

Emotional Wellbeing at Work 2

Some pressure at work can be motivating, but when it becomes overwhelming and is untreated it can lead to work-related stress. The NHS staff survey (2020)¹ found that across the whole of the NHS the most likely group to report feeling unwell because of work stress were midwives (51.9%), followed by health visitors (47%). These figures are not new and have remained almost constant since the previous 2016 NHS Staff Survey.

This Good Practice Point (GPP) resource is the second of two GPPs on Emotional Wellbeing at Work. This GPP shares some current approaches to promoting emotional wellbeing (for yourself and others) which participants of our iHV Emotional Wellbeing at Work programmes have reported to find useful.

Good Practice Points

1. Taking action by influencing in a positive way (adapted from West, Bailey and Williams²)

- Take opportunities to be part of mechanisms for health visitors to shape the culture and processes of your organisation.
- Advocate for the need for psychologically safe cultures which ensure equity, proactive and positive approaches to diversity and universal inclusion, for example, circle groups at the start of meetings, staff feeling surveys at larger events.
- Model and contribute to establishing compassionate relationships and a nurturing culture within your team, for example, encourage in-person catch ups for informal peer supervision.
- Work within your team and with leaders to identify and escalate instances of chronic excessive work demands which exceed the capacity of individuals within the team, for example, use incident reporting and critical event analysis.

- Reflecting on your work with families through the process of supervision is fundamental to the quality of care that families receive. It also helps to mitigate burnout and trauma for practitioners. For example, ensure you access supervision meetings offered and keep them integral to your practice. Escalate your concerns if this support is absent.

2. Lean into colleagues

- Find ways to regularly come together both formally and informally, for example, prioritise meetings, suggest walking catch ups and look for opportunities to avoid isolation.
- If you are working remotely, access group chats. For example, on MS Teams – but avoid communicating out of hours to maintain good boundaries.
- Find creative ways to nurture and support each other. For example, find simple ways to show you value your colleagues individually according to their preferences.
- Share your vulnerability so that others can too (see Supporting Resources 1 and 2, on page 3).

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For additional resources see www.ihv.org.uk

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- If there are difficulties within the team, find a way to name them and discuss the feelings that they evoke for everyone. See a guide to Courageous Conversations (see Supporting Resource 3, on page 3).

- Find ways to discuss diversity within the team and to ensure that oppression is tackled if it shows up (see Supporting Resources 4 and 5 on page 3).

3. Grab the humour and joy at work

- Find time for the people and things that make you laugh – laughter is a great way for flooding our bodies with endorphins.

- What matters to you? Think of one thing that brings you joy currently...and may bring you and others joy in the workplace (see Supporting Resource 6, on page 3).

4. Seek out opportunities for authentic and safe wellbeing conversations and restorative support

- Take opportunities to engage in formal conversations about your own wellbeing and the impact that the work is having on you. This could include: managerial 1:1s; restorative supervision; wellbeing at work groups; Schwartz rounds³; wellbeing conversations.

5. Look for the good

- The human brain evolved to more naturally focus on what's wrong rather than what's right in order to protect us, but we can teach it how to notice what's good⁴ (See Supporting Resource 16).
- Notice the small moments of pleasure in life, like the first cup of tea in the morning, the sun shining, the smiling face that greets us, the cat nestling your legs.
- Practise gratitude - every day for 21 days write down 3 things that you are grateful for⁵ or try an app like the Gratitude Garden.
- Notice when you are giving to other people⁶. In health visiting, there are many opportunities for this. Giving people your time by listening to them, validating their feelings, or noticing and pointing out the positive things in the relationship between them and their baby. It doesn't have to be the big things (they are rare), but notice that you are giving every day.
- There is strong evidence that strengths-based approaches are the most effective means of supporting families. One of the greatest skills in

the craft of health visiting is being able to find the tangible strengths and hope in situations that can feel hopeless. This is not empty praise, but an act of drawing families' attention to the positives that are found in every situation, for example, the fleeting moment that the depressed mother makes eye contact with her infant or the avoidant father who confides in you briefly for the first time. Hold onto these tiny wins and notice them.

6. Practise self-compassion

- Notice when you are suffering and take action to seek help or sooth yourself in the moment (see Supporting Resources 7, 8, 9, 10, 11).
- Notice and recognise your inner critical voice – talk to yourself as a loving and kind friend would (see Supporting Resource 13).
- Remember that we all suffer, and you are not alone.

7. Be mindful

- Cultivating mindfulness can be helpful. Secular methods of developing mindfulness have become much more popular in the last few years.
- Check out what is available in your area. Many organisations have purchased ShinyMind app (see Supporting Resource 17) on behalf of their staff. It is a wellbeing and resilience mindset app created with NHS staff which is now being offered across the public sector.

