



# MENTAL HEALTH AT WORK GUIDE

Why a healthy workplace matters  
and how to build one.



# WELCOME TO A MORE EMPATHETIC WORKPLACE

The message has been spread loud and clear. Happy, healthy workforces lead to successful businesses. Industry leaders around the world are waking up to the fact that they can't afford to ignore mental health any longer.

But mental health is a complex issue, which can make people worried to discuss it. Many continue to suffer in silence, afraid that opening up about their struggles will damage their reputation or their career. Until we shift the stigma around mental health, people will still suffer without the support they need, and businesses will continue to pay the price through reduced productivity.

This guide covers everything you need to know about mental health in the workplace. We'll also give you some practical advice designed to help you create a more supportive and healthy work environment.



# IS MENTAL HEALTH REALLY A BUSINESS ISSUE?

In short? **Yes**. In fact, it's **absolutely vital** if you want a productive workplace.

Mental illness is responsible for 72 million working days lost and costs £34.9 billion each year. At any given time, 1 in 6 working-age adults have symptoms associated with mental ill health. Every year it costs business £1,300 per employee whose mental health needs are unsupported.

On top of this, there is a major disconnect between senior business

leaders and the wider workforce. 69% of UK line managers say that supporting employee wellbeing is a core skill, but only 13% have received mental health training. Only 14% of employees feel able to disclose a mental health issue to a manager. In a recent UK survey, stress, anxiety and depression were the three most concealed issues. Why does this happen?

Because people fear that opening up about their struggles will damage their reputation, make them appear weak, or even threaten their position.

Unfortunately, there is a reason for those fears. Almost 10% of employees who disclosed mental health issues were subject to disciplinary procedures, demotion or dismissal.



MENTAL  
HEALTH  
IS VITAL

# HOW DOES MENTAL HEALTH IMPACT BUSINESS?

While mental health is fundamentally a human issue, it also has a direct impact on your bottom line. Any success that your company enjoys is due to the hard work of its staff, but when stress really bites, you'll see worse performance, increased absenteeism, and a high churn rate.

According to the Chief Medical Officer at BHSF, without early intervention strategies, an open workplace culture, and a proactive approach to employee mental health, this issue is not going away.

In fact, if employers don't act now, employee wellbeing and productivity will continue to decline.

- Driven by an 'always on' culture, studies show that more than 40% of all workers face high stress in their jobs, negatively affecting their productivity, health and family stability.
- Mental health costs UK businesses up to £8 billion annually.
- The UK loses 12.8 million working days per year due to work-related stress.
- The average employee takes 8.4 sick days a year. Those suffering from mental ill health take 19.6 days off due to stress, depression or anxiety.
- Addressing wellbeing at work increases productivity by 12%.



**HOW CAN WE**

**BRING ABOUT**

**CHANGE?**

Check-ins are a vital tool, but they may require a shift in how the employee/ employer relationship works.

