



## MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING @ UNISA

The University endeavours to provide a work, teaching and research environment that is mentally and physically safe and healthy. In addition to our legal obligations, it is important to create a workplace and learning environment that supports and nurtures the mental wellbeing of our staff and students so that they can thrive and perform at their best.

Enhancing the health and wellbeing of our whole community of staff and students is an important strategic priority for our University and aligns with the University Strategic Plan.

The University aims to improve and promote the health and wellbeing of our staff and students by adopting whole of institution and population based approaches to wellbeing which is reflected in the creation of a Staff Wellbeing Framework.

Mental wellbeing is one of the six elements of the [University's Staff Wellbeing Framework](#), which aims to support staff to thrive by positively impacting their wellbeing.

This guideline outlines the University's preferred approach for supporting positive mental health and wellbeing and the prevention of mental ill health in the workplace. It should be read in conjunction with the University's Health, Safety and Injury Management Policy.

### **Our goal**

Our goal is to embed clear and practical action into the way we perform our core business that supports the provision of a mentally safe and healthy work environment. We aim to create a mentally healthy and aware community where staff and students feel empowered to seek help and develop solutions.

Our focus is on:

1. **Primary**  
Raising the mental health literacy of our community in order to identify workplace stressors known to increase risks to mental health and to address issues with proactive strategies.
2. **Secondary**  
In the event that a staff member's work is impacted by mental illness, providing early intervention strategies to support them to improve their mental health including referral to appropriate services and/or health care professionals.
3. **Tertiary**  
Providing support, where possible, to assist staff manage their mental health with appropriate and reasonable adjustments whilst continuing to be a contributing member of the University community.

### **Definitions**

- **Mental wellbeing** – is about enjoying and fully participating in life through meaningful activities and fulfilling relationships. It is about dealing with life's challenges effectively and being resilient enough to bounce back when things do not go well. Mental wellbeing is about using your abilities and strengths to reach your full potential and feeling a sense of purpose in the things that you do.
- **Mental health** - is how an individual thinks, feels, behaves and the physical responses caused in the body as a result of the presence or absence of any mental health strain.
- **Mental health strain** – is the reaction people have to excessive pressures or other types of demands placed on them.
- **Mental illness** – a health problem that significantly affects how a person feels, thinks, behaves and interacts with other people. It is diagnosed according to standardised medical criteria.

## WHAT DOES A MENTALLY HEALTHY WORK ENVIRONMENT LOOK AND FEEL LIKE?

A mentally healthy environment is one where staff are communicating and interacting with each other respectfully and effectively. Its culture is characterised by trust, honesty and fairness. A mentally healthy workplace is one where all staff and managers are aware of, have access and adhere to the policies, guidelines, practices and supports that encourage positive mental health in the workplace.

In addition, a mentally healthy workplace is one where:

- Mental health is understood and valued by managers, supervisors and staff.
- Staff with diagnosed mental illness are protected from discrimination.
- Staff feel mentally and physically safe at UniSA.
- Staff work regular, sustainable hours within their designated role and where possible, have access to flexible working arrangements that enable them to meet their other responsibilities.
- Hazards to mental health are recognised and treated equally with physical hazards.

## CREATING AND MAINTAINING A MENTALLY HEALTHY WORK ENVIRONMENT

The physical work environment can have an impact on people's mental health. Ideally, work spaces should not be noisy or crowded. Where possible they should be designed to incorporate windows that allow exposure to daylight and that look onto natural settings (e.g. trees and grass). Where this is not possible, the use of pot plants should be encouraged to help reduce mental fatigue.

Everyone has a role in creating and maintaining a mentally healthy environment at UniSA.

**Managers and supervisors** are expected to actively value mental health by:

- Identifying and where possible responding to potential sources of mental health strain for their staff within the workplace.  
Potential sources of workplace stress for staff can include
  - unreasonable workloads (e.g. working excessive hours beyond what is reasonable within their position, working through breaks, or regularly taking work home)
  - work that is physically, mentally or emotionally demanding, or alternatively work that is monotonous and does not utilise the staff member's range of skills
  - inadequate time and resources to complete the work satisfactorily
  - lack of support from managers, supervisors and/or colleagues
  - role ambiguity
  - inequitable distribution of workload among the team
  - responsibility without authority
  - poor communication
  - bullying, harassment and discrimination
  - low levels of recognition and reward
  - poor management of workplace change
- In consultation with staff, conducting regular [health risk assessments](#) (including working conditions and workloads) and developing appropriate hazard control strategies to minimise these risks
- Both through formal and informal performance conversations, providing staff with clear information about
  - what they are expected to do as part of their role
  - any important work changes in a timely manner
  - their work performance in a constructive manner
- Ensuring staff receive relevant training and development
- Consulting with staff and others regarding change and job design
- Speaking openly about mental health in the workplace
- Providing assistance to those who request support in relation to mental health

