



Creating Mentally Healthy Legal Workplaces

Tips for Good Mental Health
and Wellbeing at Work

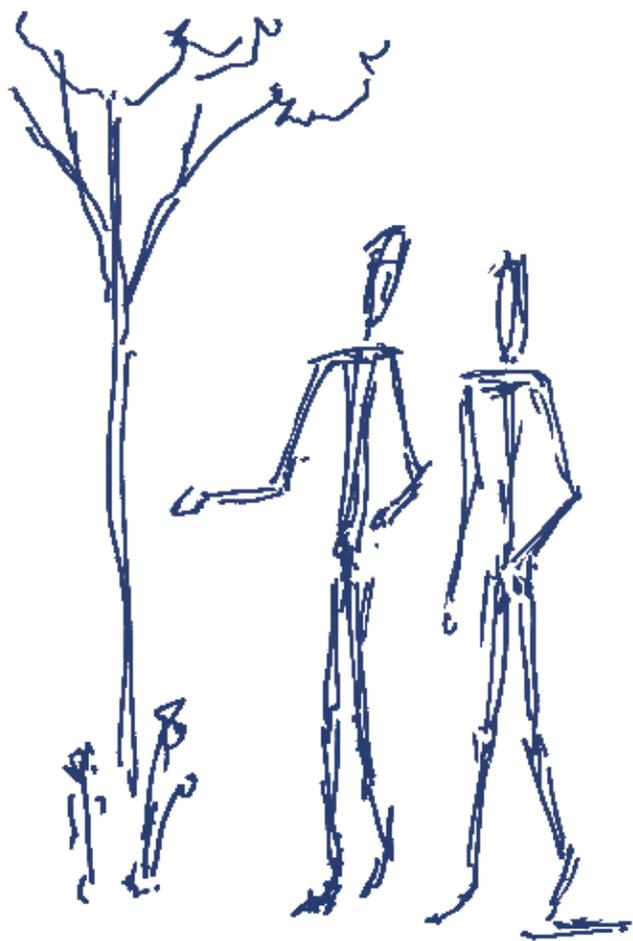
LawCare

Supporting the Legal Community



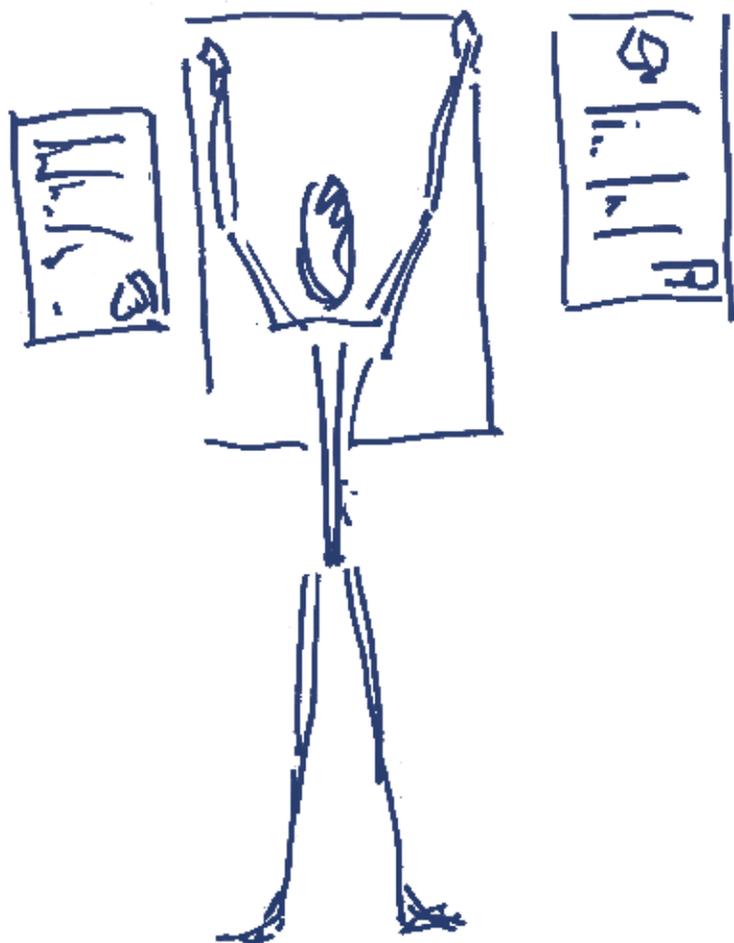
The stigma around mental health affects the bottom line

