

A guide to mental health in the electronic music industry

For employees



In partnership with

NINJA TUNE

PARADIGM



TALENT AGENCY

PERCOLATE

POLY.

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Foreword from the partners

Since we first started collaborating with Mind to raise mental health awareness in electronic music five years ago the landscape has changed for the better. In general the stigma around mental health has decreased, awareness has risen and people are talking more. However, there is still a great need to empower people across the industry to support the mental health and wellbeing of all involved – whether that is helping themselves or each other. There are many specific challenges related to the music industry that need to be understood and navigated to improve mental health. So we decided to create tailored guides for anyone working in the industry, offering advice and information to build their knowledge and skills.

In March 2020, as the project was nearing completion, the global pandemic of COVID-19 started. Plus a few months later via the

Black Lives Matter movement, greater awareness was brought to the ongoing racism crisis which has been especially important in the music community. It became more vital than ever to improve people's wellbeing and empower them to support others around them. In response to these additional concerns we revisited the guides in full in order to ensure that the advice was directly providing mental health support relating to these events.

We hope you will find this guide helpful and that it goes some way to helping you gain the tools you need to look after yourselves, each other and your clients.

We thank all our amazing colleagues from every corner of the business who contributed their time and experiences, and Mind for their dedication in helping to make sure no one faces a mental health problem alone.

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Introduction

We are Mind, the mental health charity. In partnership with Ninja Tune, Paradigm, Percolate and POLY, we have developed a range of tools to support the mental health of people working in the electronic music industry.

We all have mental health just as we all have physical health – it can move up and down from good to poor for any number of reasons. Experiencing poor mental health is not an issue specific to the electronic music industry. In fact one in four adults in the UK will experience a mental health problem of some kind each year.

We know that working in the electronic music industry can be very rewarding and offers many opportunities, however it can also come with a set of unique pressures. These include long hours, high stress, a higher incidence of drugs and alcohol abuse, isolation and insecure work. Industry professionals are often passionate about what they do. This means they may be vulnerable to exploitation and can feel guilty if their “dream job” affects their mental health.

This guide offers some practical advice and guidance to help support your mental health if you are working in the electronic music industry.

1 in 4

adults in the UK will experience a mental health problem of some kind each year



Spotlight: coronavirus

Coronavirus is having a significant impact on people and working life globally. During the pandemic, we have all had to adjust to large and very sudden changes in the way we work. The music industry has been particularly hard-hit by coronavirus and has effectively been put on pause.

Throughout this period, we have also witnessed the murder of George Floyd and the Black Lives Matter movement has brought to the forefront inequalities faced by many across our societies. This has been very difficult for individuals. We understand that the mental health of many artists, DJs, organisers, promoters and creative freelancers, as well as various other people across the industry, is being heavily affected by what is going on.

Although lockdown restrictions have started to ease, we are still unsure of what this means for the industry and the potential of further lockdowns. Many of us may be feeling anxious about the future and facing new challenges ahead.

Therefore we have developed this guide to support you both in these challenging times and in the longer term.