8. Learn to notice, accept and find ways to manage difficult emotions

- We all experience difficult and painful emotions, and finding ways to tolerate and manage them is an important skill to learn.
- Ask yourself what has worked before?
- There are many things that can help us through difficult times. Some of the most frequently mentioned, in programmes that we offer, are: connecting with family and friends; exercise; eating well; singing in a choir; gardening; walking and being close to nature; cold water swimming; watching TV; faith; mindfulness; and crafting.
- Practise managing difficult feelings mindfully (see Supporting Resource 12).

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9. Seek help when you need it

- If you are a student or newly qualified SCPHN, look for regular support in your first years in practice through a formal Preceptorship Programme. If your organisation does not formally offer this, make a specific request for this type of ongoing scheduled space.
- Don't be afraid to seek help if negative emotions and thoughts are consuming you. It's the right thing to do. Talk to someone you trust - either a family member, colleague, manager, Occupational Health, The Samaritans or your GP (see Supporting Resource 14).

10. Learn new things

- Human beings have a core psychological need for mastery. It's integral to our wellbeing. It means feeling a sense of competence, using and developing our skills and capabilities⁷ (see Supporting Resource 15).
- Use your Professional Development Reviews to recognise your needs and gaps, in order to develop a plan of areas that you really want to specialise and grow.
- Make time to learn new skills that you are interested in outside of work – flower arranging, plumbing, boxing, learning a new language.
- Take time to reflect and acknowledge all the skills you already have and the learning you have done.

Supporting Resources

1. Brene Brown (2010), The Power of Vulnerability, Ted Talk: <https://bit.ly/3Yx0Wi5>
2. NHS Employers, Deborah Lee on mental health: leading the way and tackling stigma, Podcast: <https://bit.ly/3OsROXn>
3. Petit and Stephen (2015) Developing Resilience in Practice: A Health Visiting Framework, Institute of Health Visiting, P18: <https://bit.ly/3oyeAQT>
4. Accenture (2017), Inclusion and the Power of Diversity, You Tube Video: <https://bit.ly/3DNKnFn>
5. The Kings Fund, Equality and diversity: Our Work on Discrimination and issues of equality and diversity within the health and care workforce: <https://bit.ly/3DTIO8E>
6. Medical Education Directorate-NHS Scotland, Dr Edgar Jones, Joy in Work: <https://bit.ly/4544RWi>
7. NHS Resources Toolkit: <https://bit.ly/3OzCNTA>
8. Healthcare Improvement Scotland – ihub - Staff Wellbeing Tools and Resources: <https://bit.ly/3YwFYA7>
9. HSC Public Health Agency – Staff Health and Wellbeing: <https://bit.ly/47vme3O>
10. GIG CYMRU NHS Wales – Colleague Health and Wellbeing: <https://bit.ly/3s6ADTV>
11. Kristen Neff – Self Compassion Guided Practices and Exercises: <https://bit.ly/47umRuE>
12. The Gottman Institute, Six Steps to Mindfully Deal with Difficult Emotions: <https://bit.ly/3Kxx67B>
13. Kristen Neff – Changing Your Critical Self Talk: <https://bit.ly/3QRDiLN>

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Supporting Resources Continued

14. NHS England – Supporting our NHS People, Helping you manage your own health and wellbeing whilst supporting others: <https://bit.ly/3QyIjzU>
15. Action For Happiness, Trying Out – Keep Learning New Things: <https://bit.ly/3KCXM6Z>
16. Action For Happiness, Emotions – Look for What’s Good: <https://bit.ly/3Oxw8cr>
17. Shiny Mind App: <https://bit.ly/3DXZonP>

References

1. NHS Staff Survey (2020) Available at: <https://bit.ly/45foxpU>
2. West. M, Bailey. S, Williams. E, (2020), The Courage of Compassions: Supporting nurses and midwives to deliver high-quality care, The Kings Fund.
3. Schwartz rounds – Available at: <https://bit.ly/3s32jcl>
4. Baumeister. R, Bratslavsky.E, Finenauer.C, Vohs.K, (2001), Bad is stronger than good, Review of General Psychology, 5(4), pp323-370.
5. Emmons.R, and McCullough.M (2004), The Psychology of Gratitude, Oxford University Press
6. Action for Happiness – Giving. See: <https://bit.ly/3s5hNN9>
7. Vansteenkiste.M, Ryan.R, Soenens.B, (2020), Basic psychological need theory: Advancements, critical themes and future directions. Motivation and Emotion 44, 1-31

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