

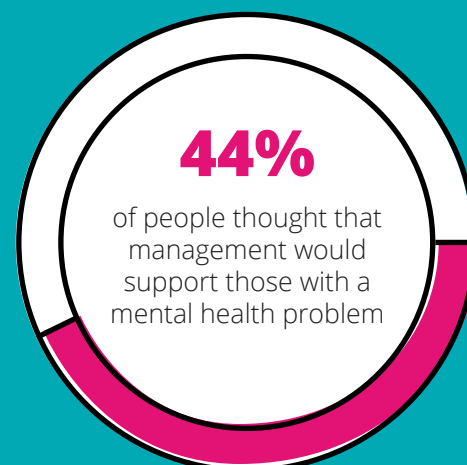
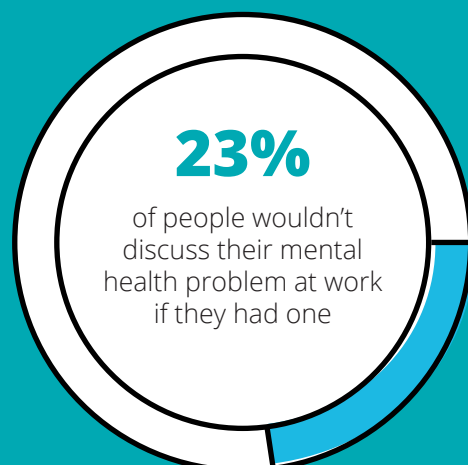
# Let's Chat

"Let's Chat" is a practical tool with guidance, tips and scenarios for line managers and supervisors to start open and honest conversations about mental health in the workplace, without fear of stigma and discrimination. It was developed with support from employers and people who have experienced mental health stigma and discrimination in the workplace.

---

## Did you know?

A YouGov poll commissioned by See Me in 2016 found that 23% of people wouldn't discuss a mental health problem in the workplace if they had one for fear of the reaction they would receive, and only 44% thought that someone in their workplace with a mental health problem would be supported by management.



**L**ook for an appropriate space and time – Conversations about mental health can (and should) happen anywhere and anytime: in the canteen, at an office party, in meetings, in the corridor, etc. Invite your employee to continue the conversation somewhere private, comfortable and neutral. If you are unable to speak at that moment in time, arrange a suitable time and place to talk, and ensure the individual will be safe until you speak again. Prioritise the conversation over other meetings and deadlines if you sense urgency.

**E**nsure confidentiality – Confidentiality is key to safe, pertinent and effective disclosure. It might feel uncomfortable but don't avoid discussing all possible outcomes about confidentiality. Being upfront and honest about that from the start will build credibility and trust. Be ready to discuss and agree with the employee what (if any) information they would like shared, and with whom. Note that you may have to break confidentiality if the person is experiencing a crisis and is at serious risk of harm to themselves or others. Remember, any information shared in confidence should be kept confidential even if you no longer line manage the individual. Mental health problems shouldn't be the source of gossip in the workplace and such behaviour should be challenged.

**T**ake an open mind-set into the conversation – Don't assume that high absence or poor performance is due to a lack of interest or ability; they could be as a result of poor mental health or wellbeing. Raise the employment issues with the employee but listen to them without passing judgement, and take their concerns into account addressing the mental health issue if it arises.

**S**ee the whole person – Everyone's experience of mental health is different so treat people as individuals and focus on the person, not the perceived problem. The issue may be a direct result of workplace conditions and/or things happening in their personal life (physical illness, bereavement, financial worries, menopause, parenthood, etc.) might be contributing to them experiencing poor mental health. Be ready to have conversations that relate to events outside the workplace.

**C**ommunicate regularly with your employees – Check in with employees regularly, particularly if you've noticed a change in them. Ensure you are accessible to them, either in person, by phone or email. Make sure you take steps to normalise the conversation; for example, by adapting your support and supervision templates to include questions around wellbeing, and raising it during team meetings.

**H**umanise the conversation – Be aware of how you project yourself in terms of voice volume, body language, conversational responses and adjust accordingly. Avoid asking questions that require a 'yes' or 'no' answer. Use open questions instead. Respond with empathy to what they say and reassure them that you hold a genuine interest in understanding them better.

**A**ctively listen – When employees tell you they're struggling, give them your undivided attention and really listen to what they say. Don't interrupt them with questions until they are done. Check your understanding by paraphrasing what they have said back to them, and avoid using dismissive comments like 'you just need to go for a walk' or 'you are young, what do you have to worry about?'. Reflect words they use to show that you've listened and understood; it should encourage them to open up more.