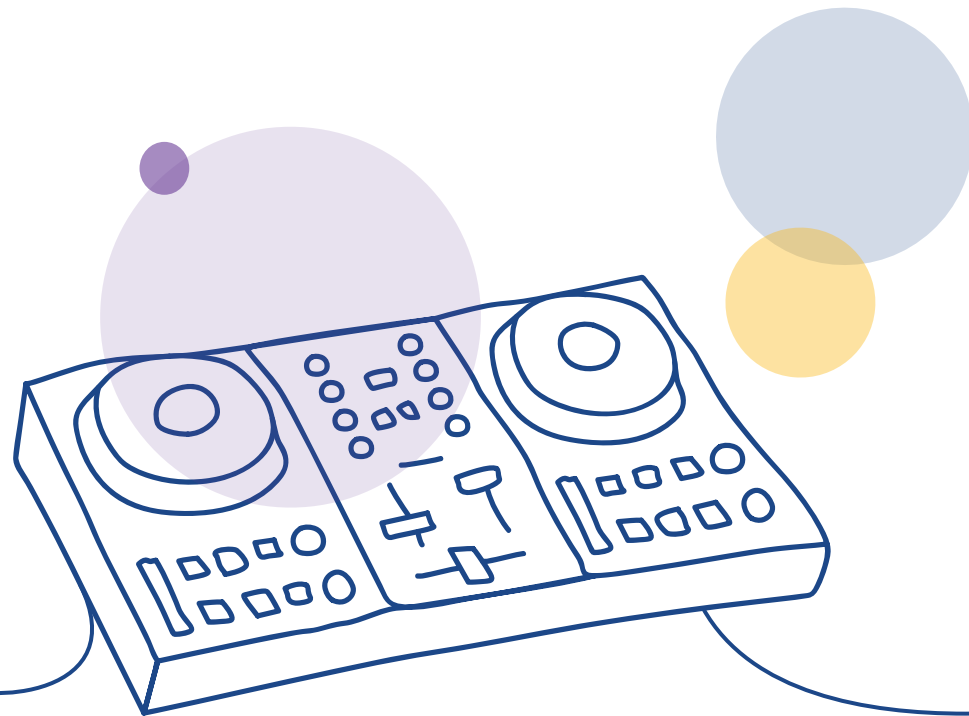


What is mental health?

We all have mental health. Our mental health is just like our physical health – we need to take care of it.

Good mental health means being able to think, feel and react in ways that help you live the life you want. But if you go through a period of poor mental health you might find the ways you're frequently thinking, feeling or reacting become difficult, or even impossible, to cope with.

Most people know someone who has experienced a mental health problem. They can happen to people from all walks of life. The good news is that there's support out there, and there are steps you can take to look after your mental health.



Mental health stigma

The stigma people face when living with a mental health problem can make them feel worse.

Sometimes stigma comes from a misunderstanding around mental health or fear that people with mental health problems are dangerous to others.

At work this might mean people use language around mental health that's offensive, dismissive or hurtful. This can be very upsetting – especially if it's coming from somebody in your professional network or a friend. Encouragingly stigma is slowly fading as more people feel able to talk about their problems and share what they've been through. But there's still work to be done.

Here's how you can start to break down the stigma with the people you work with:

- Share reliable mental health information. Mind's [website](#) is a great place you can get high-quality information you can pass on to others.
- Talk about your experience. Speaking out about how you feel (if you feel able to) is a powerful way to change people's attitudes.
- Challenge people's attitudes. Where you feel safe to do so, gently challenge people about their attitudes and stand up to the stigma around mental health.

Equality and diversity in the electronic music industry

We want to reach a point where all workplaces, including the electronic music industry, recognise the value of recruiting and nurturing a diverse workforce of talented employees, including those whose mental health may have prevented them working previously.

Everyone has a responsibility to be aware of the intersectionality between wellbeing, mental health and equality issues. People from minority groups can be at a higher risk of experiencing a mental health problem than the wider population. The reasons for this are complex and not yet fully understood. However, mental health problems experienced by minority groups have been linked to discrimination, bullying and racism.

Some people have also experienced rejection, negative reactions or hostility from family, friends, strangers and their employers. This can have a big impact on an individual's self-esteem and may mean they feel unable to be their true self at work, home or in the wider world.

People's experiences can be very different so it's important that there are forums and ways that people can share their experiences and concerns.

Talking about these issues and seeking support are important ways that you can manage your mental health. Here are some first steps:

- See our [pages](#) on seeking help for a mental health problem for more information on how to get support.
- [Hear stories](#) from LGBTIQ+ people talking about their mental health.
- Try out peer support. Mind runs an online peer support community called [Side by Side](#) that welcomes everyone and offers a friendly, non-judgemental space to talk about how you feel.

