



# PROMOTING POSITIVE MENTAL HEALTH IN THE WORKPLACE

Guidelines for organisations

Super *friend*<sup>®</sup>

# INTRODUCTION

*Work has an important role in fostering positive mental health. Among other things, it allows us to pursue goals, experience mastery and develop meaningful relationships. However, there is little evidence available on effective workplace strategies that promote positive workplace mental health. As a result, SuperFriend commissioned the Work, Health and Wellbeing Team at Deakin University and the Centre for Mental Health at University of Melbourne to address this gap in knowledge by developing guidelines containing actionable strategies that organisations, teams and individuals can use to promote positive mental health in and through the workplace.*

## OUR PURPOSE

SuperFriend is a nationwide health promotion foundation that helps 'all profit to member' superannuation funds to promote and support improved mental health and wellbeing for their members, through the workplace.

SuperFriend's mission is to reduce the incidence of suicide and the impact of mental illness on individuals, employers, workplaces, friends and families.

## ABOUT US

Created by the Industry Funds Forum, an association whose members are the CEOs of Australia's largest industry super funds, SuperFriend collaborates with 'all profit to member', group life insurers and the mental health sector to facilitate targeted workplace mental health initiatives for members of these funds.

SuperFriend's work focuses on the development, promotion and facilitation of information, resources, programs and research about mental health and wellbeing. By improving the understanding of mental health and mental illness in individuals and workplaces, SuperFriend influences the policies and practices that foster mentally healthy, supportive work environments.

We collaborate with a range of organisations, including recognised mental health service providers, to facilitate the delivery of mental health information, initiatives, programs and referral pathways to assist 'all profit to member' superannuation fund members, employers and staff, along with their associated organisations.

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### **Further Information**

For further information about SuperFriend, please visit our website at [www.superfriend.com.au](http://www.superfriend.com.au)

# CONTENTS

## 01

### INTRODUCTION

- 4 Positive workplace mental health
- 5 The Delphi consensus method

## 07

### GUIDELINES FOR PROMOTING POSITIVE WORKPLACE MENTAL HEALTH

- 8 Mental health and wellbeing strategy
  - 10 Developing a work environment that promotes positive mental health
  - 13 Positive leadership style
  - 16 Communicating effectively
  - 18 Designing jobs for positive mental health
  - 20 Recruitment and selection of employees
  - 22 Supporting and developing employees
  - 26 Balancing work and life demands
  - 28 Positive mental health and wellbeing initiatives
  - 30 Next steps
- 
- 30 Additional resources
  - 31 References

# POSITIVE WORKPLACE MENTAL HEALTH

*Traditionally, approaches to psychological functioning in the workplace have focused on the negative impact that work and the work environment can have on employees and organisations. Understanding the potential negative impacts of work is important and can contribute to preventing mental illnesses and losses in productivity. However, an approach that focuses solely on the dysfunctional elements of work in order to prevent illness does not adequately capture the elements of the workplace that engage employees, nor does it explain why some organisations develop environments where employees can flourish and reach their optimal potential.*

## WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO PROMOTE POSITIVE MENTAL HEALTH?

In the current economic environment, the capacity of our employees to deliver, at all levels of the organisation, has never been more important. Competitive advantage is driven by the collective performance of each individual. Organisations that can capture the best from their employees, capitalise on optimal performance and promote employee strengths have a significant advantage.

The benefits of happy and healthy workplaces have been demonstrated in a wide range of settings. Internationally, the evidence suggests that a workforce that experiences positive states and positive psychological health contributes to the organisation's bottom line through their high performance. Positive and high-functioning employees are also more likely to be self-motivated, persist in the face of challenge, go the extra mile in achieving organisational goals, and help their colleagues to achieve.<sup>1</sup>

Happy and healthy employees are also happier and healthier in all domains of their life. Satisfaction with life, marriage, friendships, income, work performance and health tends to lead to high levels of wellbeing.<sup>2</sup>

## HOW CAN ORGANISATIONS ENCOURAGE POSITIVE MENTAL HEALTH?

Rather than a focus on risks, positive mental health in the workplace advocates a focus on opportunities, strengths and resources.