**T**alk about other support options – If your employees experience an on-going mental health issue that affects their daily life then the workplace has a duty to put 'reasonable adjustments' in place to support the individual to stay in work or return to work following a period of ill-health. Discuss the issues constructively and ask what support they need so that they can continue to be able to do their job effectively. Involve them as much as possible in finding solutions to any work related difficulties by asking them 'what would you like to happen next?'. Signpost to further information and support: GP, human resources, occupational health, Employee Assistance Programme, supporting charities, etc.

# Good practice scenarios



**Manager:** Good morning, how are you?

**Employee:** I'm not very well, actually.

**Manager:** I'm sorry to hear that. Are you okay continuing this chat after the team meeting?

**Employee:** Are you sure? I don't want to burden you; I know you're busy.

**Manager:** Of course! I think this room is booked but I can look for a quiet space here or we could grab a cuppa at that new place across the road. What would you prefer?

**Employee:** Somewhere off-site where nobody can hear us would be good. It's pretty personal stuff...

**Manager:** Of course! We can talk at the café with a hot drink; it's freezing!



## Tips

Offering options gives the person control and empowers them to make a choice. Don't leave it to the individual to find a place to meet as this can create too much pressure. Don't assume the manager's office is a neutral space; look for an informal atmosphere instead.

**Manager:** You mentioned that you're not feeling great; would you like to talk about it?

**Employee:** I'd rather not. The last time I talked to a supervisor about it I was told that "I was just having a bad day" and I "should pull myself together". Others started acting weird, avoiding me and stuff, and I found out they were told about my PTSD and they didn't trust me. I left the job because of it.

**Manager:** I can't speak for your previous supervisor but I can assure you that I take confidentiality very seriously. How about we write down anything you feel would be worth capturing, and we can agree what's worth sharing and with whom?

**Employee:** Right now I don't want anyone else to know anything.

**Manager:** I'm happy to keep it between us but if at anytime I become concerned about your safety or others' I have a legal duty to inform authorities that can keep you safe. If that happens I'll tell you, okay?

**Employee:** I didn't know that but sure, it's not that bad.



### Tips

Use your judgement to decide when in the conversation it's best to bring up confidentiality, but the sooner the better. If the person is in crisis, make sure you seek support and don't leave the individual until you feel it's safe to do so.

**Manager:** I've noticed that you've arrived late a few times and you seem distant and disengaged in the mornings. It's not your performance I'm worried about; it's your wellbeing. Are you okay?

**Employee:** Yes... Well, I've been given new medication and I'm struggling to adjust to it. In the mornings it makes me drowsy and I find it really hard to leave my bed until 9am. Sorry I've been late.

**Manager:** I see. Would a 10am start and 6pm finish help? We can revisit this pattern next week and see whether you need formal adjustments.

**Employee:** Yes, that'd be very helpful. Thank you.

**Manager:** I'll have to let the team know that we're changing your hours. Would you feel comfortable agreeing a form of words to share?

**Employee:** I don't want people to gossip about me or think that I'm given special treatment. How about something like 'Fiona is changing her hours temporarily for health and wellbeing reasons'?

**Manager:** I think that'd do nicely. Thank you for being open to doing that.



### Tips

Ask about the employee's support network with a view to keeping them safe. Remember, it's up to the employee how much they disclose about their own lives. Wellbeing Action Plans can be helpful tools to guide the conversation around wellbeing in work.

**Manager:** I don't mean to be nosy but, I've noticed you haven't been yourself recently.

**Employee:** I don't really want to talk about it. There's no point.

**Manager:** That's okay, you don't have to. I'm here if you'd like to chat and I won't judge you.

**Employee:** Sorry, I don't mean to be difficult. I've been having some financial troubles recently, you know? It's okay when I'm at sea but when I go back home, I gamble with my pals and I go out quite a lot.

**Manager:** I see... what support do you have in place?

**Employee:** None, really. I can't afford anything just now.

**Manager:** Let me tell you about our free and anonymous Employee Assistance Programme.



### Tips

You aren't expected to fix personal issues but you can listen and signpost to further information and support. Remember that some experiences can seem insignificant to you but they can mean a lot to others.

**Manager:** I heard you left the staff room crying at lunchtime.

Are you okay?

