

# Restoring Mental Health

How to reduce the prevalence of mental health issues linked to the coronavirus

EXPERIENCE, PTSD, STRESS, FEAR

CHILDCARE PRESSURES, ELDERCARE

MENT, NEAR DEATH EXPERIENCE,

TS, FINANCIAL ANXIETY, CHILDCARE

TIC VIOLENCE, BEREAVEMENT, NEAR DEATH EXPERIENCE, PTSD, STRESS, FEAR OF REDUNDANCY, ISOLATION,

ESS, SUICIDAL THOUGHTS, FINANCIAL ANXIETY, CHILDCARE PRESSURES, ELDERCARE WORRIES, RELATIONSHIP

OWN, LOSS, DOMESTIC VIOLENCE, **BEREAVEMENT** NEAR DEATH EXPERIENCE, PTSD, STRESS, FEAR OF REDUNDANCY,

ANCY, ISOLATION, LONELINESS, **SUICIDAL THOUGHTS** FINANCIAL ANXIETY, CHILDCARE PRESSURES,

ARE WORRIES, RELATIONSHIP BREAKDOWN, **LOSS** DOMESTIC VIOLENCE, BEREAVEMENT, NEAR DEATH EXPERIENCE,

ENCE, PTSD, STRESS, **FEAR OF REDUNDANCY** ISOLATION, LONELINESS, SUICIDAL THOUGHTS, FINANCIAL ANXIETY,

, CHILDCARE PRESSURES, **ELDERCARE WORRIES** RELATIONSHIP BREAKDOWN, LOSS, DOMESTIC VIOLENCE,

BEREAVEMENT, NEAR DEATH EXPERIENCE, **PTSD** STRESS, FEAR OF REDUNDANCY, ISOLATION, LONELINESS, SUICIDAL

L THOUGHTS, FINANCIAL ANXIETY, **CHILDCARE PRESSURES** ELDERCARE WORRIES, RELATIONSHIP BREAKDOWN,

OWN, LOSS, DOMESTIC VIOLENCE, BEREAVEMENT, **NEAR DEATH EXPERIENCE** PTSD, STRESS, FEAR OF REDUNDANCY,

ANCY, ISOLATION, LONELINESS, SUICIDAL THOUGHTS, **FINANCIAL ANXIETY** CHILDCARE PRESSURES,

ARE WORRIES, RELATIONSHIP BREAKDOWN, **LOSS** DOMESTIC VIOLENCE, BEREAVEMENT, NEAR DEATH EXPERIENCE,

ENCE, PTSD, STRESS, FEAR OF REDUNDANCY, **ISOLATION** LONELINESS, SUICIDAL THOUGHTS, FINANCIAL ANXIETY,

, CHILDCARE PRESSURES, ELDERCARE WORRIES, **RELATIONSHIP BREAKDOWN** LOSS, DOMESTIC VIOLENCE,

E, BEREAVEMENT, NEAR DEATH EXPERIENCE, PTSD, **STRESS** FEAR OF REDUNDANCY, ISOLATION, LONELINESS,

TS, FINANCIAL ANXIETY, CHILDCARE PRESSURES, **LONELINESS** ELDERCARE WORRIES, RELATIONSHIP BREAKDOWN,

OWN, LOSS, DOMESTIC VIOLENCE, BEREAVEMENT, NEAR DEATH EXPERIENCE, PTSD, STRESS, FEAR OF REDUNDANCY,

ANCY, ISOLATION, LONELINESS, SUICIDAL THOUGHTS, FINANCIAL ANXIETY, CHILDCARE PRESSURES,

S, RELATIONSHIP BREAKDOWN, LOSS, DOMESTIC VIOLENCE, BEREAVEMENT, NEAR DEATH EXPERIENCE,

, FEAR OF REDUNDANCY, ISOLATION, LONELINESS, SUICIDAL THOUGHTS, FINANCIAL ANXIETY, CHILDCARE PRESSURES,

RES, ELDERCARE WORRIES, RELATIONSHIP BREAKDOWN, LOSS, DOMESTIC VIOLENCE, BEREAVEMENT, NEAR DEATH EXPERIENCE,

EXPERIENCE, PTSD, STRESS, FEAR OF REDUNDANCY, ISOLATION, LONELINESS, SUICIDAL THOUGHTS, FINANCIAL ANXIETY,

, CHILDCARE PRESSURES, ELDERCARE WORRIES, RELATIONSHIP BREAKDOWN, LOSS, DOMESTIC VIOLENCE, BEREAVEMENT,

EMENT, NEAR DEATH EXPERIENCE, PTSD, STRESS, FEAR OF REDUNDANCY, ISOLATION, LONELINESS, SUICIDAL THOUGHTS,

TS, FINANCIAL ANXIETY, CHILDCARE PRESSURES, ELDERCARE WORRIES, RELATIONSHIP BREAKDOWN,

GHTS,

TIC VI

ESS, S

KDOW

ISOLATION,

RE

FEAR OF REDUNDANCY,

PRESSURES,

NEAR DEATH EXPERIENCE,

ISOLATION, LO

DOMES

LO

RELATION

PTSD, STRESS, I

CHILDCARE PRESS

NEAR

FIN

LOSS, DOME

ISOLATION,

RELATION

FEAR

CHILDCARE PRESSURES,

NEAR DEATH EXPERIEN

CHILDC

BEREAVEME

SUICIDAL THOUGHTS,

CHILDCARE PRESSURES,

ISOLATION, LONELINESS,

RELATIONSHIP BREAKDO

