteristics are:

- **People who want to learn** - becoming a first aider involves a commitment to training, so it is important for the individual to want to learn right from the outset.
- **Willingness to invest time** - as with any training, it is a good idea to regularly review the latest information and guidance on mental health. Although a course will provide a solid foundation, being a first aider requires ongoing revision in order to be truly effective.
- **Good listener** - sometimes all a colleague needs is someone to listen to their concerns. This role will therefore need someone who is able to listen and offer reassurance.
- **On-site presence** - the first aiders need to be primarily based on site. This role may not be suitable for those who are regularly out of the office, should their services ever be needed.
- **Confidentiality** - information given to first aiders must be kept confidential at all times.
- **Non-judgemental** - the mental health issues people face can be vast and varied, so it's essential that first aiders know how to deal with all types of problems. This needs to be done in a non-judgemental manner.

A first aider for mental health will be most effective in their role if they are encouraged at management level. This means offering support to those who volunteer to take on the duties, and making it clear that they have access to guidance, or can take a break whenever they need to.

It can also be worthwhile to publish clear advice on how much time first aiders should spend on their role. Some managers may be deterred from enlisting the help of first aiders because they feel it will distract from their day-to-day duties; having a policy in place can ensure this isn't the case.

SUPERCHARGE! YOUR TRAINING



With...
Trainer Trev

www.elas.uk.com/training-e-learning



Choosing the Right Course

Once you have decided that first aid for mental health is a worthwhile investment, it's now time to consider which course to enrol in. It is important to choose a provider with a proven track record and experience in the industry, as this will help ensure your staff get the most out of their training.

No prior knowledge is necessary; a good first aid for mental health course will give attendees a solid foundation on which they can further improve their skills. Courses vary in length and may last one or two days, depending on the provider.

At ELAS we offer an accredited Level 2 First Aid for Mental Health course, designed to allow employers to provide a positive mental health culture within their workplace. All delegates will be considered as First Aiders for Mental Health and will be a point of contact within their workplace.

Topics include:

- Identifying mental health conditions
- Providing advice and starting a conversation
- The effects of drugs and alcohol
- First Aid for Mental Health action plan
- First Aid for Mental Health in the workplace

We run this training course up and down the country throughout the year so take a look at our website, www.elas.uk.com/course-type/mental-health-training, to see when our next course is!



GET IN TOUCH

The ELAS Group is the go-to specialist of a wide range of employment services, including first aid for mental health. We have been in the industry for the past 30 years, during which time we've learnt what it takes to make your business running smoothly, efficiently and in line with the law.

If you are interested in learning more about first aid for mental health, give us a call on **08450 50 40 60** and we would be more than happy to discuss the various training opportunities we have to offer.





BUSINESS SUPPORT

Charles House, Albert Street,
Eccles, Manchester M30 0PW

08450 50 40 60

www.elas.uk.com

Part of the *ELAS* group of companies

