Youth friendly mental health employment policy

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## Authors: Lauren Roberts Turner, Freya Jamieson-Smith & Ellen Ward

# Introduction

The idea for this policy was born from the YE2030 report <https://ye2030.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/YE2030-Report-Full-Version.pdf> which was the culmination of a co-designed research project into the ‘Employment and prospects for young people in England post-COVID19’.

The report found 35% of young people reported struggling with their mental health during the pandemic. However, this struggle was not equally shared. Young people who had experienced discrimination were more likely to have mental health issues due to COVID-19. Young women suffered from mental health 1.5 times more than their male counterparts. Most strikingly of all, those who identified as disabled we three times more likely to suffer from mental health and almost three quarters of disabled participants stating they had struggled with their mental health during the pandemic. [[1]](#footnote-1)

As covid-19 restrictions begin to ease, it is becoming increasingly obvious that this crisis will have a long-term impact on young people. This can be seen in a rise in youth unemployment and poor mental health among young people.

Our aim with this mental health focused section of the youth friendly employer mark is to ensure employers are committed to supporting the mental health of young employees.

It aims to push back against the widening inequalities in young people’s employment and mental health by providing a framework to help those who are potentially more vulnerable to poor mental health to be supported to stay and thrive in employment.

A team of youth campaigners have since conducted more research with young people and mental health experts into what positive workplace support looks like for young people. The findings from this research have been used to inform the following in work youth mental health support policy.

Our policy will cover:

* Transitions into the workplace for a young employee
* In work support and creating a mentally healthy work environment
* Providing the relevant training
* Signposting to other services

# Transition into the workplace for a young employee

The transition period for a new employee is a fundamental moment that sets them up for the rest of their time in a particular workplace. This is especially important for young people as they are likely to have limited employment experience and may not know what to expect or what is expected of them and how the world of employment works. It is important that a young person’s transition is well managed to ensure they feel supported when beginning work. A supportive transition will include:

* A detailed inductions that clearly outline their duties and the expectations from the employee
* The information of all support available to them
* A meeting with the team they will be working within and
* A mentor, buddy or coach assigned to them for support and regular check ins
* A Wellness Action Plan as a part of the employee’s induction

Induction

An induction is essential and should include detailed information about what is involved when completing the job on a day-to-day basis. The induction should begin before a young person’s first day in the job so that they can be sure of expectations before they arrive. This should include information about where to go on their first day, who their point of contact is, when to arrive, what the dress code is, and what will be expected of them in their first few weeks. It should also list what training and meetings they will need to attend and the initial work they will be expected to complete.

In the first week/weeks of starting employment the young person should be provided with useful resources and basic training on how to complete regular tasks that they are expected to do in their role (for example, how to use a software). Additional topics to cover include:

* how the company/organisation is run
* the key values of the company
* an introduction to their working team and being told how staff works together
* clarity on how long and when the individual can take their break
* how to request annual leave
* a space for any questions the employee has to be answered

Development opportunities should also be planned and discussed as a part of their induction. This will show the organisation is committed to employee progression.

By doing this, it will provide the young person with the confidence and work etiquette that is needed to progress in their career. It will also make it clear that the staff are supportive of the young person and will help them to go further.

Topics to be covered should include:

* key performance indicators
* a career development plan with opportunities for progression and to move into different parts of the organisation/ sector if appropriate.

As a part of their induction, the individual should receive information on what/ how to access the mental health support that is available to them. This support should be accessible to the individual at all points of their time within the organisation, including from the moment they start. In addition to this, a Wellness Action Plan should be completed with the individual to establish what support the organisation can offer them.

A Wellness Action Plan can then be used when reminding management and the individual of what keeps them well in the workplace. Mind’s “Guide for employees - Wellness Action Plans” is a useful document that we recommend for this. [[See here](https://www.mind.org.uk/media-a/5760/mind-guide-for-employees-wellness-action-plans_final.pdf)][[2]](#footnote-2)

This document should be reviewed three months in the first year of employment and every six months thereafter. It should also be made available upon request.