## Foreword

By Louise Abbs, Managing Director, PAM Wellbeing

Employers need to take proactive action to address the extent to which the coronavirus has impacted on the mental health of the workforce

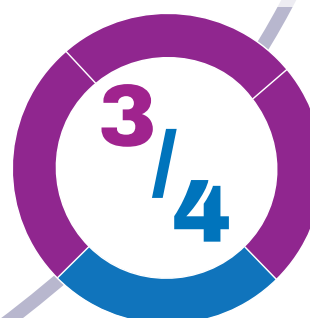
The extreme measures put in place to limit the spread of coronavirus have impacted everyone in some way. Many people felt anxious and socially isolated during the lockdown, working parents suffered stress and exhaustion while juggling work and home-schooling and many of those who had to fight for their lives in hospital are now at risk of developing post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

Many people worried about losing their job and those who couldn't be with a loved one while they passed away are not only suffering bereavement but may also be traumatised by the experience. The number of women seeking help for domestic abuse has increased by 50%, according to UK charity Refuge, and divorces are set to soar, with the strain of living in close proximity causing many relationships to fail.

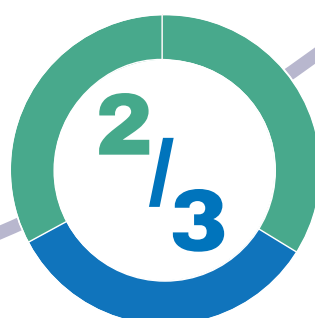
Data released by mental health charity Mind highlights the devastating impact of all this on our mental health: one in five adults (22%) who had no previous experience of mental health problems now say their mental health is now 'poor' or 'very poor'. Two thirds of people (65%) who had a pre-existing mental health problem say it has become worse during the crisis, with this figure jumping to 75% amongst people aged 24 years and under.



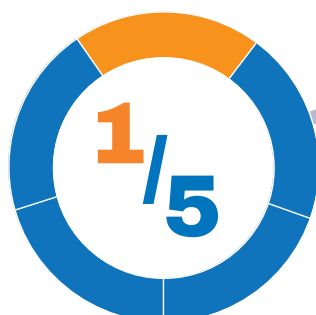
increase in women seeking help for domestic abuse  
Source: Refuge



of young people say an existing mental health problem has deteriorated further  
Source: Mind



of people with a pre-existing mental health problem say it has become worse  
Source: Mind



adults who had no previous issues say their mental health is 'poor' or 'very poor'  
Source: Mind

“ Employers now have a valuable role to play in restoring the mental health of the workforce ”

## Catching people before they fall

An extra half a million people now urgently need mental health support at a time when already long waiting times have increased further.

Employee benefits, such as access to an Employee Assistance Programme, which can provide rapid access to confidential counselling sessions for as little as the price of a cup of coffee per person a year (depending on the size of the organisation and nature of work), are an obvious starting point, but the culture of the organisation and ability of managers to direct people towards support also matters.

Jobs are under threat, while research from Business in the Community shows people feel more discriminated against due to their mental health than many other diversity indicators such as age, ethnicity or gender. It's therefore essential that managers are trained how to show the caring face of the organisation and humanise the workplace in a way that may have been sadly lacking until now, even if it's just by opening up more conversations about feelings so that people feel safe admitting when they feel overwhelmed.

