

A Managers Guide...

...To Anxiety

WHAT IS ANXIETY?

- Anxiety is a natural response to pressure, feeling afraid or threatened.
- Anxiety is commonly described as a feeling of dread, fear, or unease which can range from mild to severe and is often characterised by worrying about what might happen.
- More severe anxiety begins when individuals start to worry about many small things, or relatively harmless situations. And when anxiety becomes intense it can start to interfere with daily life, relationships, and influence people in the workplace.

WHAT CAUSES ANXIETY?

Anxiety can be caused by many different situations and life experiences. Sometimes there are no obvious triggers for it and it's difficult to know what causes anxiety, which can be upsetting or stressful. Some people find more situations stressful and experience more challenges in life than others, and they get more anxious as a result. Possible causes of anxiety in the workplace include:

- A lack of control of workload.
- High demands on an individual's time and energy.
- Lack of clarity about responsibilities.
- Difficult relationships with colleagues, bullying or harassment in the workplace.
- Fear of changes in the workplace.
- Worrying about job performance and being found out to be a fraud or not good enough, so called 'imposter syndrome'.
- Lack of support in the workplace.
- Poor line management.
- Fear of redundancy.

REMEMBER: Anxiety can be developed from incidents from inside and outside the workplace. Anxiety does not have to come from a work incident only to impact someone at work.

WHAT DOES ANXIETY LOOK AND FEEL LIKE?

Anxiety can affect our mind, body, and behaviour, for instance we might feel tearful, get stress headaches, or start avoiding things or people that trigger anxiety. Some common anxiety symptoms include:

- Feeling tired, restless, or irritable.
- Feeling shaky, trembly, dizzy or sweating more.
- Being unable to concentrate or make decisions.
- Trouble sleeping.
- Worrying about the past or future or thinking something bad may happen in the future.
- Headaches, stomach aches, and muscle pain.
- Dry mouth.
- Pins and needles.
- Increase in heart rate, irregular heart rate, stronger heartbeat, or shortness of breath when feeling anxious.

For more information on anxiety and its symptoms, you can visit the NHS website: [NHS anxiety page](#).

REMEMBER: You shouldn't expect everyone with anxiety to have the same symptoms. Anxiety can look different from person to person, and everyone may not present with the exact same symptoms.

WHERE CAN EMPLOYEES GET HELP WITH OR WITHOUT A DIAGNOSIS?

- Please ensure you have discussed with the individual whether they want support, and if they do ensure you gain consent before making a referral.
- You can signpost staff to other resources including Vivup, Spiritual and pastoral care, and their GP.

Vivup: employee assistance programme provides 24/7, 365 days a year confidential helpline offering a non-judgemental listening ear and provides free staff counselling. Contact 0330 380 0658 or visit VIVUP.co.uk

The spiritual and pastoral care team offer a 24/7 confidential, sympathetic non-judgemental listening ear for those of any faith and those who do not have any religious belief. Call 01623 622515 ext. 2754 between 8.30am and 4.30pm / 3047 or call Switchboard for the on-call Chaplain 24/7.

Remind the staff member that their GP can be contacted about any health concern, whether that be physical or mental, and reaching out to their GP could mean access to different kinds of support.

WHAT CAN YOU DO TO HELP SOMEONE WITH ANXIETY?

There are a few things you can do to help someone who is suffering from anxiety in the moment, these can include:

- Listen and give them space to talk about how they are feeling.
- Let them set the pace of the conversation if they are anxious, asking them lots of questions and talking at them could increase their level of anxiety.
- If someone is beginning to panic because of anxiety in the workplace, encourage them to breathe and help them to calm down by taking slow deep breaths together.
- You could use the 3-3-3 rule. This technique helps to ground someone who is feeling anxious. It involves naming 3 things you can see, 3 things you can hear and moving 3 parts of your body.

REMEMBER: it is important to set boundaries when it comes to supporting people, you don't want to take on too much and be unable to support the individual at all.

ADJUSTMENTS WHICH MIGHT HELP AT WORK

If you have any questions or concerns about making reasonable adjustments in the workplace, please get in contact with occupational health: sfh-tr.occupational.health@nhs.net.

- Create a safe space for employees to speak out.
- Work with the person on what they want/need.
- Allowing flexible working hours and locations where possible, including being flexible about when breaks can be taken, and about whether the employee works from home, or in-person.
- Providing a safe space for a moment alone, or for respite after a panicked moment.
- Allow time off for appointments, e.g., psychology appointments and time after the appointments (as they may feel drained, both emotionally and physically).
- Offer designated workspaces to provide consistency.
- Avoid making changes to their routine/working day without discussing this with them.
- Where issues with workload and or demands are creating difficulties discuss with the person how and what to prioritise from their workload.
- Provide clear and direct instructions for tasks and break this down into manageable chunks.
- If the person is struggling with their confidence in their role (imposter syndrome) they may benefit from mentoring, counselling or additional workplace support or training. Mentoring can be accessed through the Trust and more information on this is found on the Intranet [Benefits of Mentoring](#). Counselling can be accessed via Vivup VIVUP.co.uk. Also consider what if any additional training or support a person may need in their role and where that can be accessed.
- Work with the employee to create a plan for managing their triggers, e.g., how to avoid them, what should be done if they become triggered, etc.

You may also want to look at the trust stress risk assessment with a staff member who maybe struggling. This can be found here: [Trust Risk Assessment](#).

WHAT CAN YOU DO AS A MANAGER IF THIS IMPACTS ON YOU?

Sometimes managers can find that by supporting someone with a mental health difficulty such as anxiety, it may bring up issues for themselves, i.e., they might find it difficult because of their own history, or stressors in their life. If you are finding it difficult because of your own issues, or wish to access additional support, you can also access:

- **Vivup, contact 0330 380 0658 or visit VIVUP.co.uk.**