- Seeking expert assistance when necessary
- Taking early action to support a staff member whose behaviour is impacting their ability to do their job and/or impacting the team's ability to do their jobs
- Providing staff with appropriate feedback about concerns that they have raised wherever possible
- Encouraging staff to engage in physical activity to support their mental health
- Endorsing staff to take breaks outside (particularly for those individuals who are required to work in windowless work/study spaces)

**Staff** are expected to take individual responsibility for their own and others' mental health by:

- Conducting themselves in a civil and courteous manner to protect their own and others' mental and physical health and safety
- Behaving in a way that respects and values each person and their experiences
- Ensuring their behaviour within the workplace does not constitute bullying, harassment or discrimination in accordance with relevant University policies
- Reporting mental health hazards in a timely manner
- Committing to look after their physical and mental health

### **POSSIBLE SIGNS OF MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES**

One or more of the following signs may indicate that a person is experiencing difficulties with risks to their mental health:

- Difficulty in getting things done, meeting reasonable deadlines, managing workload and/or multiple demands
- Erratic behaviour
- Complaints of lack of management support
- Conflict with team members/manager
- Avoiding/withdrawing from colleagues and/or work/social activities
- Increased consumption of caffeine, alcohol, cigarettes and/or sedatives
- Finding it difficult to concentrate on tasks and/or make decisions
- Difficulty with memory
- Loss of confidence
- Increased errors and/or accidents
- Reduced reaction times
- Physical symptoms such as gastrointestinal disorders, rashes, headaches, feeling tired all the time, irritability, feeling sick and run down, weight loss or gain, difficulty sleeping and/or chest pain
- Musculoskeletal pain
- Appearing restless, tense and on edge
- Regularly turning up late to work, taking above average number of days of sick leave or having unexplained absences
- Being unusually tearful or emotional and/or getting angry, upset, overwhelmed or frustrated easily
- Finding it hard to accept constructive and well-delivered feedback

## **PRACTICAL STEPS TO SUPPORT MENTAL HEALTH**

### ***How to look after your own mental health***

A guiding principle for supporting mental health is to think about how you would manage a suspected physical illness or injury. You would probably:

- seek support from trusted family, friends and/or colleagues
- seek advice from appropriate health care professionals
- take appropriate action to aid your recovery or support

You can approach any concerns about your mental health in a similar way.

You may also want to:

- Identify your stressors in the workplace or at home and work with your supervisor or family to manage them.
- Talk with your supervisor, someone else that you trust, a UniSA mental first aid officer or a psychologist from the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) if you feel overwhelmed.
- Take appropriately timed and regular breaks at work and vary your tasks throughout the day where possible.
- Make a conscious personal commitment to look after your physical health, e.g. manage your sleep, diet, meditation and exercise (there is a strong link between physical and mental health).
- Make sure that you take your annual leave entitlements each year.

### ***How to support the mental health of others***

It is not your role to diagnose or counsel a staff member or student you suspect may need mental health support.

If you suspect a co-worker is in need of mental health support:

- Let them know that they can speak with you if they need someone to talk to – respect their decision if they choose not to discuss their concerns with you.
- If they do confide in you:
  - Respect their privacy and maintain their confidentiality.
  - Remind them about the availability of the EAP.
  - Where possible, help them to identify some further options for support.
  - If they talk about suicide, stay with them and get professional help (emergency services ph. 000; Lifeline ph. 13 11 14) as soon as you can.
  - If they are reporting a situation where there is a serious risk to them or others, seek human resources or EAP advice yourself regarding how safety risks can be addressed within privacy and confidentiality principles.
- If you see instances of bullying, harassment or discrimination:
  - Speak to your manager or local human resources professional if you are a staff member.
  - Take appropriate action if you are a manager/supervisor.