These guidelines can be used by organisations looking to promote positive mental health in their workplaces. They contain practical, actionable strategies that

can be used to help employees, managers and senior leaders to reach their potential and drive optimal organisational performance

## THE DELPHI CONSENSUS METHOD

These guidelines were developed using the Delphi consensus method, which is a systematic way of assessing the consensus of a panel of experts and is particularly useful in situations where relatively little research evidence exists.<sup>3</sup> In order to develop these guidelines, a systematic search of relevant publications for practical, actionable strategies that organisations, teams and individuals can use to promote positive mental health in and through the workplace was undertaken.

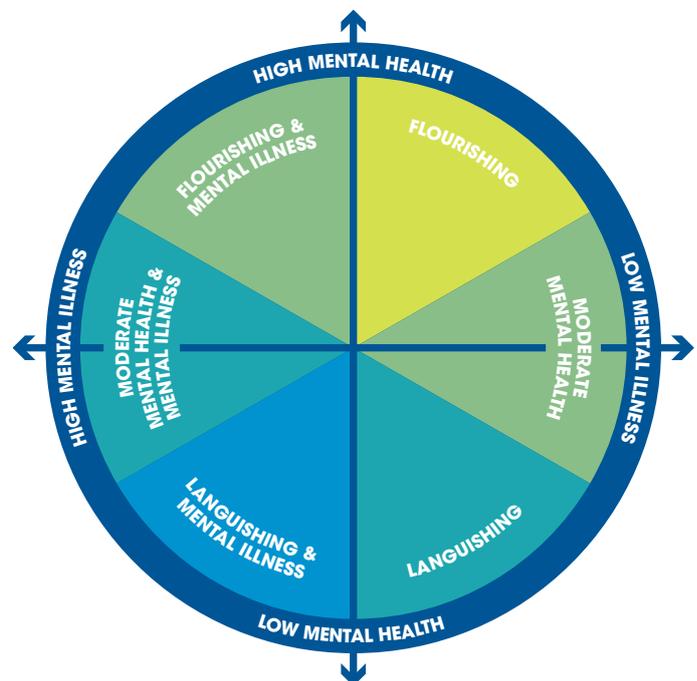


Figure 1: Keyes' complete model of mental health.<sup>4,5</sup>

Interviews with eight positive workplace mental health expert practitioners were also conducted to gain further insight into strategies that could be implemented in the workplace to promote positive mental health. Their suggestions were incorporated into the development of the guidelines. Over three survey rounds, we asked panels of experts to rate the importance of including these strategies in the guidelines. Panelists were also asked to suggest improvements to existing items or additional strategies, which were subsequently rated by the other panelists.

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#### Panel 1 – 36 members

Practitioners in the field of positive workplace mental health including psychologists, organisational psychologists, academics, occupational/organisational health consultants and senior advisors in creating healthy workplaces.

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#### Panel 2 – 36 members

Directors, general managers, employers and employees of organisations that have been recognised for promoting positive mental health and wellbeing in the workplace.

These guidelines comprise strategies for promoting positive mental health in the workplace that 80% of both panels rated as essential or important for organisations to consider. Recognising that individual workplaces vary greatly, both in terms of size and structure, these strategies are those that experts considered implementable for most organisations, teams and individuals.

## DEFINITIONS

Throughout the guidelines, we use ‘senior leader’ to refer to individuals at the highest level of the organisation, whose decisions

have implications for all employees and for the future of the organisation itself. We use ‘manager’ to refer to staff members with people management responsibilities and ‘employee’ to refer to all staff members, including managers and senior leaders.

**Mental health**<sup>6</sup> is defined as a state of well-being in which the individual realises his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community.

**Positive mental health** refers to positive emotional, psychological and social wellbeing that can enhance functioning in life.

Mental health should be viewed as a related, although separate, concept to mental illness. The absence of mental illness does not in itself mean that an individual is experiencing optimal mental health. This definition of mental health is aligned with Corey Keyes<sup>7</sup> model of ‘flourishing’ and ‘languishing’, as shown in Figure 1. Focusing on the development of positive mental health means promoting those aspects of the workplace that can help employees realise their full potential and experience positive functioning in all aspects of their life – ‘flourishing’.