Working in the electronic music industry

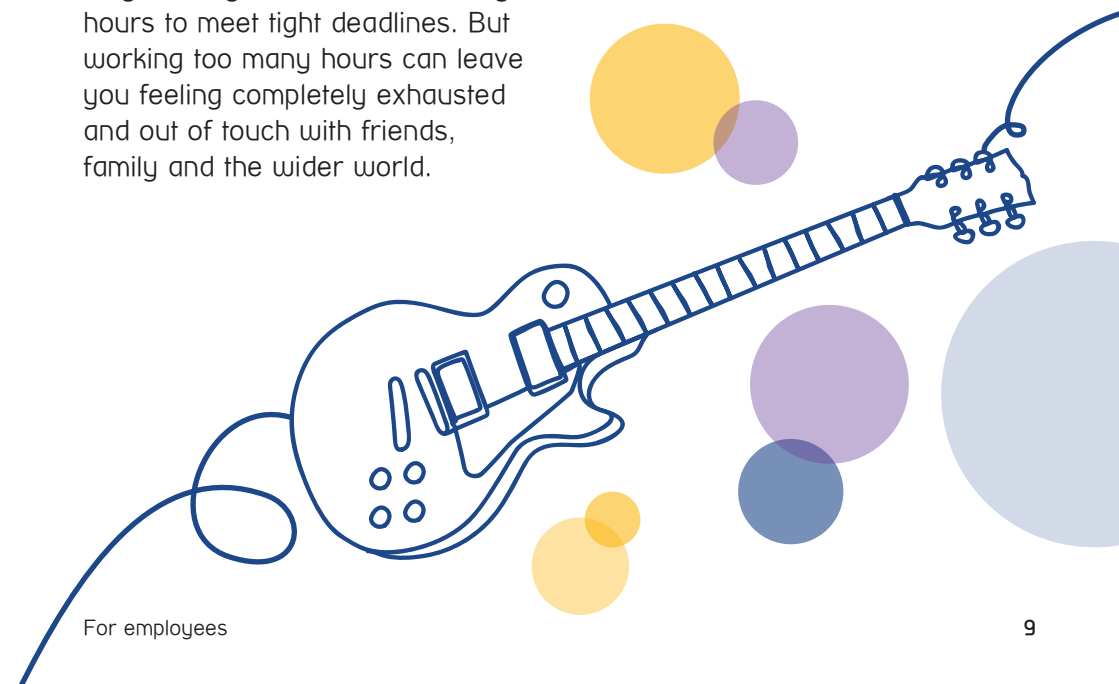
For many people working in electronic music, what they do isn't just a job – it's their passion. But like any other job, it's got its own pressures to deal with. Below are some common pressures and how you can support your people to manage them.

Working late

Dance culture revolves around late nights. Club nights, events and festivals tend to kick off late and finish late, while hectic schedules may mean you have to work long hours to meet tight deadlines. But working too many hours can leave you feeling completely exhausted and out of touch with friends, family and the wider world.

How to support yourself:

Just a couple of nights not working a week can help you feel more connected to the day-time world, refreshed and recharged. If you're not sleeping at night, try and set aside a regular time to catch-up on sleep during the day. If you feel too wound-up for sleep try herbal teas, hot baths or ambient music to relax. Be aware that relying on alcohol or sleeping pills to get some shut-eye can be bad for your mental health.



It can be quite isolating. You can arrive at a gig on your own and be expected to meet new people and network. That's a lot of pressure, it can feel difficult and tiring.

DJ/Artist

Frequent travel

Despite the coronavirus pandemic, electronic music is a global industry. After the pandemic it may again involve attending events across the world. Travelling a lot can be stressful and lonely. It can take you away from your usual support networks, which may have an impact on your mental health.

How to support yourself

To help cope with loneliness try and arrange a time you could Skype, text, email or call friends and family while you're away. Keeping a journal can help get troubling thoughts out of your head, or you could try podcasts, computer games or a book to provide some company, and a distraction.

Drug and alcohol abuse

Drug and alcohol abuse can be a problem for anyone in any kind of workplace, but dance culture often happens in party spaces where they're consumed, which makes them more available. You may not use drugs and alcohol to excess, or at all. However, others might feel they have to live up to the industry's 'hard-partying' stereotype or keep up with crowds or their industry peers. Over time, this can lead to reliance, addiction and other problems.