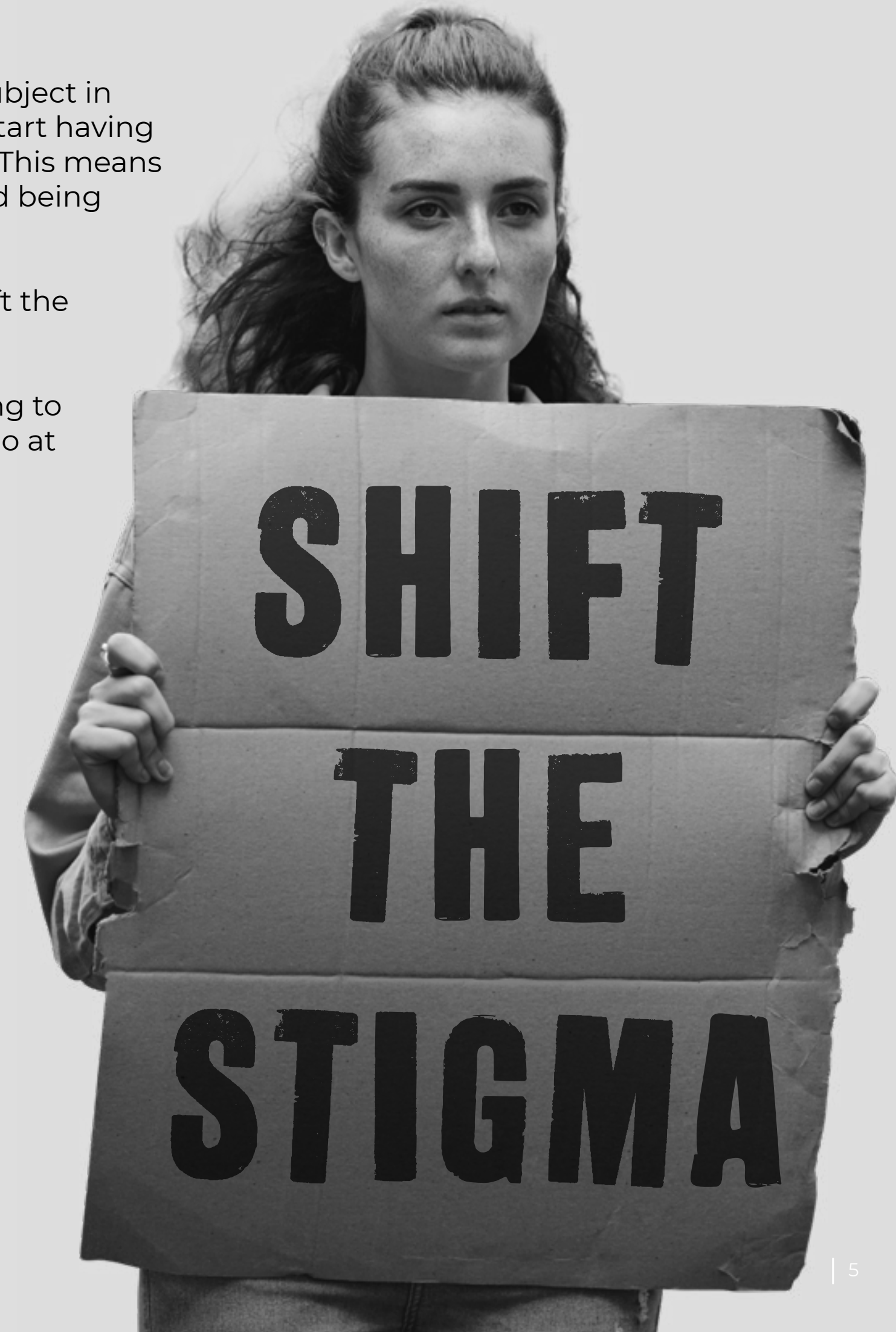
Download our complete guide for more.

Mental health has long been seen as a taboo subject in the workplace. For this to change, we need to start having proactive conversations around mental health. This means sharing our experiences, confiding in peers, and being available to help others when they need it.

Only by being open with each other will we shift the stigma around mental health.

Managers have a key role to play here. By getting to know their team members beyond what they do at work, they help create an environment where employees feel comfortable talking about personal matters.

One way to encourage this is through regular check-ins, where managers and employees discuss not only progress and performance, but also wellbeing.





## APPROACH

## WITH

## EMPATHY

If you want a truly safe environment, you can't just drop a one-size-fits-all fix to every employee. Your approach should be personalised for each person.

Work affects people in different ways. What one person might find stressful; another might find exciting. The only way to figure out what works for each person is to talk to them.

Regular discussions between employees and managers can uncover the factors that are having a detrimental effect on mental health and help them shape work to suit the individual needs of the employee.

# BEWARE OF BURNOUT

One of the biggest factors in poor workplace mental health is burnout. In fact, burnout cases have increased to the point where the World Health Organization has officially recognised it as an occupational phenomenon and was included in the 11th Revision of the International Classification of Diseases.

Burnout is what happens when someone is chronically stressed at work. It's a state of complete physical and mental exhaustion, which can often lead to physical symptoms and becoming completely detached from work. Once someone becomes burnt out, it is very

difficult for them to break out of it short of making major lifestyle changes- which can include finding a new job.

Managers and business leaders are responsible for preventing this. This means ensuring that workloads are reasonable, deadlines are realistic, and targets are achievable.

By checking in regularly with each member of their team, managers can find out how they are really feeling about their workload.