Keeping in mind the distinction between positive mental health and mental illness, organisations should develop an integrated and holistic approach to workplace mental health. An integrated approach<sup>8</sup> will: protect employees from mental illness to the extent feasible (e.g., by removing amenable hazards such as excessive workloads), promote positive mental health (e.g., by focusing on developing employee potential), and address mental illness regardless of cause (e.g., by providing access to mental health services).

# GUIDELINES FOR PROMOTING POSITIVE WORKPLACE MENTAL HEALTH



# MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING STRATEGY

*It is essential that organisations ensure that the mental health and wellbeing of their workforces is a priority. Studies have shown that where organisations demonstrate and communicate a commitment to employee mental health, they also tend to generate greater engagement from their workers<sup>9</sup> as well as improvements in employee commitment and performance.<sup>10</sup> To realise the benefits of a healthy and engaged workforce, organisations should demonstrate legitimate and visible support for the mental health of their employees.*

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*Senior leaders should ensure that a mental health and wellbeing strategy is developed and implemented across the organisation. This strategy should explicitly cover positive mental health promotion. See page 30 for links to additional resources.*

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## **DEVELOPMENT OF THE MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING STRATEGY**

During the development of the mental health and wellbeing strategy, senior leaders should assess employees' perceptions of the positive aspects of their work and the working environment and conduct a needs assessment in line with evidence-based guidelines. Senior leaders should also ensure that the mental health and wellbeing strategy is integrated into standard policies, procedures and practices.

## **IMPLEMENTATION AND CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT OF THE MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING STRATEGY**

A working group should be established and made responsible for implementation and continuous improvement of the mental health and wellbeing strategy. Additionally, managers should be provided with support and resources necessary to implement the mental health and wellbeing strategy. If an organisation has a Board of Directors, the organisation's performance against the mental health and wellbeing strategy should be reported to the Board. Managers should also ensure that they communicate information about the outcomes and success of specific positive workplace practices to all employees.

# DEVELOPING A WORK ENVIRONMENT THAT PROMOTES POSITIVE MENTAL HEALTH

*The relationship between a supportive work environment, free from incivility and discrimination, and organisational performance is well established.<sup>11</sup> In particular, organisational cultures that are positive, inclusive and respectful have been shown to contribute directly to employee commitment to their organisation, job satisfaction and motivation.<sup>12</sup>*



It is essential that managers and employees actively contribute to the development of a work environment that promotes positive mental health. Managers should communicate with employees about this through multiple channels (i.e. print and electronic communications, orientation and training, staff meetings and public addresses).

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*“All employees including managers have a significant role in ensuring a positive work environment.”*

*(Employer/employee panelist)*

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## RESPECTFUL INTERACTIONS

Employees should make efforts to build respectful relationships with their team members. They should also monitor and adjust their own behaviour to ensure they treat others with respect and civility. Additionally, managers should encourage respectful interactions between people by:

- ▶ Role modelling positive and respectful relationships
- ▶ Setting clear expectations about respectful behaviour (e.g. in performance plans or by giving practical examples of positive versus negative workplace behaviours)
- ▶ Making it clear that attaining results at the expense of respectful workplace behaviour is not acceptable
- ▶ Providing direct feedback to employees in response to disrespectful behaviours
- ▶ Being friendly and civil towards others
- ▶ Encouraging a culture that is accepting of different ethnic groups, genders, and individuals with disabilities

## SHOWING GENUINE CARE AND CONCERN FOR OTHERS

Employees should show genuine care and concern by checking that others are feeling okay, showing understanding of the pressures they are under and responding with sensitivity to their emotional concerns.



## ALTRUISTIC BEHAVIOUR

Employees should contribute to a workplace culture that encourages altruistic behaviour by encouraging others to seek and give help in the workplace, identifying opportunities for others to apply their skills and resources to help others, and by role modelling giving behaviours to others. It is also essential that senior leaders ask for employee input to inform decisions about corporate giving or volunteering.

## TAKING A POSITIVE APPROACH TO WORK

Employees should take a positive approach to work by:

- ▶ Being appropriately positive about team members
- ▶ Viewing mistakes as opportunities to learn
- ▶ Demonstrating faith in others' capabilities
- ▶ Using humour appropriately
- ▶ Acting calmly in pressured situations
- ▶ Respecting confidentiality
- ▶ Being willing to have a laugh at work

Managers should model a positive approach to work by treating all employees fairly and with respect while being consistent in their approach to managing. Additionally, managers should allow for decisions to be respectfully challenged.