How to support yourself:

If you feel the amount you're drinking is too much, try to slightly reduce the units you're consuming each week. Try alcohol-free days, or if you're keen to still drink alcohol, try low-alcohol drinks. If you think drugs and alcohol are becoming a problem for you then it's important to remember that you don't have to cope alone. [Addaction](#) can provide advice and guidance on what you're going through.

Insecure work

Many people who work in the electronic music industry don't have stability or security in their careers, so they may struggle to plan for the future. Shifts in trends can happen fast meaning that club nights, musical genres and artists can sometimes be left behind.

How to support yourself:

If you are out of work for a long time, or have a low income, you may be entitled to certain benefits. You can find out more here:

gov.uk/benefits-calculators

Ask people in your network to keep their ears to the ground to help you identify any new opportunities.

Spotlight: coronavirus

The coronavirus outbreak is putting huge financial pressures on the music industry and many organisations are facing very difficult decisions related to staffing. Coping with uncertainty around your job can lead to lots of worries about the future, especially as things feel very unpredictable right now. If you're struggling with feelings of uncertainty, try to focus on the things you can control. By accepting the things we can't control, we can start to focus our energy on the things we can.

[Read our guidance on coping with redundancy during the pandemic.](#)



Money worries

Money and mental health are often linked. Poor mental health can make managing money harder and worrying about money can make your mental health worse.

How to support yourself

- Create a weekly budget and stick to it
- Regularly review your finances, so that things don't pile up
- Aim to keep money aside for essentials and unexpected expenses
- Look into bank accounts that allow you to put money aside for essentials in separate sub-accounts
- Job sharing or additional employment can also help. Look at other opportunities in addition to your current role in the music industry to support yourself

Competition

Sometimes it can feel that everyone wants to work in the industry. When there's a constant stream of talented people wanting to do what you do, the competition can feel very intense.

This can make it feel like you have to excel at everything you do, or risk losing your job to someone else.

How to support yourself

Remember what you've achieved so far. Keeping a record of some of your best work (and any praise you've received) isn't just useful for getting future jobs. It can help you feel good, and more secure, if you're feeling insecure about your job.

Imposter syndrome

Ever felt like you don't deserve your success? That you're an unqualified fraud and everyone else is set to call you out on it? This is what imposter syndrome feels like. It can knock your confidence, leaving you doubting your professional abilities. It can often strike in moments that other people associate with success. For example, you might have gotten a promotion or a new job but in a competitive industry you might feel undeserving or lacking in confidence.

How to support yourself

Collect evidence of your abilities and achievements. This could include emails praising your work, testimonials from people you respect, or a diary that proves you're in demand. Try not to compare yourselves with others – you can't know what's really going on inside their heads. They might even feel similar to you. Be kind to yourself and practise self-care.

Toxic criticism

Feedback is part of any career. But today anyone can say what they think about a performance, a poster, a record – or any other element of dance culture – on social media. This can feel great when people are supportive. But toxic online abuse can seriously affect your mental health. It can leave you feeling exposed and under incredible scrutiny over what you do and say both online and off.

How to support yourself

Not checking social media can give you a welcome break from other people's opinions. So try a digital detox for an hour, an afternoon, a day or even longer.

Sometimes you can end up basing your self-esteem on other people's opinions.

DJ/Artist

Pressure to be positive

People working in the industry feel they're expected to have a can-do positive attitude most of the time – especially if you are a performer. Younger people just starting in the industry can feel even more pressure to say 'yes' – whether it's to poorly paid starter roles, excessive hours or other questionable requests. But it's just not possible to be positive all the time nor is it healthy to agree to some of these requests.

How to support yourself

Everyone needs a 'time out' sometimes. Talking about how you feel with trusted friends or colleagues can help. Writing your feelings down, whether on paper or on the notes section of your phone, can help to clear your thought process.

Managing your work

Improving work/life balance

It is a job, so giving yourself time off is really important. You're surrounded by music all day and so it's important to spend some time away from the industry to recharge. Read, exercise, whatever's good for you. Take time to look after yourself and find pleasure and positivity outside the industry.