**Employee:** I shouldn't be this emotional at work, sorry. It's just... I went to have my lunch. Hannah and David were debating whether her friend who has schizophrenia should be allowed to have children because she could be dangerous or pass 'it' on to them. When David said 'can you imagine the life of that poor child?' I started crying and left. I heard them say 'what's up with her, is she mentally unwell?'

**Manager:** I'm really sorry they said what they did. That's unacceptable. I will have a word with them.

**Employee:** I don't want to get them in trouble. The thing is, I was diagnosed with schizophrenia in my 20s and Paul and I are talking about having children, so they touched a nerve.

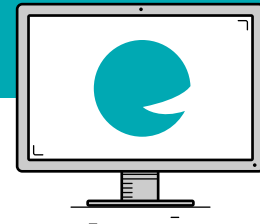
**Manager:** I didn't know that but thank you for sharing. My friend has schizophrenia and has three children that love her to bits. Sadly the illness is poorly understood.



### Tips

Work hard to allow the person time to open up about their feelings and look at what will help them. Avoid thinking about how you're going to respond while they speak. Don't close down avenues of conversation even when it doesn't sound like it's work related. Take steps to address and challenge stigmatising attitudes when you become aware of them.

# Signposting to further support



**Breathing Space** – A free, confidential phone line service for any individual who is experiencing low mood and depression, or who is unusually worried and in need of someone to talk to. Call: 0800 83 85 87; lines are open Monday-Thursday 6pm-2am and Friday-Monday 6pm-6am, or visit: [www.breathingspace.scot](http://www.breathingspace.scot).

**Samaritans** – Provides free confidential non-judgemental emotional support for people who are experiencing feelings of distress or despair, including those which could lead to suicide. The service is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Call: 116 123, or visit: [www.samaritans.org](http://www.samaritans.org).

**NHS24** – A call centre operated by the NHS to provide patients with health advice and help over the phone when your usual GP services aren't available. Referrals can also be made over the phone to crisis support and other mental health professionals out-with normal GP practice working hours (Mondays to Fridays between 6pm and 8am, public holidays and all weekend). Call: 111 or if you think you need an emergency ambulance, call 999 and speak to the operator. You can also visit: [www.nhs24.scot](http://www.nhs24.scot).

**7 Cups** – A website (also available in an app) which provides online therapy and free support to people experiencing emotional distress by connecting them with trained listeners. Visit: [www.7cups.com](http://www.7cups.com).

**Healthy Working Lives** – Their Mentally Healthy Workplaces training for managers provides good practice in promoting positive mental health and wellbeing as well as offering practical examples of how to support employees experiencing mental health problems. Visit: [www.healthyworkinglives.scot](http://www.healthyworkinglives.scot).

**See Me** – Our See Me in Work e-Learning is an easy to use development tool to help you understand more about mental health stigma and discrimination in work. Register for free at: [www.seemescotland.org](http://www.seemescotland.org).

# About See Me

We are Scotland's programme to end mental health stigma and discrimination enabling those who experience mental health problems to live fulfilled lives. We are funded by the Scottish Government and Comic Relief, and managed by SAMH (Scottish Association for Mental Health) and the Mental Health Foundation. Our mission is to mobilise people to work together and lead a movement to end mental health stigma and discrimination; work with people to change negative behaviour towards people with mental health problems, and ensure that the human rights of people with mental health problems are respected and upheld.

We believe change is needed to improve the culture of mental health so its impact on every aspect of our lives including where we live, learn, work and receive care isn't ignored. When we struggle with our mental health we often face stigma and unfair discrimination in all these areas. See Me is focused on four settings where stigma is most prevalent and has the most detrimental impact: in education, health and social care, communities and workplaces.

See Me encourages workplaces to get involved in campaigns and activities that support employees to open conversations about mental health, and build the capacity of line managers to support employees to stay in / return to work when they experience mental health problems. Visit our website for details: [www.seemescotland.org](http://www.seemescotland.org).

## **About Let's Chat**

This tool was created in response to an expressed need by employees of the four private sector employers (ScotRail, Burness Paull LLP, Apex Hotels Ltd. and Babcock Rail) involved in the See Me pilot, funded by the Workplace Equality Fund administered by Impact Funding Partners – an organisation heavily supportive of equality, diversity and human rights – on behalf of Scottish Government.

The pilot trialled a tailored consultancy approach to mental health inclusion in the workplace, with a focus on equalities. The learning, tools and resources from the pilot were embedded into See Me's wider workplace programme.