In addition, managers/supervisors are encouraged to:

- Show empathy; let them know you are concerned for their wellbeing and inform them of available supports.
- Inform the staff member of your obligations to take action where risks to safety and wellbeing are a concern.
- If they do confide in you:
  - Ask the staff member what they would like their colleagues to know and how they would like to communicate this information.
  - Address the cause/s where appropriate.
- Where possible, offer the staff member flexible work options if it is appropriate to do so.
- Ensure that the staff member is included in meetings and work social events.

- Consider staffing arrangements so that business can continue while the staff member is supported.
- Seek advice from your local human resources professional, the Employee Relations Team or the Safety and Wellbeing Team.
- Contact the EAP Manager Assist Program.

If you suspect a student is in need of mental health support:

- Show empathy, let them know you are concerned for their wellbeing and inform them of available supports.
- Inform the student of your obligations to take action where risks to safety and wellbeing are a concern.
- Let students know the University has a free and confidential student counselling service and encourage them to access this. Tell students that they can speak with you if they need someone to talk to and inform them of your role and any limits within it (e.g. 'I am not a trained counsellor and cannot provide professional advice. However, I do care about your wellbeing and want to help you as much as I can') – respect their decision if they choose not to discuss their concerns with you.
- If they do confide in you:
  - Respect their privacy and maintain their confidentiality.
  - Remind them about the availability of the Student Counselling Service.
  - Where possible, help them to identify some further options for support.
  - Take appropriate action to address the cause/s if this is within the scope of your role.
  - If they talk about suicide, stay with them and get professional help (emergency services ph. 000; Lifeline ph. 13 11 14) as soon as you can. Contact the Student Counselling Service for support.
  - UniSA Out-of-Hours Crisis Line: 1300 107 441 or text 0488 884 163 (5.00pm to 9.00am weekdays and 24hrs weekends and public holidays).
  - If they are reporting a situation where there is a serious risk to them or others, consult with the Student Counselling Service for advice regarding how safety risks can be addressed within privacy and confidentiality principles.
- Refer the student to the [Student Engagement Unit](#) the [e-referral form](#) or by contacting the counselling service directly.

#### **FURTHER ASSISTANCE**

- The [Safety and Wellbeing Team](#) is there to support you and provide advice on all mental and physical safety and wellbeing matters.
- The [Employee Assistance Program](#) (EAP) is a free confidential counselling service provided by an external psychology practice. This program is available to staff and immediate family members to support them with a variety of work, emotional, career or personal related problems.
- The [Manager Assist Program](#) (facilitated by the University's EAP provider) supports managers with personal and interpersonal work issues related to managing staff performance, work relationships and organisational change and can be accessed by telephone as well as face to face.
- The [Student Counselling Service](#) provides free and confidential counselling to enrolled students in relation to personal, relationship, family or study difficulties that may affect their studies.
- The [Student Disability Service](#) provides assistance to students with a disability, mental health or medical condition that impacts on their study.

- The [UniSA Psychology Clinic](#) provides high-quality, affordable psychology and counselling services by postgraduate clinical psychology students under the supervision of fully qualified clinical psychologists. Services are provided from the Magill clinic and by videoconferencing to clients in rural and remote areas surrounding Port Augusta.
- The [UniSA Health Medical Clinic](#) provides acute and preventative health care for staff and students. Consults at the UniSA Medical Clinic are at minimal or no cost to staff and students.
- [BeyondBlue](#) supports and promotes Australian mental health. Refer to BeyondBlue's website for resources for individuals, families, friends and colleagues.
- [Lifeline](#) is a national charity providing all Australians who are experiencing a personal crisis with access to 24 hour crisis support and suicide prevention services.
- The [Black Dog Institute](#) is dedicated to improving the lives of people affected by mood disorders through high quality research, clinical expertise and national education programs.

#### **OTHER REFERENCES**

- [UniSA Health Safety and Injury Management Policy](#)
- [UniSA Wellbeing website](#) for more information about the many initiatives that support staff wellbeing, including fitness facilities, training and development
- [UniSA Disability Action Plan 2014 - 2018](#)
- [Understanding and managing stress](#) – Australian Psychological Society
- [State of Workplace Mental Health in Australia](#) – BeyondBlue
- [First to Action: Early intervention to support psychological health and wellbeing](#)
- [Taking care of your mental health in the workplace: a guide for employees](#)
- [Creating a mentally healthy workplace: a guide for leaders and managers](#) – BeyondBlue, HeadsUp, The Mentally Healthy Workplace Alliance
- [2010 Workers with mental illness: a practical guide for managers](#) – Australian Human Rights Commission