Failure to spot and act on the symptoms of emotional distress, such as increased tearfulness, forgetfulness and changes in weight, can lead to acute problems such as anxiety and other serious issues like depression. It might also increase the risk of the individual turning to inappropriate coping strategies, such as drinking too much alcohol. It even may lead to individuals having thoughts of committing suicide. The early indications are that males aged 45-49, who already had the highest age-specific suicide rate, averaging 16 deaths a day across England and Wales, are now at increased risk of this.

## Helping people to cope

The world will not be going back to 'normal' anytime soon. People will need to try to come to terms with their experiences and ready themselves for yet more change and disruption.

Fortunately, we humans are resilient creatures. There are proven tactics we can use to boost our ability to cope under pressure, such as acknowledging and expressing our feelings in healthy ways, building a support network, doing physical exercise, spending time in nature, and focusing on what matters most to us and showing kindness to others.

As the remainder of this report explains, the workplace now has a valuable role to play in helping people to acquire these skills. Not only will this benefit individuals, who will repay employers who make them feel valued and cared for in spades, but it will also boost productivity.

Employees freed from the strain of a mental health issue are more collaborative, creative and better at problem-solving, all of which will be essential to driving business recovery over the coming months.



Manage change



Restoring Mental Health



PAM  
Wellbeing

# Normalising anxiety

## Normalising anxiety

*People need to be reassured that it's okay to feel anxious and supported to manage this in healthy ways*

The first step towards restoring the mental health of the workforce is for employers to normalise the fact it's okay to feel anxious. Indeed, it would be unnatural not to feel this way, whether the feelings of anxiety are due to pressure to juggle looking after children while working, changes to their role, risk of redundancy or having to use public transport to return to work.

Anxiety is defined as a general feeling of unease, such as worry or fear, that can be mild or severe. It's typically associated with a number of physical symptoms, including:

- Feeling sick to your stomach
- Rapid breathing or shortness of breath
- Pounding heart or increased heart rate
- Sweating, trembling or shaking
- Loss of appetite or comfort eating
- Muscle tension or pain
- Weakness or fatigue
- Trouble sleeping
- Panic attacks
- Headaches

These feelings used to come and go before particular challenges, such as prior to an important meeting or presentation. Unfortunately, prolonged feelings of anxiety are now beginning to interfere with people's daily lives, giving rise to anxiety disorders which increase our risk of high blood pressure and heart disease, and reduce our ability to think creatively or rationally, because we are always in a fight-or-flight stress response.

## Reducing anxiety levels

With research from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) showing that 19 million (37%) people in the UK are suffering from high anxiety, this is an important area for employers to focus on.

You can't think your way out of anxiety, so employers need to consider how they can educate people to recognise the symptoms of anxiety and what they can do to reduce this. They might offer group workshops and provide access to a workplace wellbeing app, such as PAM Life, to encourage people to take part in mindfulness and physical exercise, both of which have been proven to be very beneficial at reducing anxiety levels.

People who are married or in a civil partnership are experiencing some of the highest levels of anxiety (39% say they are highly anxious compared to 19% pre-pandemic). Employers will also therefore need to think about how they can help those struggling to look after children to reduce the pressure they're under, by allowing them to 'flex' their working day and judging everyone on clear performance criteria, instead of the number of hours worked. This would also help those who feel their contribution has become less visible since working from home to feel less anxious.





Restoring Mental Health



# Enabling wellbeing

## Enabling wellbeing

*Employers need to be responsive and reactive when it comes to empowering people to look after themselves*

There is still so much that is uncertain about how and when we will exit lockdown, let alone the threat of coronavirus.

Some issues, such as the number of people struggling with workplace conflict, have reduced due to the number of people on furlough. But others, such as the need for wellbeing plans tailored to BAME (Black, Asian and minority ethnic) employees, have increased as new risks have emerged.

Employers need to respond with agility; survey employees to understand their particular concerns and worries; and adapt wellbeing plans accordingly.

## Create a caring culture

With everything everyone has been through, it's no longer acceptable to have a culture where people feel like they have to hide their feelings or push them to one side. Managers need to help people to acknowledge how they're feeling and to process their emotions.

This isn't about asking managers to become counsellors or advisors. It's about encouraging managers to show the caring face of the organisation by asking people how they are (especially if they appear to be feeling down or anxious) so they can direct them towards appropriate support services, such as the Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) or by referring them for counselling.