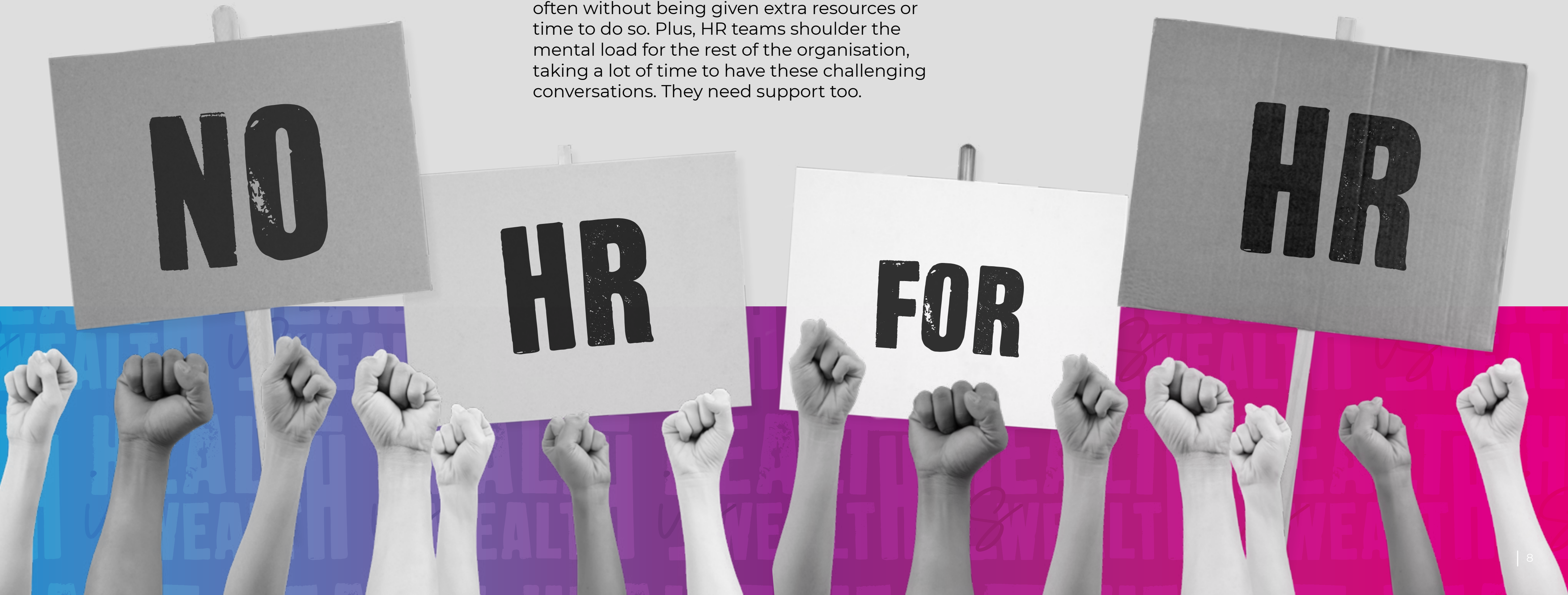
**Over half of HR professionals are on the verge of quitting due to burnout.**

That's an incredibly high number. HR is often seen as a line of defence for employee wellbeing, leading the charge on managing initiatives, providing additional support when it's needed.

**But who supports them?**

As the function develops, more companies are now putting more pressure on HR teams to partner with other business functions, to provide more and more strategic value to the wider business and to deliver effective transformation projects. That means they're having to draw even more from the same well, often without being given extra resources or time to do so. Plus, HR teams shoulder the mental load for the rest of the organisation, taking a lot of time to have these challenging conversations. They need support too.

If you want a more effective focus on wellbeing, HR must be part of the conversation, both as the team that will be actioning your plan, and one of the most affected by what you do.





# MANAGEMENT

# IS ABOUT

# PEOPLE

Managers have a greater influence on their team members than anyone else in the workplace. People don't quit bad jobs, they quit bad managers.

In fact, 91% of managers agree that what they do affects the wellbeing of their staff, but only 69% of employees feel that their line manager is genuinely concerned about their wellbeing.

In many cases, people become managers because they are experienced or successful in their specialised field, or perhaps because they exhibit certain qualities traditionally associated with leadership – confidence, assertiveness, the ability to make decisions.

That doesn't mean they're the best at managing people.

Less than a quarter (24%) of managers have received any training in mental health, meaning over three quarters of managers are totally un-equipped for handling one of the biggest workplace issues of our time. Inexperienced managers can wind up doing much more harm than good as they can end up either not having these conversations, stereotyping employees who are struggling, or even dismissing their concerns.

But with effective training in this area, managers can learn to understand the human factors that affect performance. It also helps them broach sensitive subjects with colleagues, understand how conscious and unconscious prejudices work, and how to listen without judgement. Upskilling is vital.

A person with their back to the camera, wearing a light-colored hoodie, holds a large cardboard sign that says "QUIT" in bold, black, sans-serif capital letters. The background is a solid red color.A person's hands are visible holding a large cardboard sign that says "PEOPLE" in bold, black, sans-serif capital letters. The background is a solid red color.A person's hands are visible holding a large cardboard sign that says "BAD MANAGERS" in bold, black, sans-serif capital letters. The background is a solid red color.A person's hands are visible holding a large cardboard sign that says "NOT JOBS" in bold, black, sans-serif capital letters. The background is a solid red color.