Record label

You may work in electronic music because you love it. However, it's important to develop interests outside of dance music.

Whether it's hobbies, or spending time with family or friends, creating the right work/life balance is essential. This is particularly important if you're often working long hours, late nights and weekends without a break.

Here are a few simple ways to work towards it:

- Take short breaks throughout the day, even if your day starts at 10pm!

- Have some time off. If you're entitled to paid holiday, use it. A short break can help you feel recharged and refreshed.
- Try not to let your whole life be work, nurture your outside relationships and interests.
- Set clear boundaries to your work and communicate these with your manager and contacts. In addition to this, make it clear if there are ways in which you don't wish to be contacted. For instance, perhaps you prefer to keep a personal phone number or you don't want clients chasing you on social media. This can make it easier to relax when you're at home and take your mind off work.
- Develop end of day habits. Whatever time you finish, do something that marks the end of work for now to avoid feeling 'always-on'. This could be making a list of what to do tomorrow, shutting down your computer or just switching off your phone for a bit.

Spotlight: coronavirus

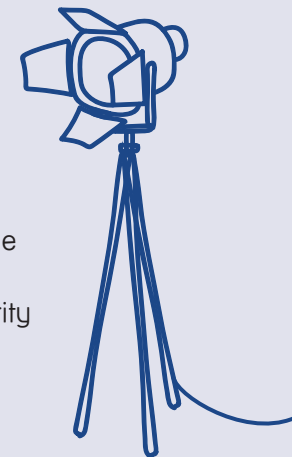
Coronavirus has played havoc with people's working patterns. And as well as the shock of clubs and venues having to remain closed, there's also been the impact of Black Lives Matter to reflect on.

Many of you will have had to adjust to a change of routine following lockdown and it's likely you'll be spending a lot more time at home than you usually would. Make sure to take a break to look after your mental health, you might need some time out to relax and unwind, so it's important to take a break and use it as an opportunity to prioritise self-care. You deserve it.

Things like yoga, colouring and DIY can be a great way to switch off, as can tidying – why not have a spring clean? You could also have a digital clear out. Delete any old files and apps you don't use, upgrade your software, or clear out your inboxes. Just make sure that you aren't keeping frantically busy as a way of avoiding your feelings.

You may already be used to working from home and already have a good routine in place. However, now that the majority of us are going to be working from home for the foreseeable future, we have all had to adjust to a new way of life. For many of us, going into the office provided a sense of routine and security; it ensured that we got to see people everyday and make social connections, which we know is good for our mental health. Swapping this for staring at your own four walls all day, and dealing with a constant stream of video calls, has taken a lot of us out of our comfort zones. See some of our guidance below on how you look after your mental health during this time:

- [Top tips for working from home](#)
- [Working from home Wellness Action Plan](#)



Managing difficult relationships

Having a difficult relationship with your co-workers can be stressful, and can make work harder to manage, particularly if they are your manager or in a more senior position. Here are some ideas on dealing with difficult work relationships:

Address your concerns.

If a co-worker says or does something that you find upsetting or offensive, arrange to speak with them in private about this. Calmly explain the situation and your feelings.

Try not to get drawn into arguments.

You won't always agree with your colleagues. But getting your point across in a diplomatic way can avoid unhelpful disagreements.

Find common ground.

You won't always have lots in common with each co-worker. But finding something that you both like – such as a sports team, TV programme or hobby – can give you something positive to talk about and improve your relationship.

Avoid participating in office gossip.

People often use gossip as a way of bonding but it can put strain on relationships and cause conflict, so try not get involved.

Keep a professional distance.