## NOTICING AND APPRECIATING POSITIVE WORK EXPERIENCES

Employees should make efforts to savour positive work experiences by:

- ▶ Expressing how proud they are of others accomplishments
- ▶ Giving others the opportunity to enjoy their moments of acknowledgment and praise
- ▶ Making an effort to attend others' special events, such as award ceremonies or important presentations
- ▶ Actively reflecting on the things they do that make a good day at work and doing more of these activities
- ▶ Expressing gratitude to others where appropriate

Managers should also encourage employees to savour positive work experiences by encouraging them to discuss moments at work where things have gone well, or that they are particularly proud of, and focusing on how good the situation felt.

A positive leadership style is one that matches the leadership style of the manager to the needs and preferences of individual team members (e.g. using a coaching style of leadership with more competent employees). Managers should understand how management styles and practices can help promote positive mental health.



# POSITIVE LEADERSHIP STYLE

*Positive leaders create positive work environments. Senior leaders and managers should model appropriate behaviours for others in their organisation to copy. Leaders can promote positive mental health in all domains of the organisation and the behaviours of managers and senior leaders have a direct relationship with the effectiveness, happiness and success of teams, as well as individual employees.<sup>13</sup> Leaders should be supported to develop a style that promotes positive mental health.*

Managers should make an effort to involve employees in problem-solving and decision-making. They should create regular opportunities to speak one-to-one with employees, provide positive and constructive feedback, and aim to be available for employees when needed. When employees achieve targets or goals, managers should emphasise the contributions of the team over their own. Senior leaders should ensure that managers receive training in the skills and behaviours that enable them to manage their teams in a way that promotes positive mental health.

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*“It is critical to recognise that it is not only what senior leaders and organisations say about positive mental health and workplace culture, but more crucially how they act and ‘live out’ those policies and strategies.”*

*(Expert panelist)*

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## FEEDBACK, REWARD AND RECOGNITION

Managers should set clear performance expectations and provide employees with appropriate levels of recognition and reward for a job well done (See page 30 for additional resources). Managers should also regularly provide constructive feedback regarding both strengths and areas for improvement by:

- ▶ Making an effort to notice employee achievements and appropriately acknowledging them (e.g. thanking someone for a job well done, making senior management aware of employee achievements)
- ▶ Ensuring that this feedback is appropriate to an employees’ level of skills and motivation (e.g. for a new employee this may need to be on a daily basis).

Managers should aim to provide negative feedback in a positive way by:

- ▶ Ensuring that feedback is genuine and honest
- ▶ Presenting information in an objective way that focuses on the issue not the person
- ▶ Focusing on modifiable aspects of behaviours
- ▶ Describing the consequences and/or feelings associated with the employee’s behaviour
- ▶ Making suggestions for acceptable alternative behaviour
- ▶ Ensuring that the employee feels validated by using statements that emphasise flexible, two-way problem-solving.

## GIVING DIRECTION

Managers should provide clear direction to employees by giving clear advice when required, clarifying role requirements and expectations and clearly communicating their own role requirements to their team. Managers should also demonstrate an understanding of employees’ roles, give them adequate time for planning and doing tasks, and follow processes and procedures, as appropriate.

## MANAGING CONFLICT

Managers should deal with difficult situations (including conflict) proactively, decisively, promptly and objectively. Managers should follow up conflicts after resolution, support employees through incidents of abuse and ensure that bullying is addressed. Where necessary, managers should seek help from Occupational Health and Safety or Human Resources staff.

## SUPPORTING EMPLOYEE GROWTH

Managers should support employee growth by asking employees about their career goals, finding opportunities for employees to develop skills that align with these goals, and identifying relevant development activities for employees.

Managers should offer their employees formal (e.g. seminars, study leave) and informal (e.g. mentoring, job rotation) opportunities to continually learn and expand their skill sets, while also encouraging employees to suggest new opportunities for learning and development. It is also important for employees to proactively identify opportunities for their own learning and development.