Alongside the Wellness Action Plan, an opportunity should be provided in the induction to share details about personal circumstances or reasonable adjustments that the employee may need. It is important to ensure this information is documented securely and can only be accessed by those who need it when supporting an employee’s wellbeing and progression.

Peer Mentor, Buddies and Coaching

Depending on the size of the organisation, the individual should be assigned the following:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Size of Organisation: | Type of peer support required: |
| Under 20 employees | A mentor to be assigned to the individual.  \*\*Optional – offering the opportunity to have a buddy assigned would be advantageous. |
| Over 20 employees | A mentor AND buddy to be appointed to the individual.  \*\*Optional - offering the service of a Coach to be considered if within the organisation’s capacity. |

**Mentor**

A mentor is someone who provides work and wellbeing support to the individual. This might include answering questions about how to complete a work task, offering advice over work-related worries/ queries, supporting the young person to track and pursue progression opportunities. They should not be their direct manager but a person, in their work, with whom they can have a more informal supportive relationship.

We suggest that meetings with the mentor begin when the individual starts their position and would initially occur on a weekly basis until the individual has settled in. Once they feel more comfortable and confident in the workplace, the meetings can be moved to a monthly basis. This decision should be made through communication between the mentor and the individual. The young person should also be able to book additional meetings if there is something that they wish to speak about.

**Buddy**

A Buddyis a work colleague who has been with the company for over a year who has had similar experiences such as starting in a similar role or being a similar age.They are apoint of contact for informal support, day to day questions, checking in etc. They would be linked up with the young person when they begin working there but, unlike a mentor, a buddy would be someone you could speak to more casually without scheduling specific peer support meetings with them. The buddy would also be potentially instrumental in helping the young person form both social and professional connections in their workplace.

**Coach**

A coach is someone who can help support the young person with their transition into work and then offer further guidance in relation to their development and role in the workplace. Theycould be an external professional who would help the young person to manage their mental health and wellness in the workplace. By not being a team member, this would give the individual an opportunity to speak to someone impartial which should make them more comfortable to open up. They can also help support the individual with topics such as optimising their productivity, accessing training opportunities, managing their workload and work-related stress etc.

A coach can be independent of the organisation or can be an employee who has been specially trained. This may not be achievable for all organisations as it would require funding. Where it is not possible to fund a coach, providing the young employee with both a mentor **and** a buddy will ensure that they are as supported as possible.

Additional Support

The young person should have regular supervision, especially from their manager, to allow an opportunity to share progress, receive support and to raise any issues.

A manager should be there to oversee the work and wellbeing of the young person and should be responsible for making sure that the individual is healthy and happy within the workplace.

The manager is also responsible for providing additional information about any other support that is available. This information should be shared as a part of the individual’s induction and on an ongoing basis. Information about support should be clear and easy to access. It is important that the young person is aware of the support available and understands all the information about the support. In addition, they should be able to ask their manager/mentor/ buddy for help in regard to accessing support.

Other transitions

In the young person’s working life, they may experience other transitions, such as after extended periods of absence (e.g. illnesses, returning to office after working from home due to COVID-19, maternity and paternity leave, etc.).

YoungMinds[[3]](#footnote-3) released a survey that showed what young people think the Government and workplaces could do to support their mental health, when returning to work after COVID-19. They highlighted that support should be tailored towards the individual and their own personal circumstances. We suggest implementing these recommendations from the YoungMinds 2020 report:

* Toolkits or guides about how to cope in employment post-covid
* Access to mental health support (e.g. counsellors)
* More regular check-ins
* Clear guidelines detailing how returning to the workspace will operate practically
* Discussions with employees about when and how they feel comfortable returning to work
* Choice around whether to return to the office or keep working remotely or partially remotely (where possible)
* Mental Health Awareness training or support session for managers
* Offer a refreshment day for anyone (especially new staff) who feel they need a reminder about their work and responsibilities
* the topic of accommodations, such as separate offices or added cleaning or working from home options, to help address employees worries should be spoken about.

