# Guidelines on Providing Support for Employees with and at-risk of Mental Health Conditions

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# Introduction

Mental health is an integral part of our overall health, just as important as physical health. Mental health, like physical health, can fluctuate on a spectrum, which can be broadly grouped into three categories i.e. "Healthy", "At-risk", and "Un-well", as shown in Figure 1.

*Figure 1. Mental Health Continuum Model*
*(adapted from the Combat and Operational Stress Continuum Model developed by the US Marine Corps and Navy[1])*
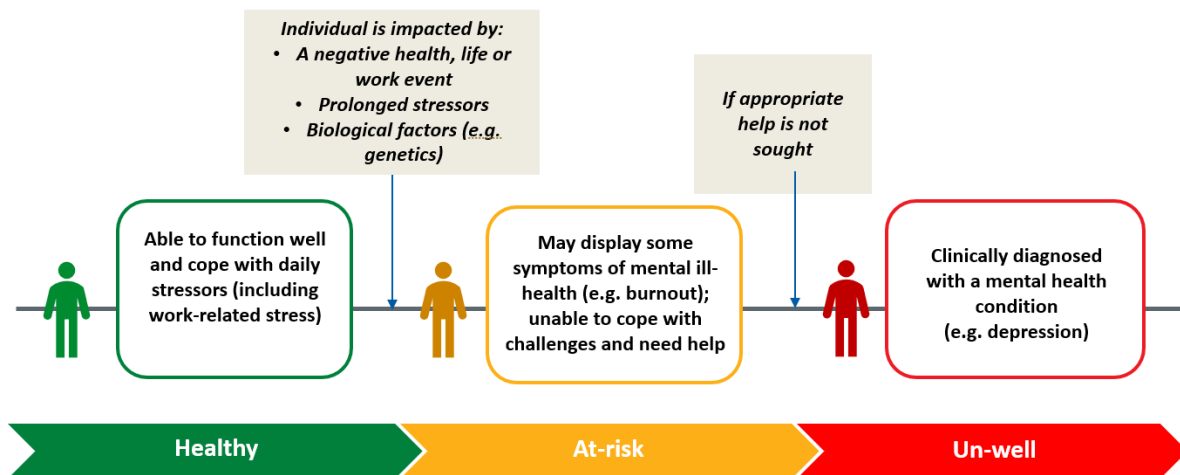


Individuals can move to different categories along the spectrum, depending on events and circumstances at different stages of life. Someone who is "Healthy" may become "At-risk" or even "Un-well" when exposed to chronic stressors. Those who are "At-risk" may recover to be "Healthy" with good support and treatment.

As most adults spend much of their time at work, employers can play an active role in creating a work environment conducive to good mental well-being. Work can be a source of good mental well-being through providing a sense of purpose, achievement and team camaraderie, and helps keep people mentally "Healthy". A supportive workplace can also help individuals who were "Un-well" but recovering from mental health conditions re-integrate into society. With the proportion of Singapore residents facing mental health challenges on the rise from 13.4% in 2020 to 17% in 2022[2], there may be more employees who are diagnosed with mental health conditions. Thus, it is worthwhile for employers to be equipped to help such employees return to work after recovery to retain their human capital.

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[1] Nash, W. P. (2011). US Marine Corps and Navy Combat and Operational Stress Continuum Model: A Tool for Leaders. Combat and Operational Behavioral Health, 107-119.

[2] The Prevalence of Mental Disorders in Singapore can be found at https://www.moh.gov.sg/docs/librariesprovider5/resources-statistics/reports/national-mental-health-and-well-being-strategy-report-(final).pdf?sfvrsn=e3b115fa_0#page=7

This set of guidelines provides senior management, supervisors and Human Resource personnel, who are keen to go the extra mile for their employees, with tips on supporting those who are in the "At-risk" or "Un-well" categories, including re-integrating them into the workplace upon recovery. It complements the Tripartite Advisory on Mental Health and Well-being at Workplaces[3], and Playbook on Workplace Mental Well-being[4], which mostly cover how to keep employees "Healthy" and prevent them from becoming "At-risk" or "Un-well".

**The Advantages of Supporting Employees with Mental Health Conditions**

A 2017 National Council of Social Service Study on Employment of Persons with Mental Health Conditions[5] found that employers who implemented workplace adjustments for employees with mental health conditions saw an average 3.3% improvement in productivity, and reduction in absenteeism, medical claims and hiring costs. The survey also noted that a supportive working environment encourages better employee performance and increases their commitment to employers, reducing costs associated with re-training and hiring, which average to about $3,650 per employee in Singapore. For every $1 invested in workplace adjustments for employees with mental health conditions, there was an average return of investment of $5.60. We encourage employers to consider these guidelines if they face challenges in supporting their "At-risk" and "Un-well" employees, as a way to maximise the full potential of the organisation's human capital.

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[3] The Tripartite Advisory on Mental Well-being at Workplaces is accessible via
https://www.mom.gov.sg/employment-practices/tripartism-in-singapore/tripartite-guidelines-and-advisories/tripartite-advisory-on-mental-well-being-at-workplaces
[4] The Playbook on Workplace Mental Well-being is accessible via
https://www.tal.sg/wshc/resources/publications/guides-and-handbooks/a-playbook-on-workplace-mental-well-being
[5] The National Council of Social Service's Study on Employment of Persons with Mental Health Conditions (2017) is accessible via https://www.ncss.gov.sg/docs/default-source/ncss-press-release-doc/mentalhealthtoolkitforemployers-pdf.pdf

# How to Support Employees who are At-Risk of or Recovering from Mental Health Conditions

These recommendations are suggestions on how companies could support employees who are at-risk of or recovering from mental health conditions. It is up to employers to consider which of the recommendations are feasible and relevant to them, how to modify them to suit each company's circumstances, and the pace to adopt them. Employers with limited mental health knowledge could tap on more established and experienced mental health service providers for advice and support *(refer to "Resources" section found at the end of this guideline)*.

**Step 1: Nurture a Supportive Mental Well-being Workplace Culture**

Employers could consider how to **nurture a supportive workplace culture**, conducive to safe discussion on mental well-being and to facilitate understanding on the topic.

A first resource is to refer to the **Tripartite Advisory on Mental Well-being at Workplaces**, and **Playbook on Workplace Mental Well-being**. These guides help to nurture a supportive, open and non-stigmatised workplace culture, which provides employees with psychological safety to be upfront about their mental health concerns.

**Comply with Workplace Fairness Legislation (WFL)**: Under the WFL, discrimination based on mental health conditions is prohibited across all stages of employment – i.e. pre-employment (e.g. recruitment), in-employment (e.g. promotion, performance appraisal, training) and end-employment (e.g. dismissal). Employers should review their human resource policies to ensure employment decisions are made fairly based on relevant factors such as the individual's experience and skills. Unless there are genuine occupational requirements, mental health conditions should not be the basis of employment decisions.

**Learn from Other Organisations' Experiences:** Employers are encouraged to join the Well-being Champions Network[6], where members could learn how to design and implement mental well-being support system, access training aligned with the National Mental Health Competency Training Framework[7], and network with other companies that are more experienced in managing mental well-being.

**Minimise Stigma Against Mental Health Conditions**: Promoting mental health and reducing stigma in the workplace requires a multifaceted approach that involves both organisational policies and cultural initiatives. Employers can consider the following steps to minimise stigma at the workplace:

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[6] The Well-being Champions Network serves to equip those implementing mental well-being initiatives in their organisations with peer learning and access to training and resources. See https://www.tal.sg/wshc/topics/mental-well-being/well-being-champions-network for more information

[7] The National Mental Health Competency Training Framework can be found at https://www.moh.gov.sg/docs/librariesprovider5/resources-statistics/reports/national-mental-health-and-well-being-strategy-report-(final).pdf?sfvrsn=e3b115fa_0#page=35

1. **Lead by Example**: Lead by example via a senior leader, by prioritising mental health in the senior leader's actions, decisions, and communications. Leaders and managers can openly discuss their experiences with mental health challenges, participate in mental well-being activities with employees, such as World Mental Health Day's observances, etc., to show that it's ok to seek help and the organisation supports those who seek help.

2. **Implement Educational Programmes**: Offer training sessions, workshops or webinars to increase awareness and understanding of mental health issues among employees. Provide information about common mental health conditions, signs and symptoms, and make support and treatment resources such as Employee Assistance Programmes (EAPs), self-help tools e.g. MindSG [8] / Mindline.sg[9], counselling services, or support groups, available for employees without having the need for them to disclose their identity, while ensuring anonymity and confidentiality. *(refer to "Resources" section found at the end of this guideline for a non-exhaustive directory of training providers).*

2. **Develop Mental Health Policies**: Develop clear policies and procedures related to mental health in the workplace, including anti-stigma policies, confidentiality guidelines, and protocols for supporting employees with mental health conditions, as well as feedback mechanism to continuously improve support systems.

3. **Implement Flexible Work Arrangements**: Implement flexible work schedules, remote work options, and accommodations for employees dealing with mental health challenges. Allow for time off or breaks as needed to attend counselling appointments or manage symptoms.

4. **Provide Leadership Training**: Provide training for managers and supervisors on how to recognise signs of mental distress, respond empathetically, and support employees who are seeking help. Encourage leaders to role model healthy behaviours and foster a culture of openness and support.

5. **Encourage a Work-Life Balance Culture**: Encourage work-life balance by promoting regular breaks, setting realistic workload expectations, and discouraging excessive overtime. Emphasise the importance of recognising signs of distress and burnout, self-care and stress management techniques.

