

Wellbeing in the workplace,  
thriving business.

Supportive  
conversations  
with colleagues

**Ripple**<sup>&Co</sup>

**Bolton**  
**Council**

# We don't often talk about our mental health. But why not?

On any given day, we speak anywhere between 7,000-20,000 words.

Between texting, tweeting, DMs, IMs, emojis, video calls and chats, we're clearly saying a lot. But how many of us honestly say things that we really feel, and how many times do we truly listen to what someone else is saying?

Many mental health concerns such as depression, anxiety and addictions, to name a few, thrive on loneliness, and it's a vicious cycle. Human closeness is very important for our wellbeing and the lack of it can make things worse for someone with mental health concerns. This lack of emotional support can cause mental health concerns to aggravate, which in turn makes it harder to speak and share your feelings.

Sometimes a conversation with the right person is enough to make us feel better. At other times it might take a bit more. But the chances are it's going to **start with a conversation**. It might seem a little daunting to start a conversation about mental health but it's important to remember you don't have to be an expert. Starting a conversation is an important first step towards supporting someone, and perhaps getting them the professional help that they need. And crucially the earlier a problem is tackled the less impact it will have.



# Tips for a supportive conversation

## Verbal listening skills



Don't talk about yourself – focus on the individual

Give them time and space to talk even if this means silences.

Silences can be helpful for the person to gather their thoughts and manage their emotions. Be patient and don't try to force them into talking if they do not want to



Put aside any personal opinion and judgements.  
Listen carefully and don't make assumptions



Reassure them that you are there to try to help

Be genuine – the conversation will happen best if it comes from a place of authentic concern for their wellbeing



Empathise by focusing on feelings – you may not understand their feelings that have been caused by a situation, but you will likely have felt the same feelings before

If you don't understand – ask. It demonstrates that you are trying to understand how they feel and helps make they feel valued



Paraphrase and reflect back what they say to demonstrate that you are listening and understand. This also helps avoid defaulting to advice and counselling which is our human nature in our effort to help someone



Ask open questions to keep the conversation flowing. Reflecting back what they say will also do this. A blend of the two will prevent the individual feeling like they are being interviewed

Highlight sources of support within the organisation

Remember, it's not your responsibility to solve their problems. It is about being supportive and helping them see the options for further support should they need it.

# Non-verbal listening skills

If holding the conversation in person, avoid any physical barriers such as a desk or table

Think about body language – try to remain relaxed and open, attentive and show interest

Avoid any distractions – e.g. mobile on silent

Offer nods of encouragement and understanding

Keep comfortable eye contact

Being an active listener who is sensitive to the mental health needs of both our work colleagues and friends is an important step towards creating mind-positive communities. In the long run, we will be able to stamp out the stigma and loneliness that is experienced by those with mental health concerns, and instead we will be able to look out for each other.

## Important note:

Conversations with colleagues who are experiencing challenges with their wellbeing or emotional health can be difficult and sometimes distressing. If you have had a conversation like this, perhaps take some time to look after your own wellbeing directly after the conversation or seek someone that you can off load to or talk to for some support.

