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To: All Branches

Dear Colleagues,

UK National 'Time To Talk Day' 1 February 2024 – Tips for Talking About Mental Health with Workers

Further to LTB041/24, The UK will hold the nation's biggest annual mental health conversation, 'Time to Talk Day', on 1 February 2024.

Run by the UK charities 'Mind' and 'Rethink Mental Illness', the day raises awareness of the importance of open conversations around mental health.

The Health and Safety Executive reported that nearly two million workers in Great Britain reported suffering ill-health as a result of their work in 2022/23, with around half these cases due to **stress, depression or anxiety**.

As well as workers who report mental ill-health, there may well be many individuals who have experiences and symptoms that employers are not even aware of.

Talking about mental health with work colleagues/Union members can be challenging, particularly as many worry about the stigma and prejudice that may come as a consequence of sharing their issues. If this results in workers not seeking the support they need, it can create more complex health needs.

IOSH (Institute of Occupational Health) has put together some tips from its Managing Occupational Health and Wellbeing course to help start to change lives this 2024 'Time to Talk Day.'

It's 'Time to Talk'

The course recommends that one way of improving mental ill-health in the workplace can be an open, one-to-one discussion, as advocated by 'Time to Talk' Day. Here are some tips around the best approach that you can use and share.

- Offer reassurance. Be mindful that not everyone will want to talk straight away. Let them know what support is available and that when they feel able to talk, support will be there.

- When someone is ready to talk, choose an appropriate place, somewhere private and quiet. Find an environment that will put the person at ease, either at work or outside of work.
- Encourage people to talk – ask simple, open questions and let them speak in their own words.
- Ask what they think may be the cause of their feelings, how it affects their life and work, and what support they are getting or need.
- Don't make assumptions. They may not need help or may feel they are able to manage. Support might only be needed every now and again, during difficult periods.
- Listen carefully. Make sure that the person, and not their problem, is the focus. Adapt the support to suit them, involve them in finding solutions and check what workplace adjustments you can offer before you have the conversation.
- Ensure confidentiality so that they know what is said will be kept as confidential as possible. If you feel you need to share the information with specific people, such as Employers Occupational Health, Safety Health & Environment or HR teams, make sure you get the person's agreement first.
- Develop an individual action plan that suits the person and their needs. It can help to identify triggers, impacts on work, who to contact in a crisis, what support they need and also ways to monitor things.
- Encourage the person to seek help themselves – many organisations have employee assistance programmes within their employee health structure that can offer counselling or access to helplines.
- Seek advice and support from HR or occupational health if you feel unable to offer the support and advice needed.
- Be honest and clear. If there are concerns about high absence levels or low performance, these need to be addressed at an early stage.

Guidance and Resources:

- **TUC 'Mental Health and The Workplace'** - Mental health and the workplace is an increasingly important issue for trade unions. The TUC has published a second edition of their 'Mental Health and the Workplace' guide and educational workbook which has been updated to keep pace with the changing world of work. The workbook is for all Union Reps and helps to explain what they can do to support those in the workplace with mental health problems. This workbook is intended to be used actively – in courses, at branch meetings and in informal discussions. As well as being an information resource, it seeks to ask questions to stimulate discussion and debate so that individuals and groups can act on their commitment to challenge mental health discrimination, stigma and promote equality wherever they work and in their communities. Download a copy at:
https://www.tuc.org.uk/sites/default/files/TUC-MENTAL_HEALTH_WORKPLACE.pdf
- **MIND & Rethink Mental Health's 'Time To Talk Day'** excellent website full of information, support paths, resources, recommended for everyone including Trade Unions, workplaces, Mental Health First Aiders and Ambassadors, schools, youth and community groups and individuals. Here you can download a host of materials and guidance to help start mental health conversations at:
<https://timetotalkday.co.uk/>
- **The Mental Health Foundation** offer an 'A-Z Topic List' of information on Men and mental health with, they say, one in eight men having a common mental health problem such as depression, anxiety, panic disorder or obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD). You can learn about how to assist those with feelings of being overwhelmed or unable to cope with mental or emotional pressure at – How people can help themselves and – How to get professional help:

<https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/explore-mental-health/blogs/stress-its-time-talk>

- **IOSH's Managing Occupational Health and Wellbeing Course** provides practical advice and tools that will help managers understand why it is important to manage fluctuations in workers' health, what the causes of ill-health can be and how to recognise when employees may be unwell. More information at: <https://iosh.com/employees/awareness-courses/managing-occupational-health-and-wellbeing/>
- **IOSH/CIPD Tools:** Sponsored by IOSH, the CIPD (Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development) and the Affinity Health at Work Research Consortium, resources and tools are available on 'Developing managers for engagement and Wellbeing' at: <https://www.cipd.org/uk/knowledge/reports/developing-managers-report/#gref>
- **The Mental Health Promotion and Intervention in Occupational Settings (MENTUPP)** has produced hubs for small-medium enterprises (SMEs) to deliver online training to managers and employees around clinical and non-clinical mental ill-health and the related stigma. More information at: <https://www.mentuppproject.eu/mentupp-hub/#benefits>

Yours sincerely



Dave Joyce
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