6. **Set-up Safe Spaces**: Designate safe spaces within the workplace where employees can take a break, relax, or engage in stress-reducing activities. Ensure that these spaces are private, comfortable, and free from judgment.

7. **Establish Clear Communication Channels**: Establish clear channels of communication for employees to report concerns, seek support, or provide feedback on mental health-related issues.

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[8] MindSG is accessible via https://www.healthhub.sg/programmes/mindsg/discover
[9] Mindline.sg is accessible via https://www.mindline.sg/

Encourage open-door policies and anonymous reporting options to promote transparency and trust.

## Step 2: Establish a System to Refer Employees to Professional Help

Employers are recommended to **Establish a Referral System** so that employees who need more assistance could be referred early to professional help to prevent further deterioration to their state of well-being. Addressing such a complex situation requires a delicate balance of empathy, professionalism, and appropriate intervention. A referral system can comprise several components, as set out below.

1. **Regularly Check-in with Employees:** Supervisors should have constant dialogue with employees to build trust as well as prevent and manage stress at work *(refer to Table 1 below)*. Approach the employee with empathy, expressing care, concern for his/ her well-being. Assure them of confidentiality and non-judgmental support.

   *Table 1. Supervisors' Role in Building Trust, and Preventing and Managing Stress at Work*

   - **Foster Psychological Safety:** Create an environment where employees feel safe to express their thoughts, share their concerns, and contribute ideas without fear of negative consequences
   - **Clear Communication:** Communicate objectives and expectations clearly so that employees understand their roles and responsibilities
   - **Workload Management**: Monitor and review individual and team workloads to prevent excessive stress and burnout
   - **Coaching and Mentoring:** Coach and mentor staff support their professional development and well-being
   - **Autonomy and Control:** Provide the right level of autonomy to the team, empowering each to make decisions and take ownership of their work
   - **Accessibility**: Supervisors should avail themselves to provide regular opportunities for one-to-one conversations to address concerns and provide support
   - **Understanding Motivation**: Find out what motivates your staff at work and tailor support and recognition accordingly
   - **Consistency**: Take a consistent approach to management by treating all employees with equal respect, fostering a fair, inclusive and psychologically safe environment
   - **Problem Resolution**: Follow up on problems raised by subordinates via addressing issues promptly and preventing further escalation
   - **Conflict Mediation:** Act as an objective mediator in conflict situations to facilitate resolution, learning moments and harmony

2. **Setup Support Networks:** These can take the form of peer support groups, mentor/ buddy systems, etc., so that employees, who are more comfortable sharing with their peers, are able to

have an outlet within the organisation. The support networks also act as reinforcement if supervisors are unable to regularly check-in with employees.

3. **Train Employees to Spot Signs of Distress or Deviation from Normal Behaviours:** Such training can address problems before the situation escalates. Table 2 below offers some possible changes in normal behaviour or signs of distress. The list of changes in normal behaviours/ signs of distress is not exhaustive, and employers are not expected to actively detect these signs unless the employee explicitly mentioned or displayed drastic behaviour changes. If one or more of these behaviours/ signs is observed, this does not automatically mean the employee has a mental health problem – it could be a sign of another health issue or something else entirely. **Always avoid making assumptions, and instead, talk to the person directly. It is recommended for supervisors/ peer supporters to undergo training to help spot signs of distress and mitigate adverse consequences.** Examples of training that can help with this are shown in the "Resources" section found at the end of this guideline.

*Table 2. Changes in Normal Behaviour/ Signs of Distress*
*(adapted from Mind's Managing and Supporting Mental Health at Work:*
*Disclosure Tools for Managers[10])*

| Physical (that lasted 2 weeks or more, or have frequent reoccurrences) | Psychological | Behavioural |
|---|---|---|
| • Inability to sleep or stay asleep<br>• Visible tension or trembling<br>• Nervous trembling speech<br>• Tightness in chest | • Poor concentration<br>• Anxiety or distress<br>• Tearfulness<br>• Mood changes<br>• Loss of motivation<br>• Distraction or confusion<br>• Difficulty relaxing<br>• Lapses in memory<br>• Illogical or irrational thought processes<br>• Presence of suicidal thoughts | • Increased smoking and drinking<br>• Using recreational drugs<br>• Withdrawal from social contact<br>• Resigned attitude and restlessness<br>• Irritability, anger or aggression<br>• Over-excitement or euphoria<br>• Restlessness<br>• Intense or obsessive activity<br>• Repetitive speech or activity<br>• Impaired or inconsistent performance<br>• Uncharacteristic errors<br>• Increased sickness absence<br>• Uncharacteristic problems with colleagues |

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[10] Mind's Managing and Supporting Mental Health at Work: Disclosure Tools for Managers is accessible via https://www.mind.org.uk/media-a/5823/managing_and_supporting_mh_at_work.pdf

| | | • Apparent over-reaction to problems<br>• Disruptive or anti-social behaviour |
| --- | --- | --- |

4. **Facilitate Early Conversations:** If signs of distress or deviation from normal behaviours are spotted, have conversations with the affected employees to find out more about their situation. Some suggestions on how to approach and frame such conversations are in Table 3 below. Such conversations seek to understand the employees' needs and challenges, and to identify and implement suitable workplace support or possible adjustments to prevent their work performance from being adversely impacted. Assure the employees that seeking help is a sign of strength, not weakness. In cases where the employee's work performance has been affected by personal factors such as development of a mental health condition, there should be an adjustment period given to the employee *(see Table 4. Suggested Questions to Ask and Avoid)* to support in improving his/ her performance.

*Table 3. Dos and Don'ts of Conversation*
*(adapted from Mind's Managing and Supporting Mental Health at Work:*
*Disclosure Tools for Managers[11])*

**Dos**
- Seek to understand what the employee is experiencing
- Ask simple, open ended and non-judgemental questions to find out what the employee is going through and how he or she is feeling or coping
- Speak calmly
- Maintain good eye contact
- Listen actively and carefully
- Encourage the employee to share
- Show empathy by acknowledging the employee's experiences and emotions without dismissing or judging them
- Be prepared for some silences and be patient
- Assure that confidential information shared would be protected, unless there is a risk of harm to oneself, others, or the workplace
- Limit the number of management staff involved in the discussion so that the employee will not feel threatened
- Invite the employee to share propose ways to address the issues so that the management could manage their expectation

**Don'ts**
- Avoid interruptions – switch off phones, ensure colleagues are not able to walk in and interrupt the conversation

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[11] Mind's Managing and Supporting Mental Health at Work: Disclosure Tools for Managers is accessible via https://www.mind.org.uk/media-a/5823/managing_and_supporting_mh_at_work.pdf

- Avoid judgemental or patronising responses
- Avoid making assumptions
- Avoid making false or empty promises, such as assuring them you will always be there or that their problems will be resolved or improved
- Do not force the employee if he/she does not feel comfortable or ready to share

*Table 4. Suggested Questions to Ask and Avoid*
*(adapted from Mind's Managing and Supporting Mental Health at Work:*
*Disclosure Tools for Managers[12])*

| Neutral Questions to ask | Provocative and Blaming Questions to avoid |
|---|---|
| • How are you coping so far?<br>• I have noticed you seemed a bit quiet lately. Is there anything you would like to talk about?<br>• I have seen that you've been arriving a bit later than usual recently. Is there anything you would like to talk about?<br>• Is there anything I can help?<br>• How would you like to be supported?<br>• Have you sought help for your concerns or second opinion elsewhere? | • You are struggling. What is wrong?<br>• Why can't you just get your act together?<br>• You better fix your problem or else the rest of the team will suffer. When are you fixing your problem?<br>• What do you expect me to do about it?<br>• Everyone else is in the same boat and they are okay. Why are you not?<br>• Who do you expect to pick up all the work that you cannot manage? |

5. **Offer Professional Help**: Encourage the employees to seek professional help from a counsellor, therapist, or healthcare provider specialising in mental health and treatment *(refer to "Resources" section found at the end of this guideline for the directory of where to seek help).*

6. **Subscribe to Employee Assistance Programmes (EAPs):** Employers are encouraged to work with the EAPs provider to develop referral protocols. There are some misconceptions that EAPs are just counselling services. While most employers purchase only counselling services as their EAP, there are many other components and relevant areas employers could consider for their employees such as the following:

- Substance Abuse and Addiction Support
- Conflict Resolution
- Stress Management and Resilience Building
- Critical Incident Support
- Referral Services to Professional Help
- Training and Workshops

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[12] Mind's Managing and Supporting Mental Health at Work: Disclosure Tools for Managers is accessible via https://www.mind.org.uk/media-a/5823/managing_and_supporting_mh_at_work.pdf

Employers may wish to identify EAPs providers that have a referral protocol that would direct employers or employees to qualified professionals for appropriate triaging. The EAPs service providers are expected to maintain the employee's confidentiality and not reveal their identities to the employer, except for at-risk cases where the employer needs to be informed immediately or as soon as possible. These include but not limited to cases when there could be potential/ immediate harm or threat inflicted on self, or to fellow colleagues or working partners or family members. Employers may refer to the list of EAPs service providers in the official website of Ministry of Manpower[13].

7. **Provide Continued Support**: Follow up with the employee regularly to check on his/ her progress and offer ongoing support. Encourage him/ her to stay connected with his/ her support network and engage in healthy coping strategies.

8. **Document Discussions**: Document all interactions with the employee, focusing on his/ her well-being and the support provided. This captures how the company has supported the employee while prioritising the employee's privacy and dignity.

9. **Consult Experts:** Seek guidance from experts such as Human Resource professionals, occupational health professionals, etc., to ensure compliance with company policies, employment laws, and regulations while supporting the employee's needs.

