



## **Workplace Partnership**

# **Workplace Champions Handbook**



WORKING TOGETHER FOR BETTER WELLBEING

# Workplace Champions handbook



Thank you for becoming a Workplace Champion. Your involvement will help to change how we think, feel and act about mental health, driving this movement forward for your colleagues and your organisation.

## Why Champions are important in the workplace

Champions are essential in challenging stigma and changing the way employees think and act about mental health in workplaces. They are at the forefront of the movement to make it commonplace for employees to say 'I'm struggling', 'I'm working too much' or 'I need support' without the fear of negative consequences, whether real or perceived.

By committing to the Workplace Wellbeing Partnership your employer is demonstrating their commitment to creating a workplace free from stigma and discrimination. Having Workplace Champions means that an organisation can help to create a working environment that is supportive and understanding towards people experiencing mental health problems.

Champions can help embed positive changes by tackling mental health stigma, instigating initiatives and running activities to improve wellbeing amongst their fellow employees.

Having people who are passionate to create change is imperative. Even if you don't have access to time, money or resources the strength lies in people who believe that change is important.

### ? What will make me a great Workplace Champion?

- Am I passionate about tackling stereotypes, stigmas and discrimination associated with people who experience mental health problems?
- Am I able to listen non-judgmentally?
- Do I have the time and resources to lead activities?
- Am I willing to engage colleagues constructively and positively when taking action to tackle mental health stigma?
- Can I empower colleagues to share their experiences of mental health problems in the workplace?
- Can I persevere despite internal barriers and challenges?
- Am I based in the workplace for most of my time (as opposed to being home based) or can I connect with my colleagues virtually?
- Can I maintain confidentiality and demonstrate an ability to relate well to others?
- Am I good at setting appropriate boundaries?



## ? What could I gain from being a Workplace Champion?

- The knowledge that I am part of a movement to create positive cultural change
- Being part of a shared network of people where I can learn and share knowledge
- An increased understanding about wellbeing and mental health
- Skills outside my work role that I can use moving forward
- Confidence about speaking out on issues that I am passionate about
- Helping to shape wellbeing initiatives and activities

## ? How do I get started?

- Check in with your Partnership lead co-ordinator, connect with them and liaise regularly so that you are kept in the loop as to what is happening
- Connect with other Workplace Champions
- Think about activities that support the Workplace Action Plan objectives
- Map out what time you could devote to this over the next few weeks/ months
- Consider what training or skills development you might need. Discuss this with your Partnership lead co-ordinator
- Enlist support from your own line manager, as they will be a key enabler
- Look at what workplace support is already in place for people and how you can communicate this
- Find out more about what support is available locally
- Be ready to start a conversation or signpost people when appropriate



## Top tips to having a conversation in the workplace

Starting a conversation can be a powerful way to challenge mental health stigma and get people to think about their perceptions.

For all of us our physical health is just as important as our mental health. Talking helps us to recognise this and can dispel misconceptions about mental health problems and the people who experience them.

- Pick a quiet place where you won't be interrupted, this could be going for a walk or a cup of coffee; it doesn't need to be a formal meeting
- Ask someone how they are feeling



- Use active listening skills to show you are listening by using prompts such as 'I see' or 'OK'
- Ask open questions to allow the person to talk about how they feel
- Use positive body language and encourage conversation by paraphrasing what the person has said back to them to show you are listening
- Try to imagine how that person is feeling, in their given situation. Use empathic statements like 'this must be tough for you' or 'that sounds like it is difficult'
- Be open-minded. Phrases like 'cheer up', 'I'm sure it'll pass' and 'pull yourself together' don't help. But giving people hope for the future by saying 'things will get better for you' and 'these feelings will pass' can be comforting.
- Don't tell the person that you know how they feel (because you don't!) but if you have a personal experience that you are willing to share talk to them about a time when you felt sad, worried, stressed and what you did that helped you.
- Reassure people that they are not on their own. Let them know that the organisation has partnered with Guernsey Mind and tell them about the help and support available through their workplace
- Let them know about any local support that you are familiar with and if you are unsure find out more by looking at the Guernsey Mind website



## Key messages to bear in mind:

- Mental health is as important as physical health
- Mental health problems are common and can be treated
- 1 in 6 workers experience depression, stress or anxiety
- Mental ill health is one of the leading causes of sickness absence in the UK. 1 in 10 people have resigned from a job due to stress
- We all need support sometimes
- Ask people what they enjoy doing and encourage them to take care of themselves
- Being exposed to stressful situations directly or supporting stressed colleagues can be difficult. Encourage people to take time out when they feel they need it



## Be aware of boundaries

Boundaries exist to protect everyone. Establishing boundaries can help clarify your role as a Champion and the relationship you'll have with colleagues when in that role. Being clear about what you can and can't offer as a Champion will help you enjoy the role and also manage other people's expectations.

