

taking care of yourself & supporting a young worker

As an employer or a manager, providing support to employees in your workplace is good practice. The benefits of a mentally healthy workplace may include increases in productivity, work engagement, job satisfaction, attraction of top talent and decreases in work-related injuries, illnesses, claims, absenteeism and turnover.

Sometimes taking on the important role of supporting the wellbeing of others can be personally challenging. It might remind you of difficulties in your own life and cause concern (or even stress) about the wellbeing of your young staff member. This article will help you to consider ways to look after yourself while you support others.



Taking care of yourself as a manager models the importance of self care for your staff. It helps to create a mentally healthy culture in your workplace.

Taking care of yourself

How much can you do? Sharing the responsibility

Looking after yourself involves setting healthy boundaries. Give some thought to what you can take on yourself and what part others might play.

Your role

Work plays a large part in people's lives and having a workplace that understands and supports good mental health is important to our wellbeing.

As a manager, you can encourage positive mental health by role modelling self-care. This might include maintaining work/life balance, taking time off when you're unwell, talking openly about mental health, and taking regular breaks.

Employers have a responsibility to assist young workers by making reasonable adjustments in the workplace to benefit their mental health. This might involve having regular supportive conversations with them, making temporary changes to their role, working conditions or approving additional breaks and leave.

You could think about factors in the workplace that are potentially contributing to worker stress, such as not being clear about their role and responsibilities, the amount of control they have over their work, workloads and time pressures. You could also provide encouragement to seek external support and perhaps even provide them with some suggestions for places that they could seek assistance.

Learn more about what you can do to create a mentally healthy workplace by visiting headspace.org.au/employers.

The role for others

You are not expected to be available out of work hours or to provide counselling for young workers. These are very reasonable boundaries to set. In fact, being clear on what you can and can't do might encourage the worker to seek the support that they need outside of work.

You are not expected to take responsibility for all aspects of your staff's wellbeing. You are one part of a community of support that may include a GP, the worker's family or significant others, a headspace centre or other support service. To find a headspace centre near you visit: headspace.org.au/headspace-centres.

When we take on too much, we start to feel overwhelmed and this reduces our capacity to be supportive towards others. Maintaining healthy boundaries supports you and your young workers by enabling you to continue to be compassionate in the long run. Consider what boundaries you need to put in place to sustain yourself at work. What changes do you notice in yourself that might indicate you're taking on too much? What can you do to support yourself when things start to go off track?

Self care ideas

You can use these tips to encourage the young worker that you are supporting but they are equally useful in taking care of yourself as a leader.

1. Get in to life

When stress increases, we can let go of many of the things that keep us well. Getting in to life can help to boost your mood and give you a sense of achievement. Regularly doing things that you enjoy is good for your wellbeing. Are you making time for hobbies, socialising, relaxing activities, trying something new, or creative? Are you continuing to grow your skills through professional development and staying connected to those aspects of your work that you're more passionate about? Do not let these things go when you are more stressed. You might need to start small by choosing one activity that makes you happy and trying to build on that over time when life is difficult.

2. Learn skills for tough times

We all have different ways of coping with difficult times. It is useful to reflect on what works for you and whether there is more that you could be doing to support yourself. Some people practice regular relaxation or mindfulness, others spend time in nature, whilst some of us use art, or talking to others as strategies to deal with stress.

3. Create connections

Relationships with friends, family (including pets), colleagues, and others in the community are essential to our mental health. Look for opportunities to strengthen your existing relationships or to develop new connections. For example, you might like to arrange to have lunch with a colleague, meet a friend for coffee, make a phone call to a family member, or re-join the social group that you were once a part of.

4. Eat well

Eating well is good for our physical health, it fuels the body and provides energy. But research tells us that it can also impact a person's mood and mental wellbeing too¹. Check in with yourself about whether you are eating a good balanced diet, minimal processed foods and plenty of whole foods like fruit, vegetables, whole grains and protein.

5. Stay active

Physical activity is also good for our mental health. It helps us to regulate our mood and to manage stress. How do you like to stay active? You might like to run, cycle, dance, do yoga or go to the gym. Consider ways to stay active at work like having walking meetings or regular strength breaks. Incorporating movement regularly is the key.

6. Get enough sleep

Sleep is vital for good mental health and often suffers during times of stress. Incorporate "winding down" activities before bed and minimise light and screen time before sleep. If you find it hard to wind down, try a mindfulness exercise like one from the Smiling Mind app.

7. Cut back on alcohol and other drugs

While it can be tempting to use alcohol or other drugs to get through hard times, they can trigger or contribute to mental health problems over time. Try to avoid using alcohol and other drugs when you're feeling down and reduce your use by learning new strategies for managing tough times. If you regularly connect with friends or colleagues over drinks, consider alternative like going out for lunch or trying something new together.

Check out Beyond Blue Heads Up for more tips on [Taking care of yourself and staying well](#) (headsup.org.au)

Connecting in with support

Part of taking care of yourself and supporting a young person includes modelling self-care and reaching out for support when you need it.

If you've noticed changes in your mental health, you might like to have a chat with a family member, a friend, or a trusted support person in your life.

If the difficulties you are experiencing are more significant and beginning to have an impact on your daily functioning (for example, your ability to perform at work, get enough sleep, or to stay connected with others), you should consider accessing a support service or healthcare provider to discuss your situation.

A GP is often a good place to begin. They will know local service providers and can help to sort out the right place to go.

If you have an Employee Assistance Program, you might like to reach out to them for support.

[Beyond Blue](#) provides free online and telephone support and they may be able to point you in the right direction for assistance in your area (beyondblue.org.au).



How is your work life balance? How are you managing work stress?

Young workers are learning about how to behave in the workplace. What you model for them helps them to understand what is expected from them at work now and into the future.

Stress busters at work:

- Take 5 or 10 minutes to yourself
- Go for a short walk
- Talk to someone in a support role
- Have a healthy snack or cup of tea
- Do breathing exercises or stretching

¹ Jacka, F.N., Mykletun, A. & Berk, M. Moving towards a population health approach to the primary prevention of common mental disorders. *BMC Med* 10, 149 (2012).



For more information on what you can do to support young employees at work, check out [headspace.org.au/employers](https://www.headspace.org.au/employers)