10. **Monitor Progress**: Monitor the employee's progress and adjust support measures as needed. Maintain communication and collaboration between the employee, Human Resource, and relevant stakeholders to ensure a holistic approach to his/ her well-being.

**Remember, every situation is unique. Tailor your approach based on the individual's needs and circumstances while upholding his/ her privacy and dignity.**

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[13] List of EAPs Providers in the Tripartite Advisory on Mental Well-being at Workplaces is accessible via https://www.mom.gov.sg/-/media/mom/documents/covid-19/advisories/tripartite-advisory-on-mental-well-being-at-workplaces.pdf#page=13

**Step 3: Establish a Return-to-Work System to Re-integrate Employees Back to Work**

To prepare for the possibility of employees, suffering from mental health conditions, returning to work, employers are encouraged to **establish a Return-to-Work System,** which helps re-integrate employees after recovery back to work. Table 5 outlines the steps and accommodations for implementing a Return-to-Work system.

*Table 5. Return-to-Work System*

| Step 1: Make early contact with the employee to coordinate his/her return to work | Step 2: Supervisors to co-create a Return-to-Work Plan with the employee, which should include the following: | Step 3: Supervisor to monitor and review the employee's progress as necessary |
|---|---|---|
| • Discuss with the employee on his/ her condition<br>• Work with the employee to seek advice from his/ her medical professional if he/ she is fit to return to work, if there are any community partners able to support in his/ her rehabilitation and recovery<br>• Find out any concerns the employee may have, and address them openly and constructively<br>• Seek the employee's consent to inform only individuals directly involved. Discuss if he/ she would like other employees to support him/ her<br>• Assign a trusted colleague to serve as a buddy for the employee. The buddy can provide guidance, encouragement, and practical assistance during the re-integration process<br>• Arrange for the employee to meet with his/ her supervisor(s) and buddy, prior to return<br>• Arrange for the supervisor(s) and the employee to share with each other on work expectation<br>• Address concerns other employees may have regarding the returning employee. Such concerns should be addressed openly and constructively<br>• Provide education and training to colleagues about mental health | • Involve all required persons in the plan (including roles, responsibilities and duration)<br>• Discuss on the job duties, tasks, and responsibilities<br>• Identify if any modifications, accommodations, or temporary adjustments are needed *(see Table 6. Possible Adjustments/ Accommodations)*<br>• Develop a gradual RTW schedule that allows the employee to ease into his/ her work<br>• Provide training, orientation, or refresher sessions to help the employee re-integrate into his/ her role and familiarise him/ herself with any changes in processes, procedures, or technology during his/ her absence<br>• Offer additional support or resources as needed to address any gaps in knowledge or skills | • Establish a process for monitoring the employee's progress, well-being<br>• Encourage open communication and regular check-ins between the employee, his/ her supervisor(s), and Human Resource to address any concerns, challenges, or additional support needs that may arise<br>• Maintain flexibility and adaptability throughout the return-to-work process to accommodate changes in the employee's health status, needs, or work requirements<br>• Be responsive to feedback from the employee and make adjustments to the return-to-work plan as necessary<br>• Conduct regular evaluations and follow-up meetings to assess the effectiveness of the Return-to-Work plan<br>• Recognise and celebrate the employee's progress and achievements. Express appreciation for |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| conditions, including common symptoms, treatment options, and ways to support the employee returning to work. Address misconceptions and stigma associated with mental health in the workplace *(refer to "Resources" section found at the end of this guideline for the directory of training providers on mental health literacy)* | | his/ her resilience, courage, and commitment to his/ her well-being |

*Table 6. Possible Adjustments/ Accommodations*

Adjustments/ accommodations should be contextualised and industry-specific, and should be determined on a case-by-case basis, considering the individual's needs and nature of mental health condition.

**Work Hours and Scheduling:**
- Providing telecommuting or remote work options
- Having flexible scheduling
- Reducing working hours
- Having a predictable and consistent schedule
- Splitting break time into shorter but more frequent periods

**Environmental Adjustments:**
- Providing of rest areas (quiet rooms)
- Modifying the physical workspace
- Adjusting lighting, noise levels, or temperature controls
- Providing of ergonomic furniture or equipment
- Installing assistive devices or technologies

**Job Redesign and Workload Modifications:**
- Reducing the quantity or complexity of tasks, and break down large tasks into smaller, achievable steps
- Gradual increase in workload
- Modifying job duties or responsibilities to align with the employee's skills, abilities, and limitations
- Redistributing marginal tasks or non-essential duties to other team members
- Re-deploying or assigning alternative tasks
- Prioritising tasks
- Having reasonable extended deadlines or resources

**Training and Support**

- Providing awareness training for co-workers and supervisors to foster an inclusive and supportive work environment
- Offering mentoring, coaching, or additional support resources to help employees succeed in their roles and overcome barriers related to mental health condition

**Communication and Support:**
- Checking in regularly with employee
- Having a buddy system/ mentorship
- Accessing to Employee Assistance Programmes
- Having mediation support from supervisor(s) in times of conflicts
- Providing written materials in accessible formats, such as large print, braille, or electronic text. This is especially so for employees with vision impairments
- Offering communication supports or interpretation services for employees, especially those with hearing impairments

**Flexible Leave Policies:**
- Allowing employees to use accrued paid time off for medical appointments, treatments, etc
- Offering unpaid leave or extended medical leave

**Individualised Accommodations:**
- Tailoring accommodations to meet the unique needs and preferences of each employee based on their specific disability, mental health condition, or functionality
- Engaging in an interactive process with the employee to identify and implement effective accommodations that address his/ her individual needs and promote success in the workplace

**Preparing colleagues for the return of an employee who has been diagnosed with a mental condition requires sensitivity, communication, and education.** Beyond the above arrangements, supervisors are encouraged to monitor the dynamics of the team and resolve any issues to facilitate the easing in of the employee back to work. Encourage open dialogue among colleagues by fostering a supportive and non-judgmental work environment. Emphasise the importance of empathy, understanding, and active listening when interacting with the returning employee.

Team building activities are recommended to strengthen the relationship and foster unity among colleagues, including the returning employee. Encourage all employees, including colleagues of the returning employee, to include self-care routines such as taking regular breaks, practicing mindfulness and engaging in physical activities into their daily routines. Provide resources and information about mental health support services available within the organisation and in the community.

Ultimately, both employers and employees have a role in fostering a conducive environment for supporting mental health. Employers can consider the above steps in supporting their "At-Risk" or "Unwell" employees. At the same time, employees who feel they may be facing mental health concerns should avail themselves of training and knowledge, as well as to consider seeking professional advice if they suspect they are experiencing mental ill-health.

# Frequently Asked Questions

This section provides advice on the specific circumstances of performance management for returning employees, managing inappropriate behaviour by colleagues, and supporting employees with self-harm intentions.

## Clarifying Expectations - Performance Management

1. **How could employers manage continued unexplained, frequent absenteeism with poor performance after the employee returns to work?**

   Managing continued unexplained, frequent absenteeism coupled with poor performance after an employee returns to work requires a proactive and supportive approach.

   Employers can take the following action steps to address this situation effectively:

   1. **Assessment and Documentation:** Begin by assessing the situation and documenting instances of absenteeism and poor performance. Gather relevant information, including attendance records, performance evaluations, and any documented discussions or warnings.

   2. **Private Discussion:** Schedule a private meeting with the employee to discuss your observations and concerns regarding his/ her absenteeism and performance. Approach the conversation with empathy and openness, allowing the employee to share any challenges or issues he/ she may be facing.

   3. **Listen and Understand:** Listen actively to the employee's perspective and seek to understand the underlying reasons for his/ her absenteeism and poor performance. Explore any underlying personal or work-related factors contributing to his/ her difficulties.

   4. **Offer Support:** Offer support and resources to help the employee address any challenges he/ she may be experiencing. This could include providing access to Employee Assistance Programmes (EAPs), offering flexible work arrangements, or referring them to counselling or other professional services if needed.

   5. **Set Clear Expectations:** Clearly communicate expectations regarding attendance and performance standards. Reinforce the importance of reliable attendance and meeting job requirements to ensure the employee understands the impact of his/ her behaviour on work performance and team dynamics.

   6. **Develop a Performance Improvement Plan (PIP):** If necessary, develop a performance improvement plan (PIP) in collaboration with the employee. Outline specific goals,

timelines, and steps for improvement, as well as consequences for continued absenteeism and poor performance.

7. **Monitor Progress:** Regularly monitor the employee's progress and adherence to the PIP. Schedule follow-up meetings to discuss his/ her performance, address any challenges or obstacles, and provide ongoing support and guidance.

8. **Document Discussions:** Document all discussions, agreements, and actions related to the employee's absenteeism and performance. Keep detailed records of meetings, performance evaluations, and any corrective actions taken.

9. **Offer Additional Training or Support:** Identify areas where the employee may benefit from further training or support to improve his/ her performance. Provide opportunities for skill development and mentorship to help them succeed in his/ her role.

10. **Consider Further Action:** If the employee's absenteeism and poor performance persist despite interventions and support, consider taking further disciplinary action in accordance with company policies and legal requirements. This may include additional counselling, probation, or, as a last resort, termination of employment.

Throughout the process, maintain open communication with the employee and demonstrate empathy and understanding while holding him/ her accountable for meeting expectations. By addressing absenteeism and poor performance proactively and supportively, companies can help the employee improve his/ her performance and contribute positively to the team.