- The World Health Organisation estimates that the cost of mental health issues such as stress, depression and anxiety to the Irish economy exceeds €3bn.
- There is a strong proven business case for legal workplaces to promote good physical and mental health for all staff – it leads to greater productivity, better morale, better retention of valued and experienced staff, and reduced sickness absence.
- According to a study from health insurers VHI in 2018, more than one in five corporate employees feel extremely or very stressed. Of those employees under the age of 34, one-quarter of those surveyed said they find life extremely or very stressful.
- One in five people has missed work in the past year due to stress, anxiety or depression.
- 50 per cent of people surveyed in a study by the National Stigma Reduction Partnership, See Change, said that if they were experiencing a mental health problem they would not want anyone to know about it.
- Lawyers have a duty to act with honesty and integrity, poor mental health can compromise ethical decision making and lead to mistakes being covered up; this can have serious consequences for both the individual and legal practice.



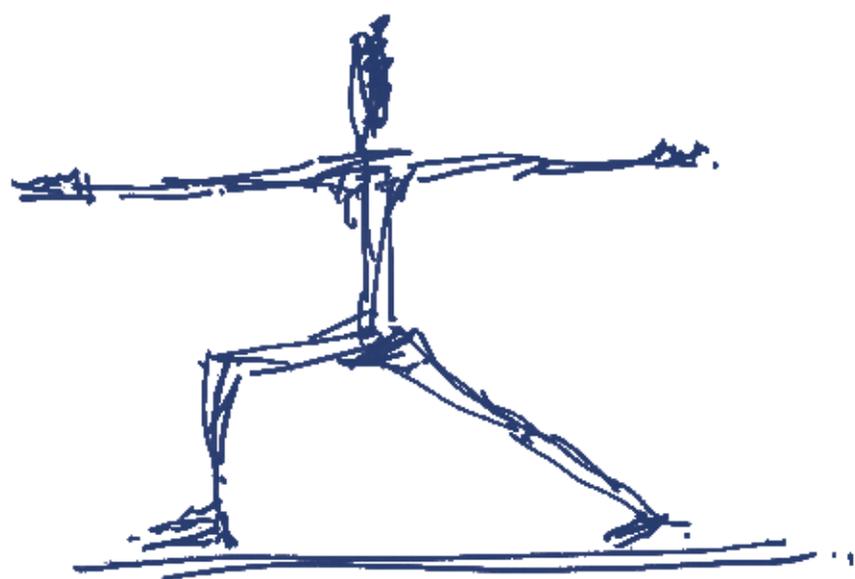
Embed wellbeing into the organisation and promote a culture of acceptance

- Wellbeing is a leadership duty. Getting senior leaders onboard sends a clear message that staff wellbeing matters – colleagues take cues from how leaders behave.
- Develop clear policies about mental health and wellbeing and make sure these are implemented and effectively communicated. Consider forming a wellbeing or happiness committee to assist with creating the policies and putting them into action.
- Leaders can demonstrate the organisation's commitment to staff wellbeing through their actions – taking those lunch breaks, working healthy hours, talking freely about the stresses and strains of working in the law and having an open-door policy.
- Training senior managers in leadership and mental health - making staff wellbeing part of their job role - is the best way to begin to change the culture of an organisation.
- Introduce mental health days or personal days as well as sick days – people will feel they can take a day off if they are struggling and this means they may be less likely to go off sick.
- Encourage colleagues to treat each other with respect, say hello, say thank you, not raise their voice or threaten each other. Make sure there are clear and effective systems in place for reporting bullying.