## PROVIDING SUPPORT DURING CHANGE

Managers can assist employees during times of change by helping them to identify the opportunities in changing environments, as well as challenging them to think about old problems in new ways. They should also encourage them to take an appreciative approach to change, by focusing on learning from and building on previous successes. Employees should also seek to identify the opportunities in changing environments.

## TRUST, HONESTY AND FAIRNESS

Managers should promote a work environment characterised by trust, honesty and fairness by making fair and just decisions concerning employees and following through on commitments and promises. Managers should also be transparent and open about decisions that affect employees and actively place their trust in employees.

## PROMOTING A SENSE OF BELONGING AND SOCIAL WELLBEING AT WORK

Managers should be aware that a sense of belonging to the workplace is important for positive mental health and should actively promote social inclusion at work. Managers can achieve this by monitoring the quality of relationships between team members and by encouraging team-based projects and

meetings. Managers should also encourage participative decision making for decisions that affect the team. They should ensure that there are opportunities for team members to share experiences and celebrate the diversity and similarities that exist within the team.

## MEANINGFUL WORK

Managers should try to enhance the meaningful aspects of work by regularly promoting the company's mission statement to all employees (e.g. talking about it in meetings) and communicating how employees' roles and individual tasks contribute to the organisation's mission and purpose. Managers should reinforce how each employees' work benefits others and identify long-term positive impacts created by the work.

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*“Employees need to feel that their work is worthwhile, of value and is contributing to the greater good, the organisation and their customers.”*

*(Employer/employee panelist)*

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Senior leaders should generate commitment to organisational values by taking opportunities to communicate these values regularly to employees. Managers should also promote the meaningful aspects of work by publicly acknowledging employees who have demonstrated a company value. It is also important for employees to be able to describe the organisation's mission and values to others.

In addition to embracing organisational values, employees should be authentic in their behaviour by acting in ways that are true to their values and taking actions that are motivated by personal values and convictions, rather than just by gaining status, rewards or personal benefits.



# COMMUNICATING EFFECTIVELY

*Good communication is the lifeblood of an organisation. Ensuring that there are open communication channels between management and employees can help employees to feel empowered and can promote a sense of belonging to the organisation, as well as individual engagement.<sup>14</sup> Encouraging employees to have a voice is a responsibility that all members of the organisation should share.*

Managers should say things that make employees proud to be a part of the organisation. This includes making the goals of the organisation clear to employees by communicating key achievements, activities, issues and developments.

Managers should facilitate communication with their teams by choosing modes of communication that are appropriate to the message (e.g. using face-to-face meetings rather than e-mails to discuss performance matters), letting their employees know that they should ask for help when needed and holding regular meetings (e.g. weekly or fortnightly). Senior leaders should also provide managers with access to additional support (e.g. training, coaching, feedback) to develop their communication skills as necessary.

## GIVE EMPLOYEES A VOICE

Managers should encourage employees to have a voice by allowing them to express their opinions without interruptions, particularly in group settings, by being open to new ideas, even if they may conflict with their own, and by developing safe and open communication forums where employees and managers can freely share issues. Employees should also clearly communicate their needs to their manager.

Managers should provide regular, on-going opportunities for employees to give feedback to management (e.g. employee surveys, suggestion boxes, town hall meetings, individual or small group meeting with managers) while also ensuring that they have a process of acknowledging employee feedback and clearly communicating any actions that result.



# DESIGNING JOBS FOR POSITIVE MENTAL HEALTH

*Job design incorporates the way that tasks are organised, the access that employees have to resources, the amount of autonomy or control employees have over their own work schedules, and the methods that they use to complete their tasks. Effective job design not only promotes positive mental health, it also contributes to the effectiveness of the organisation by encouraging creativity and empowering employees to develop more efficient ways of working.<sup>15</sup>*

Managers should ensure jobs are designed to promote positive mental health by: allowing appropriate levels of self-direction and autonomy; ensuring alternative work arrangements are adequately resourced; ensuring employees are able to use a variety of skills within their given role; and encouraging employees to take on higher levels of responsibility, where desired and appropriate.