2. **How could employers approach performance appraisal for employees with mental health conditions who require workplace accommodations, while providing equity?**

Approaching performance appraisal for employees with mental health conditions who require workplace accommodations while providing for equity involves several steps:

1. **Understanding Individual Needs:** Identify the specific accommodations the employee needs to perform his/ her job effectively, such as flexible work hours, modified workstations, additional breaks, or other reasonable accommodations tailored to his/ her needs.

2. **Focus on Job Performance:** Evaluate the employee's performance based on his/ her job performance, taking into account any accommodations provided. Focus on the quality of work, productivity, collaboration, and other relevant performance metrics.

3. **Use Objective Criteria:** Use objective criteria and performance measures to assess the employee's performance, avoiding subjective judgments or biases. Establish clear performance indicators and goals that are relevant to the employee's role and responsibilities.

4. **Consider Accommodation Effectiveness:** Assess the effectiveness of the workplace accommodations in facilitating the employee's job performance. Evaluate whether the accommodations have enabled the employee to perform his/ her duties effectively and whether any adjustments or additional support may be needed.

5. **Provide Regular Feedback:** Offer regular feedback and communication to the employee about his/ her performance, highlighting areas of strength and areas for improvement. Provide constructive feedback in a supportive and non-judgmental manner, focusing on actionable steps for growth.

6. **Address Biases and Stereotypes:** Be mindful of unconscious biases and stereotypes that may influence perceptions of the employee's performance. Challenge assumptions and stereotypes about mental health conditions and focus on objective evidence of job performance.

7. **Provide Training and Awareness:** Offer training and awareness programmes for managers and colleagues to increase understanding of mental health conditions, workplace accommodations, and inclusive performance appraisal practices. Encourage open communication and collaboration to create a supportive and inclusive work environment.

8. **Document Accommodations and Performance:** Document any accommodations provided to the employee, as well as his/ her performance evaluations and feedback. Maintain accurate records of performance appraisal discussions, accommodations requests, and any adjustments made to support the employee.

9. **Seek Guidance if Needed:** Consult with Human Resource professionals or experts if there are questions or concerns about how to appropriately accommodate employees while ensuring fairness and equity in the performance appraisal process. Follow company policies and legal requirements related to accommodations and disability discrimination.

By following the above steps, employers can approach performance appraisal for the employees who require workplace accommodations with equity in mind, supporting his/ her success and fostering an inclusive work environment.

**3. What is the approach to terminating employees with mental health conditions who does not perform up to job expectations, without being accused of discrimination?**

Terminating the employment of an employee with mental health condition who does not meet job expectations requires a thoughtful and careful approach to avoid accusations of discrimination.

Here are action steps for employers to consider:

1. **Document Performance Issues:** Ensure that there is clear documentation of the employee's performance issues, including specific examples of performance deficiencies, missed deadlines, quality concerns, or behavioural issues. Document any attempts to address the performance issues through coaching, feedback, or accommodations.

2. **Apply Policies Consistently:** Follow established company policies and procedures for managing performance and disciplinary actions. Treat the employee the same as any other employee in similar circumstances, applying consistent standards and expectations.

3. **Enable Interactive Process:** Engage in an interactive process with the employee to discuss his/ her performance concerns, provide feedback, and explore potential solutions or accommodations. Consider whether there are any reasonable accommodations that could address the performance issues and support the employee in meeting job expectations.

4. **Review Accommodation Effectiveness:** Assess the effectiveness of any accommodations provided to the employee in facilitating his/ her job performance. Determine whether the accommodations have been successful in addressing the performance issues or whether additional support or adjustments are needed.

5. **Consult Experts**. Seek guidance from experts such as Human Resource professionals, occupational health professionals, etc., to ensure compliance with disability discrimination laws and regulations. Discuss the specific circumstances of the employee's performance issues and termination decision to identify any potential legal risks and mitigate them proactively.

6. **Provide Fair and Objective Evaluation:** Base the decision to terminate the employee's employment on objective criteria and documented performance issues, rather than assumptions or stereotypes about his/ her mental health condition. Ensure that the decision is justified by legitimate business reasons and is not influenced by bias or discrimination.

7. **Offer Support and Resources:** Provide the employee with information about available resources and support services, such as Employee Assistance Programmes (EAPs), counselling services, or community mental health resources. Offer assistance in transitioning out of the organisation and provide referrals to relevant support networks.

8. **Conduct Communications Sensitively:** Communicate the decision to terminate the employee's employment with sensitivity and compassion. Emphasise the reasons for the decision based on job performance and business needs, rather than personal characteristics or mental health status. Offer support and assistance in navigating the transition period.

9. **Maintain Confidentiality:** Respect the employee's privacy and confidentiality throughout the termination process. Avoid disclosing sensitive information about his/ her mental health condition to others unless necessary for business reasons and with appropriate consent.

10. **Review and Documentation:** Review the termination decision with Human Resource and experts to ensure compliance with company policies and legal requirements. Document the reasons for the termination decision, the interactive process with the employee, and any accommodations considered or provided.

By following these steps, employers can approach the termination of an employee who does not meet job expectations in a fair, objective, and legally compliant manner, while minimising the risk of discrimination accusations.

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4. **What are some possible solutions companies can take to manage potential long leave of absences for employees with mental health conditions when they are recovering or undergoing an episode of relapse, while maintaining practicality and ensuring the company remains operational?**

Managing potential long leaves of absence for employees with mental health conditions while ensuring operational continuity requires a thoughtful and proactive approach.

Here are some possible solutions that companies can consider:

1. **Flexible Work Arrangements:**
   - Implement flexible work arrangements such as remote work, flexible hours, or part-time schedules to accommodate the needs of the employee during his/ her recovery period.
   - Allow the employee to gradually increase his/ her workload or responsibilities as they progress in his/ her recovery journey, ensuring a smooth transition back to full-time work.

2. **Cross-Training and Job Shadowing:**
   - Cross-train employees to ensure that multiple team members are familiar with essential tasks and responsibilities, reducing the impact of a single employee's absence.
   - Develop job shadowing to identify and prepare backup employees who can temporarily assume the duties of the employee during his/ her leave of absence.

3. **Temporary Replacement or Hiring:**
   - Consider hiring temporary employees or contractors to fill in for the employee during his/ her leave of absence, ensuring that critical roles are adequately covered.
   - Partner with staffing agencies or freelancers to quickly onboard temporary workers who can provide immediate support to the team.

4. **Job Sharing or Job Rotation:**
   - Explore job-sharing arrangements where two or more employees share the responsibilities of a single full-time position, allowing the employee to reduce his/ her workload while maintaining productivity.
   - Implement job rotation programmes that rotate employees through different roles or departments, providing opportunities for the employee to take on less demanding tasks during his/ her recovery period.

5. **Employee Assistance Programmes (EAPs):**
   - Encourage the employee to utilise EAPs for confidential counselling, mental health support, and resources to help them manage his/ her condition effectively.
   - Promote awareness of available mental health resources and encourage the employee to seek help when needed, emphasising the importance of self-care and well-being.

6. **Clear Communication and Support:**
   - Maintain open and transparent communication with the employee about his/ her leave of absence, ensuring he/ she understand his/ her rights, benefits, and return-to-work options.
   - Provide ongoing support and encouragement to the employee throughout his/ her recovery journey, demonstrating empathy, understanding, and flexibility.

7. **Policy Review and Adjustment:**
   - Review and adjust company policies related to leave, disability accommodations, and mental health support to ensure they are inclusive and supportive of the employee.

- Consider implementing flexible leave policies, extended medical leave, or accommodations for the employee to address his/ her unique needs and circumstances.

8. **Training and Education:**
   - Provide training and education to managers and colleagues on mental health awareness, stigma reduction, and strategies for supporting the employee with mental health conditions.
   - Foster a culture of empathy, compassion, and support within the workplace, where the employee feels valued, respected, and supported in his/ her recovery journey.

By implementing these solutions, companies can effectively manage potential long leaves of absence for the employee while maintaining operational continuity and ensuring the well-being of their employees. It is essential to prioritise mental health support and create a supportive work environment where the employees feel empowered to prioritise their health and seek the help they need.

# Managing Inappropriate Behaviours by Colleagues

1. **How to manage colleagues, including senior leadership, who behave badly to team members and staff reports, on returning to work?**

Managing members of the senior leadership team who behave badly towards team members and staff reports upon their return to work can be challenging, but there are established ways to address such behaviours:

1. **Document Behaviour:** Document instances of inappropriate behaviour or misconduct by senior leaders, including specific incidents, dates, and witnesses. Gather useful evidence such as emails, meeting minutes, or witness statements to support the documentation.

2. **Establish Clear Expectations:** Clearly communicate expectations for professional conduct and respectful behaviour to all employees, including senior leaders. Reinforce the organisation's values and code of conduct, emphasising the importance of treating colleagues with dignity and respect.

3. **Provide Training and Education:** Offer training and education on topics such as conflict resolution, communication skills, and emotional intelligence to senior leaders who exhibit inappropriate behaviour. Help them understand the impact of their actions on others and provide guidance on appropriate workplace behaviour.

4. **Facilitate Communication:** Encourage open and constructive communication between senior leaders and affected team members to address grievances and resolve conflicts. Facilitate mediation or facilitated discussions to promote understanding and reconciliation.

5. **Offer Support to Victims:** Provide support and resources to employees who have been subjected to inappropriate behaviour or misconduct by colleagues, including senior leaders. Offer counselling services, Employee Assistance Programmes, or other support mechanisms to help them cope with the situation and navigate the workplace environment.