Raise awareness of mental health issues

- Invite a speaker to talk about mental health as part of any diversity or mental health event, or better still encourage sharing of stories from people within the organisation; the lived experience can help to break down stigma and stereotypes.
- Use existing internal communications channels – blogs, staff handbook, top tips, web links, FAQs, posters, noticeboards, staff newsletters, intranet and internet pages – to talk about wellbeing.
- Encourage mental health champions – people at all levels talking openly about mental health sends a clear message that a mental health issue is no barrier to career development and support is available.
- Use national awareness campaigns such as the Green Ribbon campaign (May) or World Mental Health Day (October) to hold events, seminars, and talk about mental health in the workplace.



Encourage a healthy work / life balance

- Sustained pressure and a poor work/life balance can quickly lead to stress and burnout, reducing levels of employee productivity, performance, creativity and morale
- Encourage staff to work sensible hours take full lunch breaks; rest and recuperate after busy periods; avoid working at weekends and take annual leave entitlement. Monitor workloads and make sure teams are well resourced.
- Flexible working, in terms of working time, location or pattern of working, can support healthier and more productive ways of working for all staff
- Flexible working benefits everyone – employers benefit from increased morale, commitment, productivity and reduced sickness absence, employees are able to fit their lives around their work, helping them balance busy lives while remaining healthy and focused
- Flexible working can be a vital early intervention to prevent mental health problems from getting worse and resulting in sickness absence – it can support a phased return to work after a period of sickness absence
- Have a sensible email policy in place for the sending and receiving of emails outside core working hours.
- Wherever possible, senior leaders and managers should be role models for healthier work habits and encourage staff by example. Having the time to pursue the things we enjoy and spend time with friends and family is vital to wellbeing.



Invest in learning and development

- Everyone needs to feel valued, and supported and that their work is meaningful – a positive culture that values all staff and invests in their skills and development builds the trust and integrity essential to maintain commitment and productivity levels.
- Managers should make themselves available for regular work-related conversations with employees.
- Embed mental health in inductions and training, staff will understand how mental health is managed and what support is available.
- Firms should provide mental health training for all staff and in particular managers so they are aware about what to look out for in colleagues and how to support them and signpost them for help.
- Hold workshops and seminars on a variety of wellbeing topics – resilience, nutrition, and mindfulness for example.



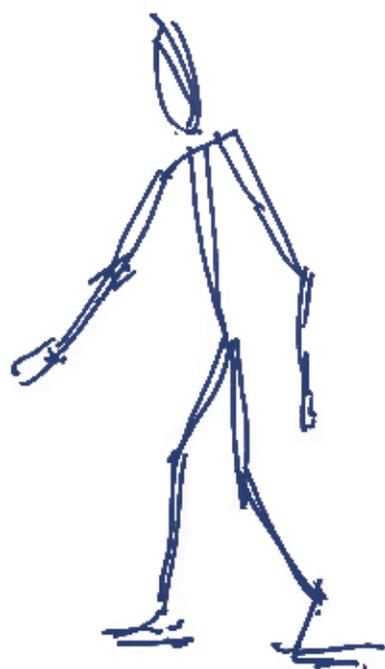
Encourage mentoring and peer support

- Sometimes people find it easier to speak to someone who isn't their manager – peer support allows colleagues to support one another outside the line-management structure and offers a great way to maximise the range of skills and experience held within your organisation.
- Mentoring and buddy schemes can help new staff to understand your organisation faster and can support all staff to gain confidence and develop new skills.
- Reverse mentoring - pairing a junior member of staff with a senior leader in the organisation - can be very effective.
- Ensure that colleagues feel able to admit any mistakes they have made and there is a system in place for this.