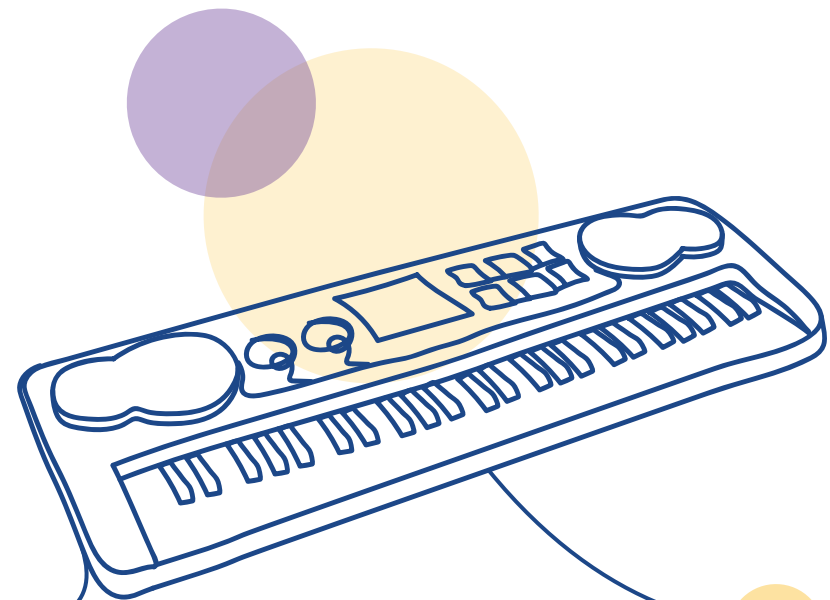
Unfortunately it's not always possible to have good personal relationships with all your colleagues, so if you do have to work with someone you don't get on with, it's helpful to keep focused on work and stay professional.

What if I'm being bullied at work?

You don't have to put up with bullying at work. If it happens to you try to:

- Speak to a friend or colleague about what's going on and how you feel
- Speak to your manager. They might be able to resolve it informally

- Find out if you have a bullying policy
- Speak to [Acas](#) or [Citizens Advice](#). Both can give personal advice
- If you have to leave your job because of bullying, an employment lawyer can help you decide next steps to take.



Looking after your physical health

Many people find that physical activity helps them maintain positive mental health. Many studies show that doing physical activity can help with:

- **Better sleep** – by making you feel more tired at the end of the day.
- **Happier moods** – physical activity releases feel-good hormones that give you more energy.
- **Managing stress, anxiety or intrusive and racing thoughts** – doing something physical releases cortisol which helps us manage stress. Being physically active also gives your brain something to focus on and can be a positive coping strategy for difficult times.
- **Better self-esteem** – being more active can make you feel better about yourself as you improve and meet your goals.

- **Reducing the risk of depression** – studies have shown that doing regular physical activity can reduce the likelihood of experiencing a period of depression.
- **Connecting with people** – doing group or team activities can help you meet new and like-minded people, and make new friends.

Top tips to improve your physical activity and mental health:

- **Start small.** Try a short walk or join a fun class.
- **Be kind to yourself.** If you're doing anything more than you normally would, then that's a step in the right direction.
- **Clear your head.** Physical activity often helps you concentrate on something other than those unwanted thoughts and worries.
- **Celebrate your achievements.** Give yourself a reward whenever you've done well.

Food and mood

If you travel a lot for your job, or work lots of late nights, eating well can be a challenge. But there's good evidence that what you eat can affect the way you feel. In fact, improving your diet may help to:

- improve your mood
- give you more energy
- help you think more clearly.

Here's some tips:

- **Eat regularly.** Feeling hungry can make you feel tired, stressed and depressed. Eating regularly helps to stabilise your mood by keeping blood sugar levels steady. Slow-releasing energy foods like pasta, rice, oats, wholegrain bread and cereals, nuts and seeds do this really well.

- **Eat more vegetables.** Vegetables and fruit contain a lot of the minerals, vitamins and fibre we need to keep us physically and mentally healthy.
- **Stay hydrated.** If you don't drink enough water, you may find it difficult to concentrate or think clearly. It's recommended that you drink between six to eight glasses of fluid a day.

Top tips for looking after your mental health

Understand your triggers

Everyone finds different things stressful. By understanding what has a negative impact on your mental health, you can start to manage these triggers better.