6. **Hold Accountable:** Hold senior leaders accountable for their behaviour and actions, regardless of their position within the organisation. Implement consequences for violations of company policies or codes of conduct, such as disciplinary action or performance improvement plans.

7. **Escalate to Higher Management:** If necessary, seek support from the chief executive or board members. Alternatively, organisations could consider having an ethics and compliance committee who reports only to the Board or the highest person in the

organisation (beyond just reporting to Senior Management) without any fear of retaliation. If the most senior person behaves badly, affected employees could consider filing a labour complaint to the Ministry of Manpower or Tripartite Alliance for Dispute Management.

8. **Seek Legal Advice:** Consult legal experts or external counsel to understand the legal implications of the senior leaders' behaviour and determine the appropriate course of action. Ensure that actions taken comply with employment laws and regulations to mitigate legal risks.

9. **Promote Accountability:** Foster a culture of accountability and transparency within the organisation, where all employees, including senior leaders, are held accountable for their behaviour and actions. Encourage reporting of misconduct and provide channels for employees to voice their concerns safely and confidentially.

10. **Monitor and Follow Up:** Continuously monitor the behaviour of senior leaders and follow up on any reports or complaints received. Take proactive measures to address recurring issues and prevent further incidents of inappropriate behaviour.

It requires a collaborative effort from leadership, Human Resource, and employees to promote a respectful and inclusive workplace culture.

2. **What to do when senior leadership trivialises mental health concerns and does not see them as a strategic priority?**

When members of the senior leadership team trivialise mental health concerns and do not see them as a strategic priority, some steps to address this include the following:

1. **Educate Senior Leadership:** Provide education and training sessions to senior leaders about the importance of mental health in the workplace, including its impact on employee well-being, productivity, and organisational performance. Use data, case studies, and testimonials to highlight the significance of addressing mental health concerns.

2. **Communicate the Business Case**: Present the business case for prioritising mental health initiatives, emphasising how investing in employee mental health can lead to reduced absenteeism, increased productivity, higher employee engagement, and improved organisational culture. Use financial metrics and return-on-investment analysis to demonstrate the potential return on investment.

3. **Highlight Legal and Ethical Obligations:** Remind senior leaders of their legal and ethical obligations to provide a safe and healthy work environment for all employees.

Emphasise compliance with relevant employment laws and regulations related to mental health accommodations and discrimination.

4. **Share Industry Best Practices:** Share examples from other organisations that have successfully implemented mental health initiatives and programmes. Highlight best practices, innovative approaches, and success stories to inspire senior leaders and demonstrate what is possible.

5. **Conduct iWorkHealth [14] Survey or Engage External Experts:** Conduct iWorkHealth survey tool to understand the workplace stressors employees are facing or bring in external mental health experts, consultants, or advisors to provide insights, recommendations, and guidance to senior leadership. External experts can offer credibility, expertise, and fresh perspectives on mental health issues and solutions.

6. **Involve Human Resource and Employee Advocates:** Collaborate with Human Resource professionals, employee resource groups, and mental health advocates within the organisation to advocate for prioritising mental health initiatives. Leverage their expertise, insights, and support to raise awareness and drive change.

7. **Create Accountability Measures:** Establish accountability measures for senior leaders to ensure they follow through on commitments to address mental health concerns. Set clear expectations, goals, and timelines for implementing mental health initiatives, and regularly track progress and outcomes.

8. **Facilitate Discussion:** Encourage open and honest dialogue among senior leaders about mental health issues, concerns, and perceptions. Create opportunities for discussions, brainstorming sessions, and workshops to foster understanding, empathy, and collaboration.

9. **Address Resistance and Misconceptions:** Address any resistance or misconceptions about mental health directly by providing factual information, dispelling myths, and challenging stigma. Foster a culture of openness, acceptance, and support for mental health awareness and advocacy.

These steps could be ways for companies to address resistance from members of the senior leadership team on mental health concerns. It requires persistence, courage, and a collaborative approach to drive meaningful change and create a mentally healthy work environment for all employees.

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[14] The iWorkHealth is a free online, company administered psychosocial health assessment tool that helps employers to understand key workplace stressors that their employees are facing, the employees' state of mental well-being, as well as the proportion of employees having work-related stress and burnout. See https://www.tal.sg/wshc/programmes/iworkhealth/overview# for more information

# Communicating Safely about Self-Harm and Suicide

**1. How to debrief teammates of an employee who attempted suicide?**

Facilitating debriefs with teammates of an employee who has attempted suicide requires sensitivity, empathy, and clear communication.

Here are some steps to facilitate these conversations effectively:

1. **Create a Safe and Supportive Environment:**
   - Schedule a team meeting or gathering in a private and comfortable setting where teammates feel safe to express their thoughts and emotions.
   - Set the tone for the conversation by emphasising confidentiality, respect, and non-judgmental listening.

2. **Acknowledge the Situation:**
   - Begin the conversation by acknowledging the event and its impact on the team. Express empathy and concern for the well-being of the affected employee and the team as a whole.
   - Normalise feelings of shock, concern, and confusion among teammates, reassuring them that it is natural to experience a range of emotions in response to such a challenging situation.

3. **Provide Information and Resources:**
   - Offer factual information about suicide, mental health, and available support resources, such as Employee Assistance Programmes (EAPs), counselling services, and crisis hotlines.
   - Share guidelines on how to support a colleague who may be struggling with mental health challenges, emphasising the importance of active listening, empathy, and non-judgmental support.

4. **Encourage Open Conversation:**
   - Encourage teammates to share their thoughts, feelings, and concerns openly, while respecting each other's boundaries and privacy.
   - Use open-ended questions to facilitate discussion and invite participation from all team members, ensuring that everyone has an opportunity to express themselves.

5. **Address Stigma and Misconceptions:**
   - Challenge stigma and misconceptions surrounding mental health and suicide, emphasising that seeking help is a sign of strength, not weakness.

- Educate teammates about the importance of destigmatising mental health issues and creating a supportive work environment where individuals feel comfortable seeking help when needed.

6. **Offer Support and Encouragement:**
   - Reassure teammates that they are not alone in navigating this challenging situation and that support is available both within and outside the workplace.
   - Encourage teammates to reach out to each other for support, check in regularly on each other's well-being, and offer practical assistance if needed.

7. **Follow-Up and Continued Support:**
   - After the initial conversation, follow up with teammates individually or as a group to check in on their well-being and provide ongoing support as needed.
   - Remind teammates of the importance of self-care and encourage them to prioritise their own mental health during this difficult time.
   - Offer additional support resources or counselling services for teammates who may be struggling to cope with their emotions or experiences.

By facilitating open and supportive conversations, addressing stigma, and providing resources for support, companies can help teammates navigate the aftermath of a colleague's suicide attempt with compassion and understanding. It is essential to foster a culture of empathy, support, and resilience within the team, where individuals feel empowered to seek help and support each other during challenging times.

2. **How to approach a colleague whom you suspect is engaging in self-injurious behaviours (like cutting, abusing alcohol, etc.)?**

Approaching a colleague whom you suspect is engaging in self-injurious behaviours requires sensitivity, empathy, and a non-judgmental attitude.

Here are some steps to approach the situation effectively:

1. **Educate Yourself:** Before initiating a conversation, educate yourself about self-injurious behaviours, including their causes, signs, and potential impact on individuals' mental health and well-being.

2. **Choose the Right Time and Place:** Find a private and comfortable setting where you can have a confidential conversation with the colleague without interruptions or distractions. Choose a time when both of you are calm and relaxed.

3. **Express Concern and Care:** Start the conversation by expressing genuine concern for the colleague's well-being. Use empathetic and non-judgmental language to convey your care and support.

4. **Be Direct and Specific:** Clearly and directly express your observations or concerns about the behaviours you have noticed. Use "I" statements to avoid sounding accusatory or judgmental. For example, say, "I've noticed that you seem to be struggling lately, and I'm concerned about you."

5. **Listen Actively:** Allow the colleague to share his/ her thoughts, feelings, and experiences without interruption. Practise active listening, showing empathy and understanding for his/ her perspective. Avoid jumping to conclusions or offering unsolicited advice.

6. **Offer Support and Resources:** Let the colleague know that he/ she is not alone and that help is readily available. Offer to support him/ her in finding professional help or accessing resources such as counselling services, support groups, or helplines.

7. **Respect Boundaries:** Respect your teammate's boundaries and autonomy. Understand that he/ she may not be ready to open up or seek help immediately. Avoid pressuring or forcing him/ her to disclose information or seek treatment.

8. **Follow Up:** Follow up with the colleague after the initial conversation to check in on his/ her well-being and offer ongoing support. Let him/ her know that you are there whenever he/ she needs someone to talk to.

9. **Maintain Confidentiality:** Respect the colleague's privacy and confidentiality. Do not share sensitive information about his/ her situation with others without prior consent, unless there is an immediate risk of harm to him/ herself or others.

10. **Take Care of Yourself:** Supporting a colleague who is struggling with self-injurious behaviours can be emotionally challenging. Make sure to prioritise your own well-being and seek support from trusted friends, family members, or mental health professionals if needed.

By approaching the situation with compassion, empathy, and a genuine desire to help, companies can create a supportive and non-judgmental environment where employees feel comfortable seeking help and support for their struggles.

# Case Studies

## Case Study 1 – SME from Service Industry

**The Founder and CEO of Animal & Avian Veterinary Clinic (AAVC), Dr Kenneth Tong, shares how the clinic fosters employee well-being and maintains high staff morale**

"In Animal & Avian Veterinary Clinic (AAVC), employees are our critical assets as we believe that when employees are happy at work, they will be able to work at their fullest potential. But this journey is not an easy one. Morale can be variable over the course of the week. One can notice at the start of a week, a cheerful staff with a "bounce" in them, but as the week progresses, employees can be seen yawning, less enthusiastic when talking to customers, and reduced "speed" or efficiency in completing a task.