Managers also need to role-model looking after their own wellbeing to make this 'allowed'. It's no good telling people it's okay to draw a line between work and home in the evenings if managers themselves send emails in the small hours. This sends a message that 'this is what it takes to get on here'. Instead, managers should tell people how they're going to switch off, or exercise today, while asking others what they're planning. This turns the message into 'wellbeing is a priority.'

**Wellbeing is a priority**



## Seven wellbeing tools

With many people not necessarily educated about practical things they can do to proactively manage their mental health; boost their resilience and have an ability to stay healthy under pressure; now is a good time to help them learn about some key wellbeing tools they can use.

These tools can be used to help employees create action plans covering things they can do every day to decrease and prevent intrusive thoughts, make themselves feel more empowered, improve their quality of life and achieve their own wellbeing and life goals.





Restoring Mental Health



PAM  
Wellbeing

# Support vulnerable employees

## Support vulnerable employees

*Challenging as the crisis has been for everyone, for some it's been devastating*

### Reducing the risk of PTSD

Doctors are now warning that there could be tens of thousands of people at risk of PTSD because of the seriousness of their COVID-19 symptoms, with more than 100,000 people admitted to hospital because of the virus. Individuals who lost colleagues were exposed to the huge number of deaths, or felt like their life was at risk through their work, so they too may be at risk of being traumatised.

Failure to identify and support traumatised individuals within four weeks after an event, could lead to serious long-term mental health difficulties. Employers should consider enlisting the support of a psychological services provider who can help them to screen and treat those likely to be affected.

At the very least, employers must be mindful of employees who were exposed to potentially traumatic situations and make sure they're aware of the symptoms of trauma and PTSD. They should also provide clear signposting to any trauma counselling via specialist support services; occupational health department; or the individual's GP.



Symptoms of trauma include:

- Constantly replaying events in your mind
- Feeling jumpy or being forgetful
- Experiencing interrupted sleep
- Feeling shock or denial
- Feeling guilt or sadness
- Not feeling anything (numbness)

As time goes on, individuals will start to feel less affected. But symptoms may return and even worsen, leading to extreme physical reactions (such as nausea, sweating or pounding heart) when reminded of the trauma. If invasive memories or intense feelings of distress make them feel like the trauma is still happening, they could be developing PTSD.

**Treatments that a specialist psychological provider, such as PAM Wellbeing, can provide include:**



**Cognitive Behavioural Therapy:** to help the individual confront traumatic memories so they can control their fear and discuss starting activities they may have been avoiding again.



**Eye Movement Desensitisation and Reprocessing (EMDR):** re-programme the brain to enable the person to recall the event without reverting to trauma or becoming distressed by it.



**Group Therapy:** to help individuals find ways to manage their symptoms and understand their condition while talking to other people who have experienced a similar trauma.

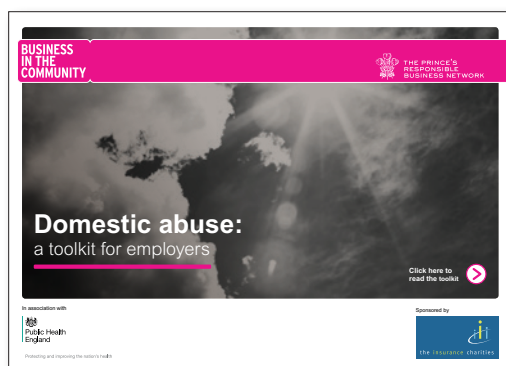
## Addressing domestic abuse

The number of people experiencing domestic abuse has surged during the lockdown. People who would normally have left the house for their own safety or gone over to a friend's house had no outlet, existing conflicts between people became exacerbated, and people under pressure may have resorted to threatening, violent, controlling or coercive behaviour to alleviate their own feelings.

Domestic abuse was already a major issue before the lockdown, with people from all sections of society affected and as many as 1.6m women experiencing domestic abuse in the year before the lockdown, with one in two of those being killed by a current or former partner every week in England and Wales alone. This means that for larger employers, the already significant number of women, and men, experiencing this issue at any time will be increased.

Employers should consider implementing the best practice advice in the government's domestic abuse toolkit for employers. Including how best to acknowledge, respond to and refer those affected. By enabling colleagues to openly discuss the topic, providing a supporting workplace that is able to respond to disclosure and giving access to organisations who can help employees affected by the issue.

Managers should not attempt to get personally involved or advise the person to just leave, as this is when the individual will be most at risk. Instead, their role is to allow people to come forward and show the caring face of the organisation by guiding the individual towards specialist support.



**Respond to disclosure**

## Supporting people through divorce

After spending prolonged time together and having time to reflect on their life choices, the number of relationships breaking up is now increasing.