Try different coping techniques

This will be different for everyone, but could include:

- contacting a trusted friend to talk about how you feel
- using mindfulness techniques, this could include focusing on your breathing
- doing exercise or having a walk outside
- using a Wellness Action Plan.

Ask for help if you need it

Discuss your workload with your manager, and ask them for support. Talk about setting realistic targets and focus on finding solutions to problems.

Balance your time

Occasionally you may need to work longer hours to get something done, but try to claim this time back later if you can.

Manage your time

Don't do too much at once. It often takes longer if you try to do too much at the same time.

Reward yourself for achievements

It is easy to focus on what needs to be done next and forget to reward yourself for what you have already accomplished.

Be realistic

Remember you don't have to be 'perfect' all the time – nobody is!

Be social media aware

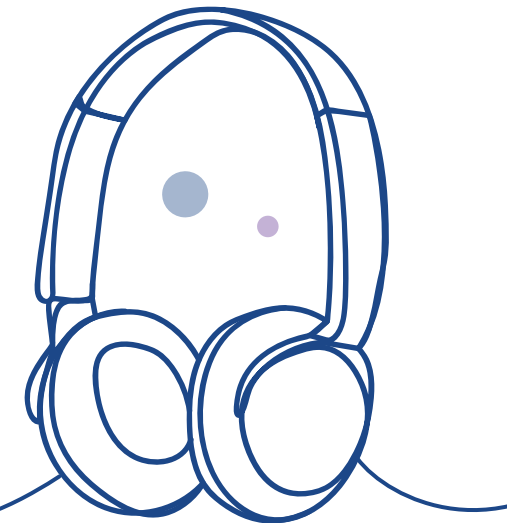
Social media can be a drain on your time and your mood. You can adopt unhealthy social media habits by comparing your life to other people's. So, even if you use social media for your job, manage how you use it. Ideally have social media-free periods or only use it at scheduled times each day. Also be aware that experts recommend switching off your device an hour before bed to get better sleep.

Learn to say no

It can be tempting to take on more work than you can manage. Over time this can lead to stress and burnout. Try to protect your mental health by politely saying no to extra demands when you've got your plate full.

When you're DJing it feels great when someone comes up after and says they've loved your set. It just takes one person in the crowd to make you feel good about what you're doing – that you've touched someone emotionally.

DJ/creative freelancer



If you're experiencing poor mental health

Telling your employer

If you have an ongoing mental health problem, or are struggling with your wellbeing, you may feel unsure whether to tell your employer or not.

You might experience barriers such as:

- not knowing who, when or how to tell
- being unsure of how much to tell
- worrying how they will react
- worrying that there will be negative consequences.

The possible benefits of talking about your mental health at work include:

- having a stronger basis for requesting support at work
- not having to hide any difficulties you are experiencing
- if you choose to tell colleagues, others may also open up about their experiences of mental health problems.

Telling anyone about your mental health is a personal choice – there is no right or wrong answer. However, if your mental health problem is considered a disability within the definition of the Equality Act, you will have a right to reasonable adjustments. But to get them, your employer must know about your disability.

More often than not employers will want to make changes to support you, like flexible working, giving you time off – or they could offer counselling through occupational services. Here are some top tips when you're thinking about telling your employer:

- **Think about how and when to do it.** Setting up a private meeting either face-to-face or online could help. Or you can put your thoughts down in an email if that would be more helpful.

- **How much to share.** Just share what you are comfortable with. It might be helpful to bring some notes with you.

- **Who to share it with.** Telling your manager(s) doesn't mean everyone has to know. Be clear that you may want to keep things confidential.

If your manager has left and you're worried about disclosing to your new manager, then use our [Wellness Action Plan](#) to help get them up to speed.

Remember that you're the expert on your needs. If you're not sure what might help, try small changes at first, and make a note of whether they help or not.

The law

Your mental health problem could be classed as a disability. The Equality Act says you have a disability if you have a physical or mental impairment that has a substantial, adverse and long-term effect on your ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities.

