



South African
EMPLOYERS 4 DISABILITY



SAE4D

Quarter 2 Newsletter



sae4d.co.za



South African Employers 4 Disability



South African Employers 4 Disability

**June
2022**

QUARTER 2 NEWSLETTER

SOUTH AFRICAN EMPLOYERS 4 DISABILITY

Greetings colleagues,

Re: Employee Mental Health in the Workplace

Each of us wants to work in a healthy and positive workplace. We are sharing a few tips on what you can do as a manager to help create an environment where everyone can thrive and ask for the support they need to be mentally healthy and productive at work.

Dialogue is key:

Encourage everyone to be open about their mental health by talking about it regularly. “Normalising” the conversation can make it easier for employees to reach out and ask for support when they need it. Many employers say that they perceive mental health to be a problem because they too often don’t know that someone has a mental health condition until they are at best not coping, and at worst, in crisis. Include mental health in discussions on employee wellbeing and disability. Talk to HR and ask them to run some specific wellbeing sessions where mental health is discussed.

Get your senior leaders to lead by example and talk about their own experiences of mental ill health, or that of friends or family (with their permission, of course!). **The power of storytelling, particularly from the top, can be huge in making it feel safer for others to open up.** “Psychological safety” has become something of a buzzword, but whatever you call it, creating a culture where everyone feels safe, without being judged, to talk about mental health and ask for the support they need to critical. Remember too that what you, or senior managers, perceive the psychological safety of your organisation to be, may not match the experience of employees on the ground.

Remind everyone in your team about your organisation’s policies on mental health and wellbeing and encourage them to reach out if they need support. For example, does your organisation have policies about leave to support mental health? **If you have a policy on disability leave, have you made it clear that this includes mental health conditions?**

If you don’t have mental health policies or wellbeing initiatives, talk to HR and your Transformation teams about developing some. It’s really important though to make sure these are accessible to everyone; too often, wellbeing programmes – such as lunchtime exercise programmes or encouraging employees to use the stairs – are inaccessible and exclude or even alienate disabled employees. People with another condition or disability are more, not less, likely to experience mental ill health, so designing programmes inclusively is critical.



See below for some examples of steps you can take to support your team's mental health.

Remote workers

It's important that members of your team feel just as supported when working remotely. It may seem harder to support your team's mental health if you're not working in the same space as them – but there are steps you can take.

Stay in touch

Working in different areas means you may have to be more proactive about staying in touch. What's appropriate will depend on the team and the individual. Here are some general tips:

- Have regular team catch-ups and one-on-one catchups with members of your team. Ask your team how they are doing and if they need any support.
- You could consider creating group chats on WhatsApp or Teams (for example) to allow your team to stay in touch and have the more casual conversations that might have happened in the office.
- Consider holding remote social gatherings that allows employees to interact socially such as online book or film sessions, gardening or baking groups where people can share their opinions, achievements and challenges or funny stories!
- That said, some employees working remotely may struggle with communication 'overload' with all communications being emails, messages and video calls. Allow employees to disconnect for periods in order to concentrate.

Your aim is to transform the working environment into somewhere that is positive about wellbeing and mental health. As a manager you want your team to feel that you will be supportive if they are open about their mental health and any problems they might be having. Role modelling is important and something that every manager at every level can take a lead on. You can set an example by:

- Discouraging competitive busyness: for example, "You're busy? You should see how busy I am!"
- Ensuring that you and the people who work for you take proper breaks and have the opportunity to take a break, perhaps for a walk outside, for a minimum of 15 minutes every day if possible.
- Encouraging lunchtime breaks away from desks and computers and phones. It can be good and productive to have a break from the screen and go outside.
- If you do have lunches or breaks together with your team, try to avoid talking about work. Consider having a rule that work talk is banned on team lunches.
- Think before sending or responding to emails out of hours. Will it make others think that they have to be working "on 24/7" and respond immediately? Make it very clear to your team that you do not expect an immediate response. You could consider adding the following to your emails saying: "I'm sending this email during my working hours which might not be the same as yours and so am not expecting an immediate response". This can be particularly helpful if your teams work different shift patterns or across different time zones.
- **Most of all – get to know the people you work with so that you can spot the signs when someone isn't coping.**



As a manager, no matter where you are in your organisation, you can take steps towards making your workplace (wherever that is) a better place for everyone – including those with mental health conditions.

It is your job to ensure that people working for you are productive. If your team feels that you are a positive and supportive manager, they will be happier and happier teams are more productive teams. It might even improve your own happiness levels!

Good practices to support mental health

Finally, there are some things all the research agrees makes for happier people and happy people make for happy workplaces:

- Control over your time and work
- Meaningful work and fairness
- Social interaction – sense of belonging and community with colleagues
- Good sleep, nutrition, and exercise goes a long way in supporting well being
- Shorter commuting times
- Sunlight and nature

These might not be within your control at work but perhaps there are small steps you can start taking. We wish you well in supporting your employee's well-being and mental health.



Upcoming Event: Webinar & Annual General Meeting

Segment 1: Breakfast Webinar Session

Duration: 45 Minutes

Topic: An employer's perspective to disability in the workplace, research by B Solombela (ESKOM)

Speaker: Babalwa Solombela

Segment 2: Annual General Meeting (AGM) Session

Duration: 45 Minutes

Chaired By: Losh Pather (SAE4D –Chairperson)

Until next time, stay well and healthy!

Losh Pather

Issued by: The Chairperson and Executive Committee of the SAE4D