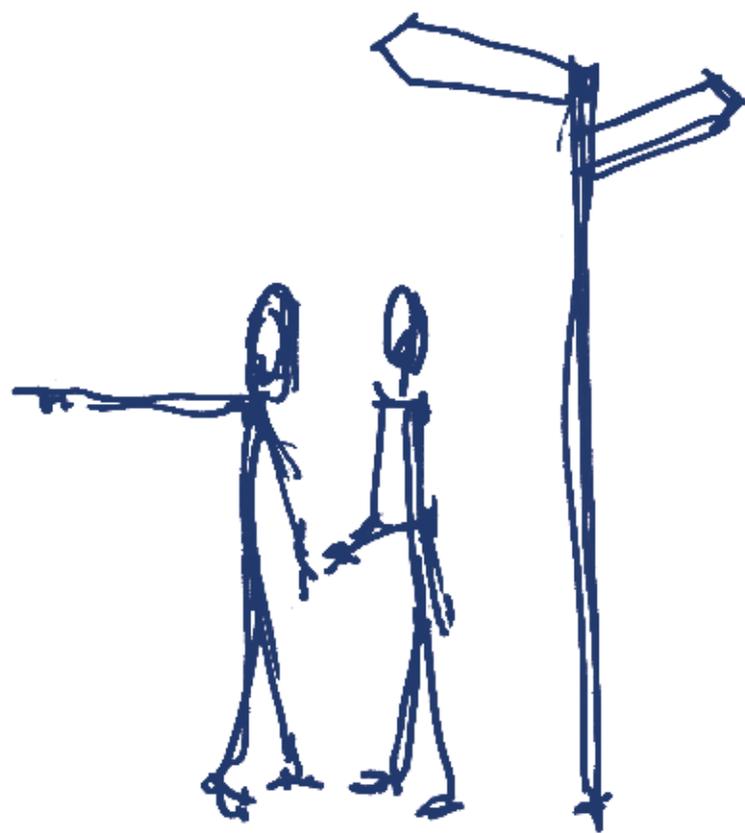
Provide good supervision

- Staff supervision promotes best practice in the workplace, encourages a positive culture and leads to better working relationships. It's an opportunity to monitor tasks and workload, and solve problems.
- Effective supervision provides a space for staff to reflect on their practice, develop skills and knowledge and builds confidence.
- Good line management can help manage and prevent stress.
- Employees appreciate an approachable supervisor so managers should make themselves available for regular work-related conversations with staff.
- Monitor the happiness levels of your staff. Have a robust performance review system which includes a wellbeing element, consider 360 degree appraisals, and use anonymous internal surveys if necessary.
- Be mindful if staff or colleagues are working in areas which can be emotionally difficult. They may need additional support, the opportunity to share their experiences, or advice on techniques for coping.
- You or your organisation may also need additional support or training in order to provide adequate supervision, or may need to engage the services of a third party such as a counsellor for staff working in emotionally difficult areas of law.



Tips for talking about mental health with a colleague

- Don't be afraid to approach a colleague you think may be experiencing a mental health issue – you don't have to be an expert to provide support and / or assistance.
- Don't ignore a colleague's symptoms or assume they will go away.
- Approach the person about your concerns – try to find a suitable time and place where you both feel comfortable to talk.
- Initiate the conversation with your colleague about how they are feeling.
- Respect confidentiality.
- Listening is very important – it is essential not to judge.
- Make it easy for the person to feel they can talk freely about their issues.
- Offer emotional support, such as recognising and accepting how the person feels.
- Explore if practical help with tasks would be of use.
- Discuss what options may be available by way of professional help and support – this can also help to identify any issues around stigma.
- Encourage your colleague to use self-help strategies and to seek the support of family, friends and others.
- Care for yourself as well – you may need to talk to someone, while respecting your colleague's privacy.



Signpost to support

It's important to signpost staff or colleagues on to their GP or another source of help if they are experiencing a mental health issue.

Invest in support for your staff such as a counselling service, an Employee Assistance Programme, or occupational health programme and make sure these services are well signposted across the organisation.

LawCare offers workplace training and provides a free and confidential helpline with calls answered by trained staff and volunteers experienced in the law on **1800 991 801**. We also have a peer support programme. There are also factsheets, information and further resources at www.lawcare.ie

Mental Health Ireland, Mental Health First Aid Ireland and the See Change Alliance all have helpful resources on their websites.

The Samaritans helpline runs 24 hours on **116 123**.

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