If there's a feature of your work causing you major disadvantage because of this disability, then your employer has to make adjustments to avoid that disadvantage. These adjustments have to be reasonable and can include:

- flexible working or changes to start and finishing times
- changes to your workspace
- an equal amount of break time to other people, but in shorter, more frequent chunks
- more supervision or support with managing your workload
- mentor or buddy systems (formal or informal)
- quiet rooms
- a phased return to work
- reallocation of some tasks
- working from home.

Even if your mental health problems aren't a disability, you can still ask for changes to make your work more manageable.

Coming back to work after time off

If you've had some time off for poor mental health, returning to work can feel overwhelming. Returning might feel like a big milestone in your recovery. However, you may be worried about what your colleagues will think, or that you won't be able to cope.

Remember, you will still need to manage your mental health, so it is good to put a plan in place before you return to work. It's also good to think about how your manager and colleagues could support you.

Below are some ideas that can help you on your return.

- Visit your GP. As well as giving you advice on managing your mental health problem, your GP can assess whether you're fit to return to work. They can also make suggestions on what changes your employer can put in place to support you.

- Keep in touch with colleagues. Email or social media can feel easier than meeting face-to-face.
- Find out what's going on at work. You can do this by asking to be added to an email bulletin (if you have one), or just checking in by phone.
- Arrange a drop-in session or lunch with your manager before you return. This can give you a chance to say hi to colleagues and re-familiarise yourself with your role. You can also talk about any changes you'd like to make to your job to support your mental health.
- Get some support. Sharing your experiences with others going through the same thing can help you feel less alone. You could join an online community, like [Side by Side](#), where you can talk openly about your mental health.

What support can I get from my employer and manager?

There's lots your employer can do to support your mental health as you return to work.

You could:

- Request to return to work gradually – for example by reducing your usual hours as part of a 'phased return' to work.
- **Make a schedule** with your manager for your first week back. Agree what you will be doing where and when so you know what to expect.
- Ask for regular **catch-ups** with your manager to talk about how you are getting on. Let them know what you're finding helpful or difficult.

- Develop a [Wellness Action Plan](#) with your manager. Wellness Actions Plans are an easy, practical way of helping you to support your own mental health at work. Everyone can complete a Wellness Action Plan – you don't need to have a mental health problem to feel the benefits. It just means that you already have practical steps in place to ensure you are supported when you aren't feeling great.
- Find out if your employer has any **specialist support services** on offer, for example; occupational health services or an Employee Assistance Programme (EAP).

Supporting your colleagues

Talking, whether it's just over a cup of tea or in a more formal setting, can really help someone experiencing a mental health problem. If someone has decided to open up to you these are a few things you can do to ensure they are supported:

- **Avoid interruptions** – switch off phones, ensure colleagues can't walk in and interrupt.
- **Ask simple, open, non-judgemental questions** – avoid patronising responses.
- **Listen actively and carefully** – speak calmly and maintain good eye contact.
- **Show empathy and understanding** – focus on the person, not the problem.
- **Be prepared for some silences** – be patient.
- **Avoid making assumptions or being prescriptive** – the best thing to do is listen.

Spotlight: coronavirus

You might be worried about coronavirus and how it could affect your life and your work. This may include spending a lot of time at home and keeping a safe distance from others if you go outdoors. This might feel difficult or stressful, so it is important that you ask for help if you need it.

You should also take time to ask your colleagues and people you work with how they are coping too. Give people an opportunity to share if they're struggling, and be honest with them about how you are feeling too.

If you are feeling really low or struggling with feelings of isolation, there are people who can help.

You might also find these pages helpful:

- Our [information](#) on coping with going into work during coronavirus, including advice for healthcare, emergency services and other key workers.
- Our [tips](#) for managing feelings about lockdown easing.
- Our [coronavirus useful contacts](#), listing Government and NHS guidance, helpful organisations and other ways to get support during the coronavirus pandemic.
- Our [information](#) on the coronavirus pandemic and your wellbeing.



We're Mind, the mental health charity. We want to support a million people each year to stay well and have good mental health at work.

Be part of our movement for change in workplace mental health.

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