The emotional toll this exacts on people can be severe, with a third of adults at risk of developing depression at the onset of separation and divorce.

Workplaces should make people feel safe acknowledging that what they are going through may be a hugely distressing event. This allows people to 'flex' their work to accommodate meeting with divorce lawyers or selling their house, and it means people will be helped to work through the classic stages of grief – denial, anger, bargaining (holding onto what they have), depression and sadness – so that they can come to terms with what has happened and stay productive and healthy.

## Preventing suicide

Most people who contemplate suicide do not actually want to end their lives but simply don't know how to cope with the emotional distress they're experiencing.

With the extra pressure now being placed on people due to the coronavirus and the resulting economic crisis, it's therefore important that companies pay close attention to people they know live alone, who may be going through a relationship break-up, struggling with financial difficulties or acting out of character.

Asking them how they are in a way that shows you actually want to know and putting them in touch with their GP or A&E (if the GP is closed), if they are actually expressing imminent risk. Training employees to be Psychological First Aiders, to provide support and guidance to those struggling so they can signpost them towards help and support, before mental health issues get out of control, can also provide another important safety net.



Support and prevent

## Conclusion

As we recover from the health crisis and begin mitigating the economic fallout, it's important to remember that the coronavirus has also exacted a huge emotional toll on many people.

Critical to helping them recover is normalising the emotions they are feeling in response, showing the caring face of the organisation and keeping a watchful eye over those who might now be struggling with issues including bereavement, PTSD, domestic abuse, relationship breakdown or even suicidal ideation.

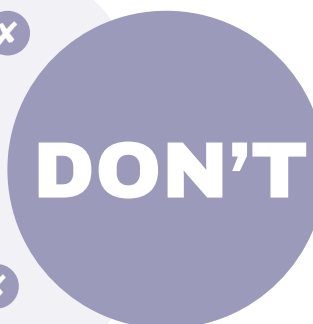
Companies that get this right, and equip managers with the ability to talk about feelings and emotions, and train employees in how to proactively manage their mental health to boost their ability to stay healthy under pressure, will have a healthier, more motivated and productive workforce. Such a caring culture will stand them in good stead for years to come.

## Top Tips




- ✓ Make it safe for people to talk about how they're feeling
- ✓ Ensure people know what support services are in place
- ✓ Educate people how they can boost their mental health
- ✓ Get managers to role-model looking after their own wellbeing
- ✓ Encourage people to use apps that nudge them to stay healthy


- Expect people to carry on without acknowledging what's happened ✗
- Build wellbeing plans that aren't based on data showing actual needs ✗
- Forget to adapt solutions to take into account emerging risks ✗
- Overlook the importance of looking out for vulnerable individuals ✗
- Underestimate the impact on mental health on business performance ✗





## How PAM Wellbeing can help


We can help you create a cost-effective package of support for your people at this challenging time, through the following range of services.


 **Resilience webinars**  
Train your people how to proactively manage their mental health and cope with issues ranging from uncertainty to anxiety and loss, with our online workshops.


 **PAM Life App**  
Give employees access to our interactive workplace wellbeing app, to provide them with personalised reminders to keep their physical and mental health on track.


 **Manager training**  
Educate managers how to proactively manage mental health, show the caring face of the organisation and creating a culture of wellbeing to boost productivity and engagement.

 **PAM Assist EAP**  
Provide employees with round-the-clock access to our own team of professional counsellors, psychotherapists, trauma experts, welfare rights and debt advisors and legal guidance services.

 **Trauma Support**  
Our specialist psychological services teams are experts in the provision of trauma support and rehabilitation services, including CBT, EMDR and critical incident management.

 **Psychological First Aid**  
A suite of training modules for employees and managers to equip them with the soft skills needed to become Psychological First Aiders.

 **Return to Work**  
Clinical assessment, followed by a range of treatments, designed to ensure employees get the most cost-effective and appropriate support to help them recover and return-to-work.

 **WellCheck**  
One off sessions with a psychotherapist, for groups or individuals, to help them review issues impacting on their emotional wellbeing and build strategies for dealing with these.

**Want to talk?**

If you would like to chat about the opportunities for boosting the mental health of your workforce, or putting some support services in place, please contact us via:

 [info@pamwellbeing.co.uk](mailto:info@pamwellbeing.co.uk)

 [www.pamwellbeing.co.uk](http://www.pamwellbeing.co.uk)

 08081 968 186