Before returning to work there should be an open discussion with their mentor and manager to share worries about returning to work, including a wellness discussion and any reasonable adjustments to support an individual. The adjustments should be altered and reviewed if the individual feels it is required.

# In Work Support and a Mentally Healthy Environment

In work support

To create a culture that promotes good mental health in the workplace, this culture needs to be led and valued from the top down, from the CEO to the senior management team to the rest of the staff. Below are some suggestions for how a mentally healthy workplace can be achieved.

Open conversations around mental health are key to creating a mentally healthy

Workplace

All employees should feel comfortable and be encouraged to discuss wellbeing and mental health at work. This starts with already established members of the team, such as managers and senior members of staff. If these more senior members of the team speak openly and comfortably about their own challenges or experiences, this encourages newer and younger members of staff to openly share their own experiences and needs.

It can sometimes be difficult to start these conversations but there are multiple resources available to help employers to promote awareness and start conversations about mental health. Having a content plan to ensure that this conversation is ongoing can also be useful. The Mental Health Calendar can guide employers to specific dates that additional activities/awareness promotion can be implemented to increase awareness and prompt further conversations about mental health.

* The [Mental Health Calendar](https://www.time-to-change.org.uk/take-action/resources-your-workplace/mental-health-calendar)
* Resources from [Mind UK](about:blank)
* Resources from [Time to Change](about:blank)

Wellness Action Plans

Having a standardised approach where mental health and wellbeing is discussed on a regular basis with each employee can be a useful way to check-in and ensure that every employee can ask for support if they need it. Wellness Action Plans are an effective way of managing these check-ins as they guide the employee and their manager or mentor through a series of questions that help to prompt the conversation. These plans should be co-produced by the manager and employee when they first start working there, they should then be revisited on a regular basis. We recommend revisiting the Wellness Action Plans every 3 months for the first year of employment and every 6 months thereafter, or upon an employee’s request.

Mental health support in the workplace

According to Health and Safety regulations, employers have a responsibility to provide instruction and training to employees on health and safety and to appoint a competent person as the safety officer[[4]](#footnote-4). The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) also recommends that, as a minimum, an organisation should have the tools to assist first-aid and a person appointed to take charge, preferably someone with first aid training[[5]](#footnote-5). These standards should also be upheld for mental health and wellbeing.

#### **Staff training: Employers should ensure staff are trained to support their own and colleagues’ wellbeing. There are many training resources available, including training in mental health first aid, managing employee mental health, resilience, and wellbeing, etc.**

* [ACAS](https://obs.acas.org.uk/EventsList.aspx?SubRegionId=-1&SearchTopicId=73&SubRegion=--%20All%20Regions%20--&SearchTopic=Mental%20health%20in%20the%20workplace%20(digital))
* [SAMH](https://www.samh.org.uk/get-involved/workplace/workplace-training)
* [MHFA](https://mhfaengland.org/organisations/workplace/)
* [Mind](https://www.mind.org.uk/workplace/mental-health-at-work/)
* [St. John Ambulance](https://www.sja.org.uk/course-information/guidance-and-help/mental-health-resources/workplace-mental-health-first-aid-training-guide/)

#### **Train a Youth Mental Health Champion or Mental Health First Aid Officer & promote this role and person to employees: Employers should also appoint a competent person to promote and support mental health and wellbeing in the workplace. This person will be responsible for responding to situations where someone in the workplace needs support for their mental health and wellbeing by being able to signpost them to the tools and resources available to them.**