## JOB CRAFTING

Managers should be aware that job crafting is important for positive mental health. Job crafting is a process during which employees, within their formally designated roles, use opportunities to customise their job by either:

- ▶ Actively changing elements of their role (e.g., an accountant creating a new method of filing taxes to make their job less repetitive)
- ▶ Changing the nature of their interactions with others (e.g., a computer technician offering to help on-board new co-workers as a way to have more social connection at work) or
- ▶ Cognitively reframing their role (e.g., a hospital cleaner viewing their role as contributing to the safe treatment of sick people rather than simply cleaning)

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### Tasks are more meaningful when you have:

**Task variety** - Tasks that involve greater variety of skills.

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**Task identity** - Tasks that are seen as part of an identifiably “whole” piece of work.

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**Task significance** - When employees are able to see the impact that their tasks have on others.

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If job crafting is possible in a workplace, managers can encourage this by:

- ▶ Asking employees about whether or not their workload is at a level that is appropriate to them
- ▶ Helping employees to see that their job is something that they can proactively shape and not a fixed entity that simply places unchangeable demands on them
- ▶ Providing employees with opportunities to broaden their perceptions of the impact or purpose of their jobs (e.g. thinking about their jobs as a whole rather than a set of separate tasks and relationships)
- ▶ Talking to their employees about how they can craft their jobs to provide greater task variety, identity, and significance
- ▶ Working with employees to build incremental goals to work towards a more ideal version of the job
- ▶ Providing employees with opportunities to take advantage of any tasks that they see as meaningful that are already part of their jobs (e.g. by allocating more time, energy and attention to them)
- ▶ Providing employees with opportunities to redesign elements of their jobs, so that they include opportunities to forge relationships that lead to feeling a sense of pride, dignity, or worth (e.g. hospital cleaners increasing the amount of interaction they have with patients and their families)
- ▶ Encouraging collaborative job crafting within teams (e.g. getting teams together to discuss how they can support each other to craft different elements of their jobs while still achieving team-based targets)
- ▶ Meeting with employees to discuss job crafting progress



# RECRUITMENT AND SELECTION OF EMPLOYEES

*Selecting the right employees for the organisation plays a key role in the promotion of positive mental health. Ensuring that there is a match between designated roles and the qualities, strengths and attributes of employees can enhance an individual's sense of job satisfaction, commitment and likelihood to remain with the organization.<sup>16</sup>*

Senior leaders should develop and implement policies for the recruitment, selection, training and development of managers that recognise and promote positive attitudes and behaviours.

Managers should use competency-based recruitment and selection practices to recruit employees that fit the role. Specifically, managers should ensure that there is a good fit between employees' interpersonal and emotional competencies and the requirements of the position they hold. In order to do this, managers should:

- ▶ Adequately define roles in terms of the interpersonal, emotional and technical competencies required to do the job well
- ▶ Select employees based on their fit to the role
- ▶ Ensure that values-based criteria are assessed and appropriately inform selection decision

Managers should ensure that new employees are assigned a buddy to support them through their first few weeks of work.



# SUPPORTING AND DEVELOPING EMPLOYEES

*Surveys of employees suggest that opportunities for growth and development are key factors in deciding to join and remain with an organisation. An environment that offers individuals opportunities to enhance their skills and use their strengths is essential to attracting, retaining and developing valuable employees. The work environment can also support the development of 'homegrown' talent.<sup>17</sup>*

Supporting and developing employees is essential to promoting positive mental health in the workplace. This can be achieved by identifying, developing and promoting employee strengths at work while also encouraging employees to achieve their goals.

## PROMOTING EMPLOYEE STRENGTHS

Managers should assist employees to develop new strengths at work by having conversations about areas in which employees would like to develop strengths. Managers can assist employees to identify and apply their strengths at work by:

- ▶ Having conversations about what employees think they are good at and what gives them energy at work
- ▶ Discussing how employees could use these strengths in their existing roles
- ▶ Discussing any need to temper excessive uses of strengths that can have a negative affect (e.g. being too kind could prevent honest feedback)
- ▶ Following-up with employees to monitor progress

Employees should identify and apply their strengths at work by actively reflecting on what they are good at, the extent to which they are actually applying their strengths at work, and the impact of their efforts to apply their strengths.

Additionally, managers should allocate team tasks based on relative individual strengths. This can be achieved by getting the team together to discuss team tasks in relation to the strengths that are needed to complete them. Managers should also encourage employees to notice and acknowledge the strengths of other team members.

