

Guide to Wellness Action Plans (WAPs)



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Developing a Wellness Action Plan (WAP) can help employees to actively support their own mental health by reflecting on the causes of stress and poor mental health, and by taking ownership of practical steps to help address these triggers.

This process can also help managers to open up dialogue with employees, understand their needs and experiences and ultimately better support their mental health.

The WAP is inspired by Mary Ellen Copeland's Wellness Recovery Action Plan® (WRAP®): an evidence-based system used worldwide by people to manage their mental health.

We all need to support our mental health at work, so all staff should be offered a WAP – whether they have a mental health problem or not. This sends a clear message that the organisation cares about employee wellbeing and helps encourage people to be open and seek support sooner. By planning in advance, organisations can ensure that everyone receives the support they need when they need it.

Managers should work together with employees to develop a personal action plan to proactively manage their mental health. This allows people to plan in advance and develop tailored support for a time when they're not coping so well. It also facilitates open dialogue with managers – leading to practical, agreed steps which can form the basis for regular monitoring and review. An action plan should cover:

- actions and behaviours that support the employee's mental wellbeing
- symptoms, early warning signs and triggers for poor mental health or stress
- potential impact of poor mental health or a mental health problem on their performance
- what support they need from their line manager
- positive steps for the individual to take if they are experiencing stress or poor mental health
- an agreed time to review the support measures to see if they're working.

It should be drafted by the employee, with support from a health professional where appropriate, and then discussed and agreed with the manager.

The WAP should be held confidentially and regularly reviewed by the employee and their manager together. Employees need only provide information that relates to their role and the workplace, and that they are comfortable sharing. The WAP is not legally binding but is intended to allow a line manager to agree with employees how they can be practically supported in the workplace and how to address any health needs.



Case studies

Below are some examples of support measures and workplace adjustments that have helped some people. These adjustments were effective because they explored individuals' needs and put in place practical, easy to implement adjustments based on these needs. Often the necessary change is one of attitude, expectations

or communication rather than a major or costly change. Employers should explore, with the individual, their specific needs and be as creative as possible when thinking about how to address these issues. These can then be captured in the person's WAP.

Simon

Simon had a history of panic attacks. He was accessing support for this and making good progress but often found that without regular breaks during the day he would become agitated and sometimes start to experience physical symptoms. When his manager suggested taking a flexible approach to breaks (dividing his lunch break into three twenty minute slots), Simon was able to spread the time he took out from work more evenly across the day and felt better able to cope.

Sophie

Sophie's anxiety had led her to develop obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) and she had started to feel very overwhelmed at work. Her confidence had been affected and she was having trouble trusting her own judgment. Getting regular reassurance from her manager that she was doing a good job, such as saying 'thank you' and acknowledging her hard work, helped Sophie to feel she was on top of things and contributed to her experiencing less anxiety and greater confidence at work.

Chloe

When Chloe's doctor recommended she change the medication she was taking for depression, Chloe became very nervous about the prospect of telling her manager. She knew that switching to the new medication would likely result in side effects which would impact her ability to perform her role, but was afraid that if she spoke openly about this with her manager she would be judged and might even lose her job. When her manager became aware of the support Chloe needed, he arranged for her to work flexibly whilst transitioning onto the new medication, with weekly catch ups to support her with managing her workload and the opportunity for afternoon naps when she was experiencing side effects from her medication. These adjustments were easy to implement and helped enormously in supporting Chloe during this time.

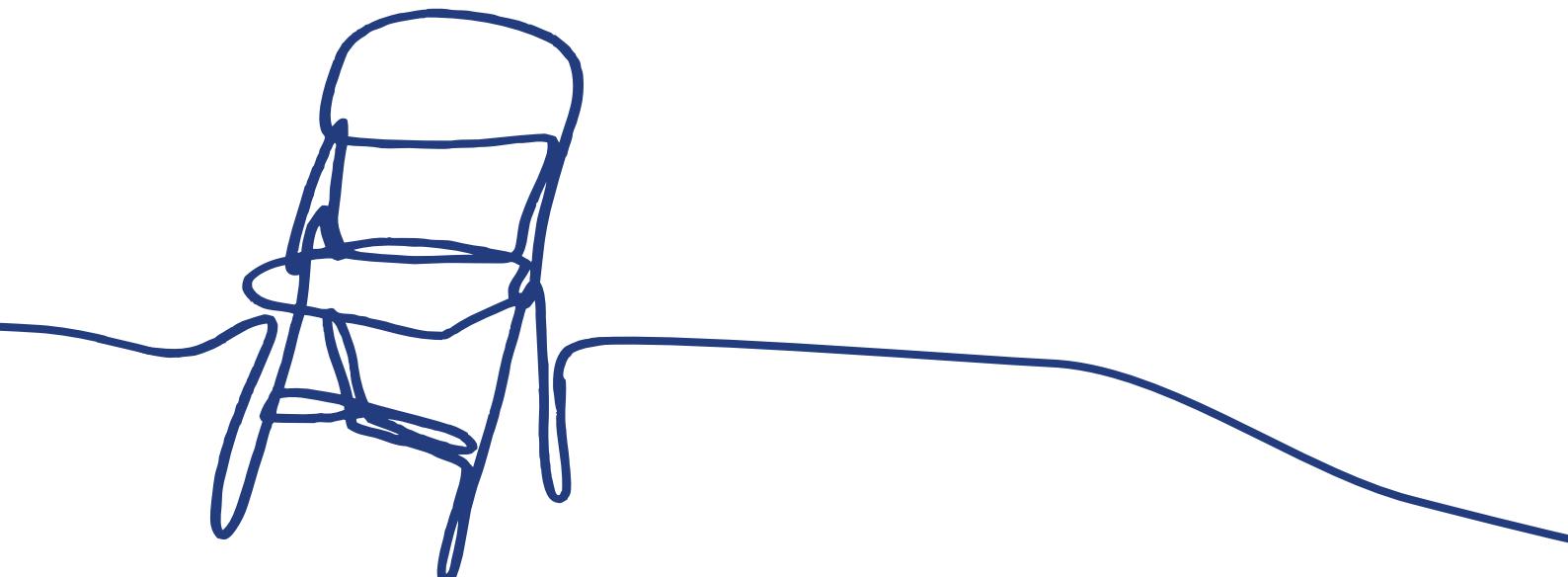
Supporting people to develop a Wellness Action Plan: Top tips for managers