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#### **Mental health support poster: Most organisations will have one or more posters outlining the importance of health and safety and where to go for further resources and support to ensure they are safe at work. A similar poster for mental health support and resources should be displayed to help those employees who do not feel comfortable opening up to their colleagues or managers to find the support they need.**

Additional funded support

In some cases, a young person may need some additional support to overcome mental health and wellbeing challenges. Addressing these challenges by providing support early on is important for both the young employee and the company. Mental health challenges that are not addressed can become harder to manage and impact on the quality of someone’s work[[6]](#footnote-6). Where possible, employers should be willing to fund additional support that is needed by employees. If providing funding for additional support is not possible, employers can still support employees to seek out this support by providing necessary time off, signposting to locally available resources, and, importantly, providing an understanding and supportive response.

Informal spaces

Providing staff with informal spaces to spend time together encourages them to form relationships beyond work and can be beneficial to their wellbeing as it provides them with a support system of peers within the workplace[[7]](#footnote-7). This space can be a dedicated lunch area or canteen, a library with seating, or any space that is dedicated to a function other than work. These spaces can then also be used by staff when they need a break or some quiet space to take a rest.

This type of engagement can also be encouraged by organisational culture such as avoiding a culture of having lunch at your desk, organising small events such as team lunches, and having coffee mornings or other in-house events and activities[[8]](#footnote-8).

Regular reminders of support available

Having regular check-ins, conversations about mental health and reminders of the support available, both internally and externally, will help young people to be open about any challenges they face and to seek support when they need it. One way to ensure this happens is to encourage buddies, mentors and/or managers to regularly speak to young employees about the support available. Another effective approach is to have daily or weekly team check-ins where everyone is asked to share how they are feeling, what their current stressors are and if there is any support they need. This can be done confidentially to allow employees to open up and should be followed up if required.

Strong youth representation in organisation decision making

Having a voice and being listened to helps young people to feel safe and supported at work. A culture that supports youth wellbeing in the workplace can be created by ensuring there is strong youth representation on boards and other decision-making bodies within the organisation. Giving young people the opportunity to comment on policies and plans being proposed in their workplace/organisation empowers them to voice concerns, suggest ideas, and ultimately build a workplace and culture where they and their peers can thrive[[9]](#footnote-9).

# Mental First Aid and Signposting

Training requirements

It is important that mental health training is carried out to ensure those working with colleagues of a range of ages are able to spot signs of deteriorating mental health or wellbeing. It will enable them to provide basic mental health support and first aid (MHFA) to potentially prevent, and help deal with a crisis or challenge if and when it occurs.

Employers must ensure that for organisations of 5 employees or more, at least one member of staff has completed a MHFA qualification. For those organisations with 20 employees or more, at least two members of staff should have completed a MHFA qualification. For larger organisations, it is advisable to train more mental health first aiders however, this is at the organisation’s discretion. All organisations (of 5 or more employees) must ensure mental health first aid can be provided to all employees.

We would strongly suggest all employees receive some form of training in how to support mental health and wellbeing in the workplace. This can be official mental health first aid training or other forms of relevant training. This training is especially important for managers, particularly those who manage teams which include young people. This will equip managers with the knowledge, skills and confidence to support good wellbeing within their teams and respond appropriately when staff experience poor mental health[[10]](#footnote-10).

