

**Mental and emotional health or 'wellbeing' is a resource that we need for every-day life that enables us to manage our lives more successfully. It is the emotional resilience, which enables us to enjoy life and survive pain, suffering and disappointment** (Minding Our Health, Draft Strategy, 1998).

## THE FACTS

- Organisations have the opportunity to preserve and promote positive mental health within the workplace. Employers, when making strategic decisions, should recognise the impact that these decisions have on the mental health of their workforce.
- Employers have a responsibility to prevent stress caused or exacerbated by working conditions and working procedures.
- Nearly 3 in every 10 employees will suffer some kind of mental health problem, mainly depression and anxiety disorders.
- Stress related absence accounts for half of all sickness from work, with an estimated annual cost to industry of £4 billion.
- The Institute of Management found that 16% of managers had taken time off work because of stress during the last 12 months.
- Stress can lead to low productivity, accidents, turnover, low morale, antagonism at work and job dissatisfaction.
- No business is immune, employees in even the smallest companies can be affected.  
*(Adapted from Working Minds-Making Mental Health Your Business)*

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## WHAT A WORKPLACE CAN DO

- Set about devising a workplace policy on mental health (if necessary seek help from the agencies listed under 'Help is at Hand'). It should aim to
  - Raise awareness of mental wellbeing and reduce the stigma associated with mental ill health
  - Change aspects of the working environment that adversely affect mental wellbeing
  - Educate the workforce in coping skills
  - Encourage early recognition of problems amongst the entire workforce
  - Provide published systems of support
  - Establish procedures for rehabilitation and reintegration into work for individuals who have suffered from mental ill health.

Other ways of promoting positive mental health in the workplace include:

- Reviewing current policies and practice on areas which can affect mental health e.g. harassment, equal opportunities and terms and conditions of employment.
- Promoting and participating in local mental health awareness campaigns.
- Undertaking a stress audit to identify and tackle sources of stress.
- Where possible introduce work life balance options such as time off in lieu, job sharing and flexi time.
- It's worth remembering that employees can often identify creative and practical ways to reduce stress and improve mental health, often at no extra cost to the business.

## HELP IS AT HAND

- Health Promotion Department  
12C Gransha Park, Clooney Road, Derry/Londonderry  
028 7186 5127
- Action Mental Health  
028 9040 3726
- Aware Defeat Depression  
028 7126 0602
- Northern Ireland Association for Mental Health  
028 7126 9677

## RESOURCES

- Managing for Mental Health, The Mind Employers Resource Pack, 2000.
- Understanding Depression for Managers and Employers, National Depression Campaign leaflet, 1999.
- Stress at Work: A guide for Employers, published in 1995 by the Health and Safety Executive.
- Employment Adjustments for people with mental health problems, Briefing by the Employers Forum on Disabilities.

*The above resources are available from the Resources and Graphics Centre at the Health Promotion Department.*

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Notes