

PURPOSE

This guide outlines the importance of supporting the mental health of managers, shares tips on how businesses can support their employees in these roles and, in turn, also help managers feel more comfortable about supporting their teams.

WHY ACTION IS IMPORTANT

Nobody is immune from mental health challenges, and there is no correlation between impacts and experiences, management capabilities, or the ability to cope with pressure and stress. According to the Harvard Business Review, 'mental health symptoms are just as common in the C-Suite as among individual contributors.'¹ Managers and leaders may be experiencing stress on a personal level, as well as potentially dealing with the added responsibility of supporting their direct reports who may be experiencing mental health challenges.

We also know that the way managers interact with their staff has a profound impact on their working environment and relationship with the organisation.² The behaviour of managers can have an impact on work-related stress levels as well as employee understanding, acceptance, and confidence in discussing mental health and wellbeing.³ It is not the role of a manager to be a mental health expert, but they do have a duty of care for themselves and their teams in assisting them to get the help they may need. Given this, it is important to provide managers with as much support as possible.⁴

TIPS FOR MANAGERS

1. Managers need to look after themselves first

This should always be the first step, and just like the safety briefing on an aeroplane you should always 'put your own oxygen mask on before helping those around you...'.⁵

[HeadsUp](#) provides some strategies for managing our work roles in a way that maintains or enhances our mental health and wellbeing:

- Limit working extra hours
- Take regular breaks
- Take regular leave
- Set realistic deadlines
- It's okay to say no
- Make use of your Employee Assistance Program if you have one or other support
- Make use of flexible working arrangements.⁵

¹ HBR, [Eight ways managers can support employees mental health \(2020\)](#).

² Forbes, [How bad bosses compel good employees to leave \(2019\)](#).

³ Healthy Performance (UK), [Why line managers are key in managing and supporting mental health at work \(2020\)](#).

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ HeadsUp, [Taking care of your mental health – a guide for employees](#).

2. Create a positive work environment

Managers can put in place and support measures that can improve the working environment for employees and promote mentally healthy workplace practices. A number of mental health NGOs and workplace health and safety agencies (such as Beyond Blue, Black Dog Institute, and Mental Health First Aid Australia) have an extensive range of [training programs](#) and resources which are free, particularly for smaller businesses.

[HeadsUp](#) provides guidelines for leaders and managers to create a mentally healthy workplace that is safe and healthy that includes:

- strong leadership that values employee contributions
- clarifying organisational structures, roles, and responsibilities
- communicate regularly
- encourage a culture of support that values diversity
- include your team in the plan
- help educate your staff about mental health and the workplace
- talk openly about mental health and encourage others to do the same
- demonstrate respectful behaviour and health work habits, for example '[leaving loudly](#)'
- improve job design by addressing workplace stressors
- be an influencer.⁶

HeadsUp have also developed an [action plan checklist which is available here](#).

3. Respond to challenges

Looking after yourself, modelling behaviours, and putting in place other proactive measures will go a long way towards creating a mentally healthy work environment, however, mental health challenges can still arise despite best efforts. Considering how we respond to these challenges is an important part of the overall approach.

How your organisation should respond to challenges as they arise is determined by a number of [legal obligations](#) and workplace mental health strategies, policies and processes. As such, managers must be well versed in these obligations and organisational arrangements.

[HeadsUp](#) provides guidelines for managers on:

- [supporting others who may be experiencing a mental health condition](#)
- [signs to look for and conversation approaches for those struggling](#)
- [tips on helping someone experiencing challenges to stay at work](#)
- [tips on providing ongoing support](#)

This business guide provides a summary only of the subject matter covered, without the assumption of duty of care by Consult Australia. The summary should not be relied on as a substitute for legal or other professional advice.

⁶ HeadsUp, [Creating a mentally healthy workplace - a guide for business leaders and managers](#).