However, turnover is still minimal at our practice as we maintain a high communication channel and a workplace that behaves as a team and family. Commonly cited reasons for resignation indicated poor work-life balance, long work hours, long distance travelled from home-work, as well as the need to attend to details and customer demands.

We conduct our mental well-being survey, on top of individual dialogue session with the CEO. Through the surveys, we were able to identify staff concerns and formulate a feasible solution.

After implementing more mental well-being initiatives, like a stricter "closing" time for the clinic, with an enforced "last-registration" timing, we see a more energetic staff, who looks forward to the end of the shift (for lunch, or end of the day). It improved the initial morale of the team. The improvement met my immediate target of raising morale.

However, being a small SME in the (veterinary) medical-service line, there is only so much one can do to improve work-life balance (with emergency cases close to end of shift, emotions received from self and clients from dealing with end-of-live patients), whilst remaining profitable (sustainable) for the long future, supporting the salaries (and increment) for all the staff. In a way, AAVC did not suffer such a low morale that it affected the turnover, absenteeism, or even sick leaves. AAVC strives to "pre-empt" e.g. burn-out, etc., by holding individual dialogue sessions, and keen observation of all employees (communication between colleagues and clients, non-verbal signs, amongst other work performances) to gauge the staff motivation at work. As such, we were able to prevent events of mental stress / break-down from happening.

At AAVC, we listen to employees' suggestions, and implement the ones that are feasible, whilst explaining the rationale of the initiatives and the ones that are for future consideration. We also keep our staff involved in company's decision-making so that employees are able to understand the rationale of various decision made e.g. profitability vs. sustainability vs. improved welfare. We cross trained all staff, so all is able to cover for one another when the other is away. Thereby being more productive and efficient (except for professional staff, their role can only be taken by another vet). But a vet can cover for an administrative officer or a technician. We are performing more, with less manpower. Working faster, and bringing in more revenue/employee and having less staff. That helps with manpower crunch.

In addition, we cancelled our after-hours clinic operations unless of emergency nature to prevent overworking of staff. We also implemented flexible work schedule, early time off (unrecorded) for staff to attend to events. All these helps to preserve the sanity, energy and passion that the staff have. Part-time work is now available, where staff can choose to work during the day 10am-2pm, or evening 5pm-8pm shift. So certain employees can send/pick their children from school or have family meals together. Furthermore, we enable staff to take medical leave without the need to produce a medical certificate, even to the extent of taking a medical leave for "rest and recharge" or for depression or mental health issue, without the need to produce any form of documentation. Just a declaration of such will do, and the option for the staff to elaborate on the stressors so that the company can take steps to help reduce it. Work from home, and bring children to work are encouraged where feasible.

Moreover, we also facilitate and allow staff to attend to various virtual talks conducted by the Singapore National Employers Federation (SNEF), Health Promotion Board (HPB), Ministry of Manpower (MOM), Tripartite Alliance for Fair and Progressive Employment Practices (TAFEP), Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA), etc., to improve on their physical and mental well-being literacy. Such talks were able to help our colleagues, enable them to learn new skills and reach out to one another to better connect with the team, and to address their mental stressors or approach professional help when required.

All the above started from a dialogue session. Where feasible (sustainability of the business), it will be accepted and implemented. Such support reassures employees that their mental well-being is being looked after, which motivates them to support the business operations despite challenging

circumstances. The main factor is COMMUNICATION between CEO and employees of the rationale of the decisions made.

It is a never-ending willingness to change and adapt. What works for this employee, may not work for another. What seems effective now, may not be in the next year. As everyone has different needs/ wants depending on their life stages, the initiative has to change or suit different lifestyles or stages of their lives. e.g. single vs married vs one with a young family, or one with teenagers as kids, or senior employees. it comes with challenges, and there are many times the initiatives might seem to be "abused", or "never pleasing", but keep training to fine tune the right formula for your company.

The most important first step is to recognise mental well-being as a factor in retaining staff, maintaining (or even improving) efficiency and work productivity. Employees are the essence of the success of a business, and the "longer" the employee is with the business, the more valuable this employee becomes for the business. The "network" and "familiarity" of this employee that it brings to the clients and colleague, with his/her wealth of experience. The employer has to recognise that times have changed. Employees are not looking for a stable career, fending for their survival to provide for their family or a roof over their heads. Today's generation are looking for job satisfaction, that suits their lifestyle, encompassing a work-life balance (which varies with individual), where enjoying what they earn, spending what they earn, having time to enjoy and spend is valued and practiced.

For companies that are SMEs, it is usually at a disadvantage when it comes to manpower. The benefits that an SME can offer may be restricted as compared to an MNC or a large corporation. As such, SME may lose the ability to attract and retain talent. Notwithstanding, SMEs usually have the ability to be nimble and make faster, decisive decisions. This quick manoeuvrability enables SMEs to try out, and adapt to change, modify their policies much faster, and better suit their smaller workforce needs. Different SMEs would have different pool of employees with various need, depending on the SMEs' nature of business.

Start now by having constructive dialogue sessions with your employees from all departments, to understand their wants/ desire, and what is making them stay or stay away from work. Start by asking, and listening, to understand and empathise, and that hopefully, follows with initiatives that improves the overall welfare for the employees, which translate to an improved well-being, and improved and sustainable mental well-being.**"**

## Case Study 2 – SME from Construction Industry

**Mr Hon Lip Yung, General Manager (Airport & Infrastructure) of SWIA Pte Ltd, shares how their commitment to Total Workplace Safety and Health (Total WSH) helps to foster a culture of trust and well-being**

"SWIA Pte Ltd, an independent entity from Samwoh Group of Companies, is an SME construction company specialising in the maintenance and enhancement of airfields and infrastructure engineering in both commercial and military airports. SWIA's top management is committed to the concept of Total Workplace Safety and Health (Total WSH). Beyond the safety of its teams at project sites, SWIA is also committed to the overall well-being of each individual team member. SWIA's Total WSH Policy, developed together with its Environment, Health and Safety (EHS) department and external consultants, is communicated through both formal and informal settings such as posters, and announcements during mass safety talks, and reminders during one-to-one chats with employees.

SWIA recognises that building a safe and open environment for our team members to share goes beyond writing a policy. Therefore, we have taken steps to cultivate a closely-knitted team that transcends hierarchies and yet, emphasises on mutual respect. Every employee knows that their opinions are valued, and they are encouraged to approach their peers and the management to share their views and concerns either through mass safety talks or informal one-to-one sessions, where they can choose to be anonymous. We believe that such practices forge a stronger sense of trust between employees and their peers, as well as towards the management. It also allows us to deeply understand concerns from the ground and helps us to plan ahead based on what works and what doesn't.

While we do not have an independent body to assist to build a culture of no conflict of interest, we deploy a matrix structure when it comes to checking in with our employees. Check-ins can be done by peers, immediate supervisors and even, the top management. Employees also have a platform to share their views anonymously which have proven to be effective as well. With strong emphasis placed on safety and well-being throughout the company, our employees are not afraid to share their views and concerns. We respect individual workers' situation and keep their information confidential. With the culture that we have, our employees feel safe and supported in their sharing. Our project management team of engineers and supervisors are also always encouraging feedback and concerns from the workers – be it in a formal or informal setting – as they are the ones who are on the ground most and able to identify issues right immediately.

There was an instance where an employee's family member was critically ill. As the employee was working in Singapore and his family was in India, he felt stressed and helpless. However, with the support system we have in place, the employee came forward for assistance. We then assisted him in arranging for the next earliest flight back to his hometown to be with family, while assuring him to not worry about work. At SWIA, we acknowledge and understand our employees' priorities. In this case, it was our employees' family. We believe in providing the necessary support for our employees, whenever we can.

The tightknit community at work also helps in keeping employees motivated and their morales high. Till date, our efforts have been sustaining positive results. However, we are constantly updating our practices and keeping ourselves informed of the latest trends in keeping our workers safe and healthy.



Our journey is and ongoing commitment to transform the DREAM of workplace safety and health excellence into reality.

D:      Dedication to employees' well-being ignites a collective passion for positive work outcomes.

R:      Responsibility is our guiding light, uniting us in upholding high standards.

E:      Educating and empowering our team bridges the gap between aspiration and action.

A:      Assurance of safety measures and a respectful work environment builds the foundation and trust for our employees – to know that they are cared for.

M:      Motivation thrives in a positive work environment.

It is through teamwork that we make the DREAM work. Together, we turn the DREAM of workplace safety and health excellence into a vibrant reality, creating a safer, healthier, and more fulfilling work environment for all. We have seen that workers whose well-being are taken care of, have higher productivity levels and are motivated in to upkeep high standards of safety and productivity for the company.**"**

# Case Study 3 – SME from Construction Industry

**Ms Loh Ferng-Lyng, Human Resource Manager of Keller Foundations (S E Asia) Pte Ltd, shares the company's holistic approach to sustaining employees' well-being**

"Keller Foundations (S E Asia) Pte Ltd is a geotechnical specialist contractor from the construction industry, incorporated in Singapore since 1974. Our principal activity is ground improvement and stabilisation with other specialised construction and related activities.

In an ever-changing world, we recognise that it has never been more important to support employee mental health and well-being. Prioritising well-being not only enhances our employees' health and happiness, but also makes good business sense, as well as improves company's resilience, productivity and performance.