It is important that you develop clear boundaries to keep yourself and your colleagues safe.

**Time** think about how much time you can offer to the role and the support you can provide to your colleagues

**Abilities** being clear about what skills, knowledge and abilities you have or do not have to help others

**Confidentiality** being clear on what you can and cannot keep confidential and circumstances when things that have been shared with you may need to be shared elsewhere. There may be times that confidentiality may have to be broken to help keep someone safe. You may need to discuss this with your Partnership lead co-ordinator as it will be important that you adhere to organisational policy and procedures.

## **What your role is NOT**

You are not expected to take on a pastoral/ caring role. It is important that others do not see you as a workplace counsellor and you don't go beyond your abilities and role to provide ongoing emotional support to someone

If you feel comfortable you could offer peer support, on an equal basis grounded in shared experience but this is not an expectation

## **How to keep clear boundaries**

- Understand the remit of your role and ensure it is clearly defined. For example you could say:  
'My role as a champion is to share information that promotes awareness of how to keep yourself well'  
'I'm not the best person to advise you as I am not a trained Mental Health Practitioner but I can signpost you to where you can find other help and support'
- Look at the champion role description and be clear to avoid feeling overburdened or pressured to act outside of what you are comfortable doing
- You may have received some training or professional qualifications but your role as a champion is to listen and signpost and not advise or make judgement
- Don't make promises that you can't keep, such as keeping things confidential. Always start a conversation by explaining that there may be things that you will need to escalate if you are worried about their wellbeing
- Avoid any physical contact or behaviour that could be misconstrued. If someone is very upset don't offer to hug them but you could place a supportive hand on their hand
- Signpost individuals to help and support. Help empower them and encourage them to take a course of action that is right for them
- Be mindful of your own wellbeing and reflect on your role to help you identify whether you are taking on too much
- Be kind to yourself if you get things wrong, just identify what happened and look to

do things differently next time. Being compassionate is very unlikely to be the wrong approach

- Talk to someone about how you are feeling if you have a difficult conversation that impacts you. This is important part of supporting others. You do not need to break any confidences

**If others are not respecting your boundaries speak to them about it. Start by saying 'I think or I feel' as that way you are owning the statement**

## **What to do if someone discloses something concerning**

- Listen without judgement and try not to give any opinions or offer advice
- Stay calm and reassure the person that they have done the right thing by talking to someone about how they are feeling
- Let them know that in their best interest you suggest that you get help (this could be from someone in HR, safeguarding lead, GP or senior manager). You could go with them to a meeting with HR if that would find that helpful.
- If they refuse and say you must not tell anyone be honest and say that as you are worried for their wellbeing you will need to get help and support for them
- Record what the person has said, using their words where possible
- Ask them if they have someone that they live with or a friend/ family member that they will be comfortable sharing this information with who can support them
- Ensure that you do not compromise their confidentiality by discussing with anyone other than who you have agreed
- Avoid physical contact. If the person is very upset placing your hand over theirs or on their lower arm will be reassuring but do not put your arm around someone or hug them, as this can be misconstrued
- If you are worried that someone is having suicidal thoughts or feelings ask them directly 'are you feeling suicidal' or 'are you having suicidal thoughts.' This might feel a scary thing to ask someone, but you will not make things worse and you will not put the idea in their head
- Get a debrief for yourself from a colleague or manager to ensure that you are OK. Remember you do not need to break any confidences.



## ? Do you need to share your own experience?

As a Workplace Champion there is no requirement for you to share your own story. This is a very personal decision. When someone is talking about their experience it is important that the conversation focuses on them and their feelings and does not become about your experiences. However, you may decide that you are happy to talk about something that has impacted you

- Your experience will not be the same as someone else's experience so it will not be appropriate to say 'I know how you feel'. If they ask for advice based on your own experience, remind them that their experience is different to yours and ask them to think about what the best options are for them
- Ask yourself will the person benefit from hearing about your experience? Is it relevant? Have they asked you if anything like that has ever happened to you?
- Tell them that although you can't possibly know exactly how they feel you have had a time when you also felt worried/ upset/ anxious/ depressed

**Remember to look after yourself and to take time out for your own self-care when you need it.**