* MHFA England, which specialises in providing Mental Health First Aid courses, offers a mental health first aid course for adults that can be taken online or face to face. If completed online, it takes place over four live training sessions, spread across two weeks, with self-learning activities in between[[11]](#footnote-11)..
* <https://mhfaengland.org/organisations/workplace/online-mental-health-first-aid/>In person, it is a two-day face-to-face course delivered across four manageable sessions[[12]](#footnote-12).
* <https://mhfaengland.org/organisations/workplace/2-day/> Both forms of the MHFA course cost £300pp to complete. MHFA England also offers the ‘mental health skills for managers’ course. This is ideal for larger organisations with many managers as the course cost £2,200 +VAT which includes the training of up to 16 managers, bringing the cost to less than £150 +VAT pp if all places were filled. <https://mhfaengland.org/organisations/workplace/mental-health-skills-for-managers/>
* If £300 feels like an unmanageable expense for your business or organisation there is a free government funded ‘mental health first aid and mental health advocacy in the workplace’ course which is available online only. It takes three weeks and participants will complete a level two CACHE qualification. It can be done through many online course providers, such as Reed, and is only available to those over the ages of 19. <https://www.learningcurvegroup.co.uk/courses/employers/level-2-mental-health-first-aid>
* If your organisation works with young people or has a large proportion of the workforce under 25, it is advisable to undertake the ‘psychological first aid: supporting children and young people’ course. It offers training on how to provide practical and emotional support to children and young people affected by emergencies or crisis situations.
  + <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/phe-launches-new-psychological-first-aid-training> This has been produced by public health England and covers those aged 0-25. It is free of charge and can be accessed via FutureLearn. <https://www.futurelearn.com/courses/psychological-first-aid-for-children-and-young-people>
* Mind offers a range of mental health training courses, including awareness courses for the whole organisation and specialist courses for managers. The costs are tailored to the size of the organisation and preferential rates are given to charities ensuring that these vital courses are affordable for all organisations regardless of size or focus. <https://www.mind.org.uk/workplace/mind-training/elearning/> They also offer in house training. <https://www.mind.org.uk/workplace/mind-training/in-house-training-from-mind/>

## **Signposting**

Positive culture building, awareness and mental health first aid training are indeed key to supporting employees with their mental health. However, managers and Mental Health First Aiders are not expected to act as mental health professionals. Signposting employees and colleagues who are struggling is a key role of managers and mental health first aiders in supporting individuals to access appropriate help. The earlier this help is accessed the more chance it has of being effective. It is therefore important that workplaces can give relevant signposting in a way which makes it as easy as possible to access the support and increases the likelihood of the employee following through on taking up the support.

Make the signposting relevant

Whenever possible, an organisation should ensure that they signpost resources that are specific to the age and situation of an individual. Good young person specific resources to signpost include:

* The Mix; offers support for under 25s. This includes a helpline, an email support service, 24/7 crisis messenger, 1-2-1 SMS chat service, short term counselling service, a group support chat, and a general chat to unwind. It also offers a full database of local, regional, and national organisations who can offer under 25s support.  <https://www.themix.org.uk/get-support>
* Kooth; is an ‘online mental wellbeing community’ that offers an online, anonymous counselling service for young people up to the age of 25, as well as peer support through moderated forums and articles published by young people. <https://www.kooth.com/>
* Anxiety UK; <https://www.anxietyuk.org.uk/> offers a self-help group and support to access therapy for those suffering with anxiety as well as specific workplace training which may be beneficial if a high proportion of your workplace suffers from anxiety. <https://www.anxietyuk.org.uk/workplace/>
* Bipolar UK offers online peer support groups and regional support groups for those suffering with Bipolar, employee and employer guides and information about Bipolar. <https://www.bipolaruk.org/>
* Beat offers online peer support groups and regional support groups for those suffering with eating disorders. It also offers extensive support for those supporting individuals who are struggling with an eating disorder including, 1-2-1 support, helplines and peer support groups. Information about eating disorders, tips for recovery and information about dealing with bad decisions that may have been made in regard to the treatment of someone with an eating disorder is also available.  <https://www.beateatingdisorders.org.uk/>
* Gamcare offers support for gambling problems, including a helpline, 0808 8020 133, which is available from 8am to midnight, seven days a week, a live chat room, a forum to share experiences, an individual recovery toolkit and information about gambling problems. <https://www.gamcare.org.uk/>