In 2021, Keller launched a global well-being framework to provide the support and resources to drive well-being for our colleagues, their families and wider communities around the globe. A global framework with localised and tailored support not only allows for a flexible approach locally but also increases our focus on all aspects of our people's well-being; ensuring our people are healthy and fulfilled – at work and at home, now and in the future. Success for Keller can come in many forms but there is nothing more important than knowing that our people are safe and well. Care for one another is the core of our culture and defines who we are. With the world changing rapidly around us, our commitment and structured approach to the well-being of our people will ensure that we thrive as individuals and as an organisation.



We have in place the following policies to guide our business and people:
- Respect in the workplace standard and guidance, which sets out the behaviour we expect from our people to ensure we are all positively contributing to a culture we can be proud of.
- Health, Safety and Well-being policy, which aims to ensure that our employees and others affected by our undertaking and activities, remain free from harm and ill-health. It also

highlights our leaders' commitment and personal responsibility for the safety and well-being of our people.

- Inclusive site culture policy and guidance document, which supports and explains how to put into practice Keller's Inclusive site culture standards and highlights other cultural and religious considerations that shall be considered when delivering projects.
- Well-being toolkit for leaders, which provides additional suggestions to improve site culture from a well-being perspective.
- Stop Work Authority, which tells all employees they have the right to stop work if anything looks or feels unsafe; contacting the impartial whistleblowing service to voice concerns confidentially; or reaching out to someone they trust.
- Inclusion commitments
- Flexible work arrangements policy
- Work life harmony policy

We have also implemented the following Well-being initiatives:

| Welfare | <ul><li>Employee Assistance Programme</li><li>Wellness Newsletters</li><li>Wellness Events, such as<ul><li>Employee Appreciation Day</li><li>Health & Wellness Lunch Talks</li><li>VP Ignite, Keller's Global Health Challenge</li><li>Mental Health and Well-being Week</li><li>Suicide Prevention Awareness Month</li></ul></li></ul> |
|---|---|
| Employee Benefits | <ul><li>Medical benefits, including outpatient and teleconsultation services</li><li>Health insurance</li><li>Education sponsorship programme</li><li>Marriage Leave and Compassionate Leave</li><li>Corporate discounts for telcos, car rental, dental services and health screenings</li><li>Long service awards, newborn gifts, get-well hampers, condolence wreaths</li></ul> |
| Training Programmes | <ul><li>Mentorship programme</li><li>Behaviour based safety training</li><li>Psychological first aid training</li><li>Keller Women in Construction – a company-wide initiative to offer women opportunities to share thoughts, resources, and ideas to promote professional development within the organisation and construction industry</li></ul> |

We ensure that our employees always have someone to call for help. Besides being able to reach out to their colleague or manager, employees can approach their local Ethics and Compliance Officer or phone *Safecall*, an outsourced whistleblowing hotline provider.

One of the keys to our success is having a people-first strategy that has buy-in from all levels and our excellent Wellness Committee, which is designed and run by employees, for employees, is the core of

this strategy. The committee is at the heart of all activities, celebrating cultural events, organising games and team exercises, and running seminars focusing on mental and physical health topics. In February 2021, our first issue of Keller SG Wellness Newsletter was launched to keep all employees updated on the wellness activities happening in the company and spread the positive vibes to a wider circle. Since there, our newsletters have been published on a quarterly basis. Senior leadership team will also provide half yearly updates during town halls. We have an annual budget of around $15-20k for our Wellco team to plan events and programmes which are relevant, interesting and open to all our employees.

Well-being requires long-term commitment, consistency and regular engagement to be effective, and we use an in-house developed well-being maturity model to help us stay focused and measure progress. We hold ourselves accountable to this Well-being Maturity Model and establish action plans which are categorised under strategy, leadership, engagement and ways of working to fulfil each step. In addition, we regularly conduct pulse surveys, post programme surveys and submit applications for external awards such as the WSH Council's CARE Awards to benchmark ourselves with market or industry best practices.

Different demographics of employees (office employees and site employees) made planning for wellness initiatives challenging as the well-being needs, cultural differences and work patterns were varied. Therefore, the pulse surveys and post event surveys aim to guide the team on planning the next initiative and/or event. Since our Wellco team were made up of employee volunteers who came from different departments, they were also able to share perspectives, opinions and ideas during discussions. In the Well-being pulse survey conducted in April 2022, 95% of participants rated themselves as having good physical health, and 92% rated themselves as having good mental health. 98% are happy at work and 94% enjoy a good relationship with their co-workers.

As testament to our strong track record on health and safety, a total of 29,865 Free Loss Time Injury (LTI) man-hours was clocked for our Chemical and Refining Integrated Singapore Plant (CRISP) Project, one of ExxonMobil's investments in base stock production in Singapore, which lasted from 1 July 2022 to 18 October 2022. As of 15 September 2023, our Singapore Yard has achieved ''100,000 Safe Manhours'' and also achieved the fourth time glory of ''Globally the Best Yard'' among all Keller yards around the world.

It is important to have leadership commitments and enablers in place. Our leaders are provided with toolkits and guidance documents, which are based on global research and best practice specific to our industry, to equip them with the tools to carry out well-being activity in a strategic way. Next, having a dedicated team designed and run by employees will ensure initiatives and programmes are relevant and tailored to suit the needs of our people. Having a people-first strategy that has buy-in from all levels will help to maximise local impact and make it easier to overcome challenges since everyone will be more willing to adapt and make changes. Last but not the least, what doesn't get measured, doesn't get done. To drive accountability and ensure progress, we conduct pulse surveys, post event surveys and seek feedback from our employees on a regular basis.

Our safety and well-being on site depend not only on our own actions and behaviour but also on our colleagues working alongside us. We should treat our colleagues like our family, respect them, encourage them and take care of them. Only by doing this, a positive work culture can be formed, and everyone's safety and well-being can be assured. Start by making small changes to processes, behaviours and communications. Slowly but surely, this will drive positive change, nurture a diverse and inclusive working environment and give everyone the opportunity to be at their very best."

# Case Study 4 – SME with Social Mission

**The Resilience Collective, a young charity, shares on striking a balance between ensuring mental well-being-being and maintaining high efficiency of its staff**

"Founded on the principles of resilience, empowerment, and community support, Resilience Collective (RC) aims to equip Singapore's young adults with the tools they need to navigate the complexities of modern life. As a young charity with a relatively young workforce, some of whom are persons with mental health conditions, RC balances between ensuring the mental well-being of their staff and maintaining a high level of efficiency with a small workforce.

**Challenges**
1. How does RC encourage employer-employee communication about mental health and well-being?
2. How does RC encourage staff to utilise the available mental health care services?
3. How does RC ensure high productivity while allowing employees time-off for self-care and family needs?

**What RC has done**
RC recognises that implementing and maintaining mental health and well-being initiatives in the workplace is a shared responsibility. All levels of the organisation contribute to this success.

The management encourages and nurtures open communication about mental health and well-being by facilitating conversations from employees to managers, and across the workplace. The executive director and managers share their personal experiences with mental health conditions, as well as journey towards help-seeking and recovery, both internally and on public platforms. This openness helps to create a culture of openness, normalising conversations surrounding mental health and de-stigmatising the use of mental health resources.

The Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) is also available at no cost to support any staff who experiencing mental health conditions/ issues that affect their well-being and work performance. Staff who experienced work-related and personal problems may also seek professional mental healthcare support e.g., psychologist, psychiatrist, therapist. As management demonstrate their willingness to share their help-seeking experiences, they assure staff of the organisation's commitment to the importance of employee mental health and well-being, and that seeking help does not in any way affect their future in the organisation.

The RC team is structured in a way that allows all employees to share support on days they are unwell, going for therapy, or on leave. This support within the team is founded on the principle of power-neutral accountability across all levels within the team, that is built on consistent conversations about their state of mental health and their needs. This sense of safety allows for all employees to dynamically understand the overall team's capacity, while allow both managers and staff to provide relevant and timely support when it is called upon.

Employees are empowered to discuss work arrangements with their managers, and managers are encouraged to allow staff the flexibility to work from home. This gives staff time to attend to personal matters when required and to return to the workplace on days where physical meetings take place.

**Results**

The result of an open, empathetic and inclusive culture has led to staff being enabled to speak freely about their mental health challenges with their managers and peers. Staff are more willing to seek help and utilise EAP services, which aid greatly in their recovery journey. As staff are empowered to share and speak openly, colleagues and managers are also able to pre-empt and provide timely support to ensure work is covered. The support and assurance from management helps employees find meaning and flourish in their roles, manage stress and boost resilience to continue to reach their highest potential."

## Case Study 5 – SME with Social Mission

**Foreword Coffee Roasters, a social enterprise, shares on its inclusive hiring policies which has helped it to grow from strength to strength**

"By using coffee as a vehicle for change, Foreword Coffee empowers persons with disabilities and mental health conditions through training and employment opportunities. Started in 2017, Foreword Coffee is a social enterprise coffee company with the mission to mainstream disability and normalize inclusion. Today, Foreword Coffee currently operates in 8 locations and offers a range of services such as mobile coffee carts for events, barista-as-a-service for in-house cafes, and wedding favours.



Mr Lim Wei Jie started his social business just before he graduated with a bachelor's degree in psychology. He seeks to continuously improve himself through introspection and advice from peers and mentors in the industry. As a first-time entrepreneur, he strives to make Foreword a sustainable and thriving business while advocating for the strengths of persons with disabilities and persons with mental health conditions.