# WHAT OTHER STRATEGIES ARE THERE?

While you need to take personalised approaches to wellbeing, here are four basic strategies that can be applied generally to any workplace to get you started.

## ■ 1. Surveys

While it is the job of a manager to discuss the wellbeing of team members during check-ins, the HR department or senior leadership are responsible for understanding the wellbeing of the workforce at large.

The best way to do this is through mental health surveys, where employees can disclose information with anonymity.

But beware: if you carry out a survey, you'll have to act on the results. Asking employees to share their experiences and then ignoring them will do more harm than good.

## ■ 2. Mental health first aiders

You wouldn't ask a manager to fix a broken arm. Mental health first aiders are a vital tool to support employees, as they're not only trained in mental health, they're also independent and unbiased.

Knowing that these people are removed from direct management and internal politics may encourage more people to come forward and discuss their mental health in confidence, safe in the knowledge that it won't have a detrimental effect on their career.

## ■ 3. Encourage openness and honesty

For positive change to take place, you need to encourage a culture of openness and honesty in the workplace.

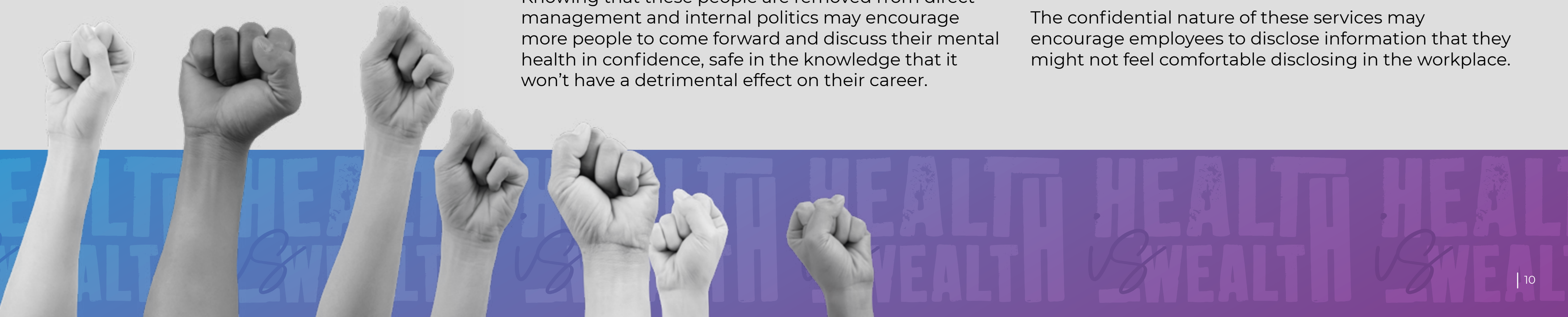
The best way to do this is through regular check-ins, where employees meet face-to-face with their managers and have constructive conversations about anything work related.

Regular meetings help managers and employees to get to know each other on a human level, and breakdown traditional boundaries between both parties.

## ■ 4. Offer independent support

Another option is to offer independent support as part of your benefits package. Mental health services can be expensive, with NHS provisions having long waiting lists. You can give your people access to a range of professionals and services, from counselling to advice around financial management.

The confidential nature of these services may encourage employees to disclose information that they might not feel comfortable disclosing in the workplace.



# WHAT RESOURCES ARE AVAILABLE?

There are many organisations dedicated to raising awareness around mental health, both globally and locally. Many provide information, training courses and events designed to help us better understand the challenges associated with mental health. Here are just a few examples.

**GLOBAL**

The World Federation for Mental Health:

The Centre for Global Mental Health:

**UK**

ACAS:

St. John's ambulance:

Mind:

**A SOLUTION**

**THAT PUTS YOUR**

**PEOPLE FIRST**

What's the biggest barrier that's stopping you from helping employees with their mental health?

For many HR professionals, **it's time.**

Looking after the mental wellbeing of your employees takes a personalised approach, and that takes time. With many HR departments stretched to capacity, time is a precious resource. With day-to-day admin, compliance and crises to consider, taking a moment to ask an employee how they're doing becomes a luxury.

**We see the world of work a little differently.**

Not only does People First free you up from a huge range of administrative tasks, it makes prioritising employee wellbeing much simpler. Offering training for managers, supporting effective check-ins, even utilising sentiment analysis to get a better understanding of how the company as a whole is feeling, all become simpler with People First in your corner.