#### **Specific support for those who identify as part of LGBTQ+ community:**

* Switchboard offers a confidential, non-judgemental helpline, instant messaging service and email service for members of the LGBTQ+ and those wishing to support loved ones who are members of the LGBTQ+ community. [Switchboard LGBT+ Helpline](https://switchboard.lgbt/)

#### **Specific signposting for those with a diagnosed mental illness or condition:**

* Rethink mental illness aims to ‘improve the lives of people severely affected by mental illness through [a] network of local groups and services [and] expert information’. They have ‘a network of 140 peer support groups and over 200 services altogether to support those living with mental illness’.[We Rethink Mental Illness](https://www.rethink.org/)

More general support resources

* The Hub of Hope ‘is the UK’s leading mental health support database [that brings] local national, peer, community, charity, private and NHS mental health support services together in one place’. It provides information on mental health problems and indicators of poor mental health as well as a ‘need help now’ section for immediate support and a support finder which enables people to search by postcode for support services in their area. <https://hubofhope.co.uk/>
* Action for happiness is a collective of individuals working to create a happier society. <https://www.actionforhappiness.org/> The website offers tips and resources for helping you create more happiness in the world around you as well as ‘10 days of happiness; a free online coaching service for challenging times’. <https://10daysofhappiness.org/> This may be good for employees looking to boost their mood through positive action or those struggling with social isolation.
* The mental health foundation offers resources to help you manage your mental health and provide information about mental health conditions and good mental health ‘including an invaluable A-Z of mental health terms’. <https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/your-mental-health>
* Mind offers information and support for those ‘living with a mental health problem or supporting someone who is’ <https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support> including a specific information hub for those 18 and under. <https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/for-children-and-young-people/>
* Samaritans offers a free telephone service 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. You can call 116 123 free from any phone as well as via post and email or by visiting a local branch. [www.samaritans.org](http://www.samaritans.org)
* Shout provides immediate crisis support. Text SHOUT to 85258 ‘to chat by text to a trained and supervised volunteer. Free, confidential and available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.’ [www.giveusashout.org](http://www.giveusashout.org)
* One you - after answering 5 questions on your recent moods this website offers ‘a personalised plan of simple ideas to help improve your mental health and wellbeing.’ It also offers general information about making better choices to improve physical and mental health. One You (www.nhs.uk)

Options for finding more support

* The individual’s GP; ‘If they appear to be really struggling and you are concerned about them, or not sure where to signpost them [advising them to speak to] their GP is a good first port of call.’
* The NHS website can also be a good place to direct people to for general information on mental health problems and options for treatment. <https://www.nhs.uk/mental-health/>
* Helplines; ‘visit the Helplines Partnership website for a directory of UK helplines’: [www.helplines.org/helplines](http://www.helplines.org/helplines)

1. <https://ye2030.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/YE2030-Report-Full-Version.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Mind Wellness Action Plan <https://www.mind.org.uk/media-a/5760/mind-guide-for-employees-wellness-action-plans_final.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. YoungMinds survey [coronavirus-report-summer-2020-final.pdf (youngminds.org.uk)](https://youngminds.org.uk/media/3904/coronavirus-report-summer-2020-final.pdf) pg. 15 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. <https://www.citizensinformation.ie/en/employment/employment_rights_and_conditions/health_and_safety/health_safety_work.html#lb8b0e> [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. <https://www.hse.gov.uk/firstaid/> [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3062016/> [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/jiawertz/2019/11/30/create-great-company-culture-studies-show-start-with-office-space/?sh=61bc3e5623f3> [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/ericmosley/2020/02/18/how-managers-can-foster-more-meaningful-relationships-at-work/?sh=4589c77548bb> [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbesbusinesscouncil/2020/06/10/why-having-young-people-on-corporate-boards-is-a-game-changer/?sh=21512843759c> [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. (The University Mental Health Charter; principles of good practice, 2021) [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. (Mental Health First Aiders, n.d.) [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. (Mental Health First Aiders, n.d.) [↑](#footnote-ref-12)