**Challenges**
- Hiring Individuals with Mental Health Conditions (IMHCs)
- Supporting IMHCs at work

**What Foreword has done**
About 80% of Foreword's staff are Individuals with Disabilities (IwDs) or Individuals with Mental Health Conditions (IMHCs). Wei Jie shares his experience of creating an inclusive and supportive culture to support IMHCs at work by:

(1) Supportive Systems
   a. Open Collaborative Culture

        i.  During recruitment, patience, openness and mutual helping are core foundational assessments (these are opening interview questions when he assesses a prospective employee's suitability in terms of aptitude and attitude)

        ii.  Given the setting of how employees are expected to help one another in problem-solving in a fast-moving F&B environment, a culture of peer support, mutual helping and collective problem solving to keep the café/ outlets running is cultivated through experience

  b.  Job (Re)design

        i.  Progressive scaling of tasks/ responsibilities

        ii.  Closer check in and guidance from café supervisors in 1$^{st}$ 3 to 6 months of probation

        iii.  Openness to make adjustments to job scope where necessary based on strengths of staff

  c.  Empower Middle Management

        i.  Trust in the café supervisors to execute the workflow and support the staff (including IMHCs)

        ii.  Found that the café supervisors (mostly deaf) are able to create a respectful and empowering culture among the frontline café staff who are mostly IwDs/ IMHCs/ persons on the autism spectrum

        iii.  Regular check in with the café supervisors for updates on staff performance and to render support

  d.  Maintaining Active Communication

        i.  Active channel of exchange among staff in a WhatsApp group which facilitates access to bosses and colleagues, as well as a platform where online behaviours can be observed

        ii.  Bosses avail their presence for access via visits to outlets (walk the ground)

        iii.  Distinguish public and private communication to resolve people-to-people conflicts (it is human for people to rant about others in private, until it spills over into the professional context and affect working relationships)

(2) Mindset

  a.  Separate the person from the problem; the person is not the problem, the problem is the problem.

        i.  Do not generalise what a person is exhibiting as representative of all IMHCs or IwDs (in a casual careless broad stroke)

        ii.  Focus on tackling the problem at hand, it could be a systemic issue.

        iii.  Look beyond disabilities / the labels, to see the strengths and assets, the person bring.

  b.  See what is strong, not just what is wrong (assets-based / strengths perspective)

        i.  Appreciate that each individual brings their own strengths and assets;

        ii.  Differences can be seen as unique gifts which offer creative challenges for flexible deployment and cultivating fit

(3) Importance of external support

a. Rely on trusted recommendations from mental health agencies like SAMH MINDSET Learning Hub (SAMH MLH)
b. Timely support rendered if staff experiences a break down at work / no show – with supportive interventions like counselling support
c. Two-way communication where café supervisors also offer inputs on concerning behaviour
d. Frame it as a win-win partnership with SAMH MLH to supply and support workers with mental health conditions

**Key Quotes:**

While there are challenges relating to hiring IMHCs, there are rewards too: like filling a manpower gap, and it can be fulfilling to see IMHCs employees improve/ progress and create an empowering culture that is beneficial to all employees.

**Results**

Wei Jie hired five IMHCs from SAMH MLH to date, of which two are still working in Foreword.

Foreword Coffee is recognised as:

- One of six recipients of the Enabling Mark (Platinum) Award in 2021, the highest accolade given to organisations for best practices and outcomes in disability-inclusive employment, by SG Enable. Enabling Mark (Platinum) Award is renewed in 2024, which is valid until 2027.
- The 17th certified B-Corporation business in Singapore which prioritises an inclusive, equitable and regenerative economy where the environmental and social impact of Foreword spans across five segments - governance, workers, community, environment and customers.
- Social Enterprise of the Year award in the biennial President's Challenge Social Enterprise Award (PCSEA) 2024. This award recognizes the contributions of social enterprises to their community.
- "Champion for Good" tier in the National Volunteer and Philanthropy Centre's (NVPC) new Company of Good (COG) Recognition system in 2024."

# Resources

**To Improve the Capacity, Capability and Competency of Workplace Well-being Champions and Peer Supporters through Training, Peer Learning and Guidance**

| Organisation | Purpose | Contact |
|---|---|---|
| Well-being Champions Network | Upskilling of competencies, learning how to develop strategies and plans for implementation | hello@wellbeingchampions.sg |

**To Nurture a Supportive Mental Well-being Workplace Culture**

| Organisation/ Resource | Purpose | Contact/ Website |
|---|---|---|
| Beyond the Label resources (i.e., BTL web series, roving exhibitions, guide on speaking about mental health) | Help to nurture a supportive mental wellbeing workplace culture by equipping employers with knowledge on addressing stigma and advancing awareness and dialogue on mental health | BTL Web Series: Beyond the Label (BTL) \| Linktree - A video series on how to kickstart conversations about mental health (normalise dialogue on mental health)<br><br>BTL Roving Exhibition: https://padlet.com/btl_admin/btl-mobile-exhibitions-5gghyayjbvfvt6vmz - Mobile exhibition panels related to addressing stigma and promoting social inclusion are readily available for bookings<br><br>BTL Guide on Speaking on Mental Health: www.ncss.gov.sg/docs/default-source/beyond-the-label/btl-infographic-speaking-about-mental-health.pdf - Alternative terms to use that are non-discriminatory towards PMHCs |
| Clarity Singapore | Workshops on mental health and psychoeducation | ask@clarity-singapore.org |
| Club HEAL | Workshops on schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, and depression and gives mental health talks | info@clubheal.org.sg |
| Counselling and Care Centre | Support in responding to crises and traumatic incidents through its Employee Assistance Programme | info@counsel.org.sg |
| Department of TRaCS, Changi General Hospital | ReXilience® provides preventive mental health education, training and peer support programme development | tracs@cgh.com.sg |

| Organisation/ Resource | Purpose | Contact/ Website |
|---|---|---|
| | services, employee counselling service; to enhance mental well-being in individuals and organisations | |
| Health Promotion Board | Provides services that build sustainable strategies for employee engagement, including:<br>1. Supportive management styles and behaviour<br>2. Holistic employee psychological well-being programmes | hpb_health_at_work@hpb.gov.sg<br><br>HPB_MHE@hpb.gov.sg |
| HealthServe Ltd | Basic mental health training and talks for migrant workers in Singapore to deal with distress and adjustment issues<br><br>Psychological First Aid (PFA) training to enhance competency of supervisors and managers to spot signs and symptoms of mental distress among migrant workers and effectively provide support using evidence based PFA principles | info@healthserve.org.sg |
| Shan You | Provides support with mental health conditions, managing mental health crises, mental health training and talks | counselling@shanyou.org.sg |
| Silver Ribbon (Singapore) | Provides mental health first aid, mental wellness workshops, and complementary counselling services | info@silverribbonsingapore.com |
| Singapore Anglican Community Services (SAC) | Curates and provides mental health literacy workshops, facilitates Singapore Anglican Community Services - NTUC LearningHub collaborative WSQ Wellness Courses, and EAP+ Individual and group counselling services. | EAP@sacs.org.sg |
| Singapore Association for Mental Health (SAMH) | Conducts talks and workshops on mental wellness and positive living. | comed@samhealth.org.sg |
| SkillsFuture | Administers the Skills Development Fund (SDF) that supports local workforce upgrading programmes and provides training grants to employers under the Continuing Education and Training (CET) system | Various courses available at here |

**To Support Recovery and Return-to-Work**

| Organisation/ Resource | Purpose | Contact |
|---|---|---|
| HealthServe Ltd | Provides comprehensive crisis support and intervention services to migrant workers facing mental health challenges, including suicide prevention, through a 24/7 helpline manned by a team of culturally sensitive crisis helpline specialists<br><br>On-site post-crisis debrief services for migrant workers to offer immediate and confidential following a fatality or traumatic episode, whether accidental, medical, self-harm, or suicide | info@healthserve.org.sg |
| IMH Job Club (at the Institute of Mental Health) | Assists persons with mental health conditions to gain and sustain open employment or provide support, if required, in their current workplace | enquiries@jobclub.sg |
| Psalt Care | Offers structured peer support platforms designed specifically for individuals in recovery | info@psaltcare.com |
| Resilience Collective | Offers structured peer support platforms designed specifically for individuals in recovery | contactus@resilience.org.sg |
| Singapore Anglican Community Services (SACS)'s Integrated Employment Services (IES) | Offers persons with mental health conditions vocational assessment, training, job placement and support at the workplace. | ies@sacs.org.sg |
| Singapore Association for Mental Health (SAMH)'s Mindset Learning Hub | Provides persons with mental health conditions vocational skills training, job placement and case management support. | mindsetLH@samhealth.org.sg |
| SupportGoWhere | List of other social service agencies | Mental Health - SupportGoWhere (life.gov.sg) |

**General Mental Health Resources and Helplines**

| Organisation/ Resource | Purpose | Website |
|---|---|---|
| MindSG and Mindline.sg | Provide guides and tips on practising self-care (e.g., setting boundaries) and how to support colleagues' wellbeing (e.g., responding to colleagues in distress), which contributes to nurturing a supportive mental wellbeing workplace culture | https://www.healthhub.sg/programmes/mindsg/discover<br><br>https://mindline.sg/ |

| National Council of Social Service | General Resources | https://www.ncss.gov.sg/our-initiatives/beyond-the-label/resources |
| --- | --- | --- |
| | Resources to empower recovery for persons with mental health condition(s) | https://www.ncss.gov.sg/social-services/persons-with-mental-health-conditions |
| | A list of helplines for mental health care and counselling | https://www.ncss.gov.sg/social-service-tribe/what-we-do/wellness-resource-hub/helplines |