See page 30 for links to additional resources.

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*“I believe this is a two way process and the more you can engage employees in recognising strengths in others and expressing gratitude towards others, the more likely they will be able to self-identify strengths and appreciate their own achievements and success.”*

**(Expert panelist)**

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## ACHIEVING GOALS

Managers should be aware that it is important to encourage employees to achieve goals in order to build belief in their abilities. This should include helping employees to set goals that facilitate growth and development, as outlined in Figure 2.



Figure 2: Goals that facilitate growth and development

*“Goal setting, planning and achievement is essential for promoting positivity within the individual employee as well as the team. Team members can also play an important role in the planning of pathways towards an individual’s goal, by providing constructive feedback and reflections of the individual’s strengths and past successes and achievements.”*

**(Expert panelist)**

### How is it done?

Managers should consult with individual employees to arrange a mutually acceptable schedule to review progress towards employees’ goals. These consultations should include goal setting conversations, during which managers should encourage employees to:

- ▶ Anticipate potential obstacles
- ▶ Think about multiple ways of achieving goals
- ▶ Set goals that are in line with their personal values (i.e. authentic goals)
- ▶ Set goals that are in line with their personal strengths
- ▶ Frame goals in terms of positive outcomes to be achieved rather than negative or painful outcomes to be avoided (e.g. take on a new challenge at work in order to learn and to grow, rather than to avoid disappointing your boss or colleagues)

Managers should encourage employees to believe in their ability to achieve goals by providing opportunities to:

- ▶ Observe people who have achieved similar goals
- ▶ Get plenty of practice in achieving their goals
- ▶ Receive positive feedback on their progress towards the goal
- ▶ Experience success

## COACHING AND MENTORING

Managers should be aware that coaching and mentoring play a direct role in developing strengths and building capacities, as well as facilitating growth and mastery in the workplace. They should also be aware of the importance of mentoring in developing positive relationships for both the mentor and mentee.

Senior leaders should ensure that any coaching or mentoring programs are aligned to the overall organisational strategy and objectives.

When managers are implementing coaching and mentoring programs, they should ensure that these align with the mental health and wellbeing strategy. Managers should show strong, consistent and visible support for coaching and mentoring programs. Any coaching or mentoring programs should also incorporate an effective maintenance strategy (e.g. check-in sessions every three months, review of program retention or success rates).

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*“It is essential that support for mentoring and coaching programs is demonstrated through actions (e.g. providing appropriate accommodations so that these programs can take place) - not just through words or policies.”*

**(Expert panelist)**

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# BALANCING WORK AND LIFE DEMANDS

*Juggling work, family and other commitments can be challenging and can lead to the depletion of both physical and psychological resources. The workplace plays a critical role in supporting employees to prioritise and maintain positive mental health both in the workplace and at home.<sup>18</sup>*

## RESTORING PHYSICAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL RESOURCES THAT ARE USED AT WORK

Senior leaders should have a clear policy that enables employees to understand what is expected of them, in terms of working outside of their agreed hours. Additionally, senior leaders should promote the importance of engaging in active strategies to restore physical and psychological resources that are used at work (e.g. providing training, seminars or information). Managers should avoid putting pressure on employees to work during their breaks and should allow them to have restorative experiences during work hours (e.g. a ten minute break to take a walk). Employees should ensure that they prioritise their own positive mental health, in addition to that of their team members. Employees should restore physical and psychological resources used at work by:

- ▶ Being aware of daily work routines and making changes where they can, in order to increase the time and energy available for things that matter most to them
- ▶ Engaging in effective strategies in their breaks (e.g. go for a walk or catch up with a friend)
- ▶ Engaging in effective strategies outside of work (i.e. activities that elicit positive emotions, provide a sense of control or achievement, connection with people, volunteering, or exercise)

### Promoting flexible work arrangements

Managers should be aware that flexible work arrangements can enhance employees' sense of control over their work and should seek to accommodate reasonable requests from employees for these arrangements. If flexible work arrangements are available in the workplace, senior leaders should investigate whether existing policies and

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*"We can encourage positive activities outside work hours, but it is up to the employee to decide how they want to use their leisure time. For example, for some being alone, quiet, still could be the best way to spend a break time."*

**(Employer/employee panelist)**

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procedures (e.g. recruitment systems and manager training) are consistent with flexible work arrangements. Senior leaders should promote and support the use of flexible work arrangements and inform managers that these arrangements are 'normal' in the workplace, and not a privilege, exception, nuisance or an unnecessary cost. Employees should ensure that they use any flexible work arrangements so that they can enhance their own positive mental health.