As a manager, when supporting your employee to develop their WAP, be positive and encouraging, but do not try to influence them. Throughout the process provide a sense of supported empowerment and help them to feel trusted and capable. Remember:

- People are often experts when it comes to identifying the support or adjustment they need and how to manage their triggers for poor mental health.
- The plan must be written by the individual: expressing their own personal choice, reflecting their voice and their personal experience and needs.
- The plan needs to include all the things that are important to the individual and their mental wellbeing.

Ask the person you are supporting to think about:

- what are they like when they are feeling well and flourishing at work
- what their environment is like when it is supporting their wellbeing
- what are the things they need to do to maintain good health and wellbeing
- coping strategies they already use and what makes these effective
- how they've managed to work through challenging situations previously
- what hasn't worked in the past and why they think this might be.



What managers can do to promote wellbeing

The WAP is intended not only as a tool to support staff when they are experiencing problems, but also as a means of identifying how an individual's wellbeing can be proactively promoted. When it comes to supporting a member of staff's wellbeing, the following actions and approaches can be helpful.

Your managerial style:

- Be supportive, approachable and responsive
- Be available for regular work-related conversations and increase the frequency of supervision or catch-up time with the team member if required
- Proactively support staff to monitor their workload and encourage healthy working hours and a positive work/life balance
- Ensure you are setting realistic targets and be clear about priorities
- Tailor your management style to suit the needs of each staff member and task by asking your staff what support they need from you
- Use one-to-ones and catch-ups to cover a wider agenda than just your employee's to-do list, including reflecting on what has gone well and what has been difficult in the past month, and forward planning together, for example by identifying upcoming pinch points, challenges and required support
- Encourage positive relationships with colleagues and provide mediation where necessary
- Provide staff with meaningful work and opportunities for personal development and growth
- Ensure people are working in an appropriate physical environment

Your managerial style:

- Encourage staff to talk and be open about problems they are experiencing
- Ensure confidentiality and provide an appropriate place for confidential conversations
- When talking about an individual's mental health listen, be respectful and do not make assumptions
- Be positive – focus on what employees can do, rather than what they can't, providing training, mentoring or coaching if there are skills gaps
- Work together and involve people in finding solutions as much as possible
- Support staff to develop personal resilience and coping strategies
- Involve staff in dialogue and decision-making and remember that people are often the expert when it comes to identifying the support or adjustment they need and how to manage their triggers for poor mental health
- Recognise and praise good work and commitment, providing regular opportunities
- to discuss, review and reflect on positive achievements – this can help people to build up positive self-esteem and develop skills to better manage their triggers for poor mental health
- Encourage staff to seek further advice and support (for example from buddying or mentoring schemes), and seek advice and support yourself.

Wellness Action Plan (WAP) template

1. What helps you stay mentally healthy at work? (For example: taking a lunch break, keeping a to-do list)

2. What can your manager do to support you to stay mentally healthy at work? (For example: regular feedback and supervision, explaining wider developments in organisation)

3. Are there any situations at work that can trigger poor mental health for you? (For example: conflict at work, organisational change, something not going to plan)

4. How might stress / poor mental health difficulties impact on your work? (For example: find it difficult to make decisions, hard to prioritise work tasks)

5. Are there any early warning signs that we might notice when you are starting to feel stressed/mentally unwell? (For example: changes in normal working patterns, withdrawing from colleagues)

6. What support could be put in place to minimise triggers or to support you to manage symptoms? (For example: extra catch-up time with line manager)

Employee signature

Employer signature

Date to be reviewed

7. If we notice early warning signs that you are feeling stressed or unwell – what should we do? (For example: talk to me discreetly about it, contact someone that I have asked to be contacted).

Please include contact names and numbers if you would like your line manager to get in touch with someone if you become unwell.

8. What steps can you take if you start to feel unwell at work? (For example: take a break from your desk and go for a short walk, ask your line manager for support)

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