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*"Flexible work plays an important role in enabling positive mental health. When it works well, it's a terrific opportunity to set employees up for success. Leaders need to be supported in adapting to the changing face of flexible work so that mental health risk is not increased."*

**(Employer/employee panelist)**

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Senior leaders should enable managers to receive training on how to support employees during periods of heightened work demands. While employees are on parental leave, sick leave or extended personal leave, managers should ensure that employees are offered the opportunity to be kept up to date with workplace activities, including any changes that might occur.



# POSITIVE MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING INITIATIVES

*A range of wellbeing initiatives exist for organisations that wish to support employee positive mental health. These vary from the provision of basic education and information to interactive programs conducted within the workplace.*

Senior leaders should provide employees with information and education on evidence-based strategies that can enhance positive mental health (e.g. resilience, mindfulness). This education should specifically cover interventions to enhance individuals' strengths, capacities and positive outcomes (e.g. flourishing, meaning, engagement, accomplishment and positive relationships).

Senior leaders also should provide employees with a variety of positive mental health and wellbeing programs that are consistent with the mental health and wellbeing strategy. Senior leaders should themselves be active participants in these programs and should also support public initiatives that raise awareness of positive mental health and wellbeing in the workplace (e.g. Mental Health Week, Mindfulness Training).

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*“I believe programs designed specifically for workplaces are essential and integral. They should also cover skills for early identification, intervention, and understanding what resources are available internally to the workplace for seeking help.”*

***(Employer/employee panelist)***

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# NEXT STEPS

It is hoped that these guidelines will support organisations to take an integrated approach to achieving optimum mental health by helping organisations to promote the positive within their workplaces. The success of positive mental health strategies and activities largely depends on how they are implemented. The processes and methods used to develop and implement key activities within the organisation are just as important as the activities themselves. It is critical for any workplace mental health program that there is senior level support, and that effective planning and evaluation are conducted.<sup>19</sup>

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## Acknowledgements

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## Additional Resources

- ▶ Creating Thriving Workplaces – <http://www.superfriend.com.au/news/2014-12-16/superfriend-s-thriving-workplaces-project-complete->

- ▶ Workplace Prevention of Mental Health Problems Guidelines – <http://prevention.workplace-mentalhealth.net.au>
- ▶ Psychological health and safety in the workplace - Prevention, promotion, and guidance to staged implementation – <http://shop.csa.ca/en/canada/ohs-management-systems/occupational-health-and-safety-management/icat/ohsmanagement>
- ▶ Best-Practice Guidelines – Workplace Health in Australia – [http://www.workplacehealth.org.au/\\_literature\\_51087/HAPIA\\_Best\\_Practice\\_Guidelines](http://www.workplacehealth.org.au/_literature_51087/HAPIA_Best_Practice_Guidelines)
- ▶ Assembling the Pieces: An Implementation Guide to the National Standard for Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace – <http://www.mentalhealthcommission.ca/English/issues/workplace/implementation-guide>
- ▶ Guide to Promoting Health and Wellbeing in the Workplace – [http://www.healthierwork.act.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/Guide\\_to\\_Promoting\\_Health\\_and\\_Wellbeing\\_in\\_the\\_Workplace\\_3.pdf](http://www.healthierwork.act.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/Guide_to_Promoting_Health_and_Wellbeing_in_the_Workplace_3.pdf)
- ▶ beyondblue and The Mentally Healthy Workplace Alliance Heads Up – <http://www.headsup.org.au/>
- ▶ Improve Psychological Health and Safety in your Workplace – <https://www.workplacestrategiesformentalhealth.com/>
- ▶ Guarding Minds @ Work: On the Agenda – <https://www.workplacestrategiesformentalhealth.com/free-training-and-tools/on-the-agenda>

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