



# MENTAL HEALTH AND WORK

A #NoStigma information  
booklet to promote  
**Life Without Stigma  
in the Workplace**

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# INTRODUCTION

## What is the #NoStigma campaign?

This booklet has been prepared as part of the #NoStigma campaign from St Patrick's Mental Health Services. The campaign aims to reframe mental health stigma and discrimination by showing the positive effect on life when they are not experienced. #NoStigma invites us to consider how life without stigma in the home, community and workplace benefits us all. You can learn more about the overall campaign and share your thoughts on life without stigma at [nostigma.ie](http://nostigma.ie).

This booklet focuses on promoting life without stigma in the workplace.

## Life without stigma in the workplace

The World Health Organisation highlights that when it comes to mental health and work:

*"Most critically, the stigma surrounding mental health conditions remains a dominant barrier to disclosure at work, to the implementation of support at work for people living with mental health conditions or, indeed, to the uptake of available support for workers."*<sup>(i)</sup>

We all have the right to work without experiencing stigma and discrimination.

Work without mental health stigma means:

- Our workplaces are inclusive and supportive environments
- We all experience equal opportunities for employment and for progressing at work
- We all get access to available support in the workplace if we need it
- We can let others know if we are struggling
- We don't delay in looking after our mental health.

## Work and mental health

The World Health Organisation highlights that when work is meaningful, and work conditions and environments are safe and good, it can be protective of our mental health. Importantly, work can contribute to recovery and inclusion for people experiencing ongoing mental health difficulties.

Returning to work after a period of mental ill health can be a positive experience. Among other things, work can help promote recovery by:

- Giving you a sense of purpose or meaning
- Giving routine and structure to your days
- Giving you better financial security
- Giving you the chance to interact and develop friendships with others
- Building your self-esteem by developing new skills or using skills you already have.



# MENTAL HEALTH AND RIGHTS IN THE WORKPLACE

## Mental health and rights in the workplace

A vital part of achieving life without stigma in the workplace is understanding:

- Our rights to be protected from discrimination
- Our obligations as employers to promote equality and protect staff from discrimination.

## What does discrimination mean?

Discrimination can be understood as a part of mental health stigma that relates to our behavior and how we treat one another. Discrimination happens if we are treated less favourably than another person, because of who we are.

In legal terms discrimination is understood as:

- Unfavourable treatment compared with another
- Based on a specific ground
- Where there is lack of a reasonable and objective justification.

The specific grounds include different characteristics and categories of people. One of these grounds is disability, and mental health difficulties fall under this area within the relevant law.

## How are we protected from discrimination at work?

The main laws that protect us from discrimination related to work are the Employment Equality Acts. These acts prohibit discrimination on nine different grounds. Disability is one of these grounds, and mental health difficulties are included under this ground. This law also includes the right to 'reasonable accommodations' in the workplace.

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## What are reasonable accommodations?

*"Providing reasonable accommodations promotes an inclusive work environment for workers with mental health conditions by enhancing equitable access to opportunities and resources at work." (iii)*

(World Health Organisation)

In Ireland, the Employment Equality Acts require that employers make reasonable accommodations for employees who have a disability. Reasonable accommodations are practical changes or steps an employer must make so that people with disabilities have equal opportunities to take part in employment. This includes people experiencing ongoing mental health difficulties.

These steps may be needed at different stages, such as attending job interviews; taking part in, and advancing, at work; or undertaking training.

Employers do not have to put in place measures if they would result in a "disproportionate burden" to the organisation. For example, this might mean if there were very high costs involved. However, many relevant measures would not be of this nature, and there are also related grants available to employers.

We will look more at reasonable accommodations for mental health difficulties in the next part of this booklet.

## What can I do if I believe I've been discriminated against at work?

If you believe you have been discriminated against under the Employment Equality Acts, you can make a complaint to the Workplace Relations Commission. It's important to note that there are time limits for doing this. You must make a complaint within six months of the last act of discrimination. You can find more information about the process [here](#).

## Where can I get more information on my rights?

If you would like to know more about your rights in the workplace, the 'Your Rights Service' by [the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission](#) provides information on your rights under equality and human rights law in Ireland. You will find contact details in the 'Helpful Information and Supports' section at the end of this booklet.

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# RETURNING TO WORK

## Returning to work after time off for a mental health difficulty

Occupational therapists often work with people who are accessing mental health services to explore what might help when it comes to their work-life. We asked our Occupational Therapy Department for their advice on what can help when someone is returning to work after time off for a mental health difficulty, including when someone has spent time in a hospital setting.

Here are their top tips:

- When you are ready, speak with your doctor and manager about returning to work to put a plan in place to support you. You may be able to access support from an occupational therapist to help you think about planning for return to work.
- If you have had an admission to hospital as part of your recovery, it can be very important to make sure you take enough time at home getting back into regular daily life before returning to work. Reconnecting with friends and families, a daily routine, and building up your stamina are crucial to give time to firstly, before setting a return to work date.

## What can help with the return to work?

If you are starting a new job, or returning to a current job after a period off, there are many small things you can do to help feel more confident on your first day.

For example:

- Ask to return to work slowly. Consider only working part-time initially - this is called a phased return.
- Adjust your routine ahead of time. In the days before your return, try to get used to going to sleep and getting up at the same times you will need to for work.
- Choose your outfit for the first day. Try it on ahead of time to make sure you are confident and comfortable in it.
- Consider if reasonable accommodations might work for you in the short or long-term. Telling people about your mental health difficulty is not something you have to do, but it may help your workplace to support you. Think about what your employer may need to know, who you would tell, and when. This is sometimes referred to as 'disclosure' and there is more information on this on the following page.

**If you think you might benefit from reasonable accommodations, it can be helpful to get advice about this from a mental health professional, such as an occupational health professional, job coach or an occupational therapist.**

## What helps to stay well when back in work?

- Self-care is important in managing stress - remember to take your breaks in work and stick to your agreed working hours. Rest breaks, eating well, drinking plenty of water, chatting with others, and including movement and fresh air into the workday where possible are all parts of self-care that can help us stay well.
- Remember to celebrate the small successes - try to identify one small thing each day you can accomplish.
- Put into practice skills and strategies that you've built up during your recovery. Include things that help into your work routine. For example, if getting fresh air and exercise every day is helpful for you, make time for this on your lunch break. Or If you have been using breathing exercises or mindfulness exercises, try and include brief opportunities to practice during the work day.
- Use available supports. If there are employee assistance programmes, wellbeing initiatives or other potentially helpful supports available in the workplace, consider if they might be of help to you and your recovery.

## Reasonable accommodations and mental health difficulties

Reasonable accommodations will be different depending on people's needs and they may be needed temporarily or on an ongoing basis. They may be needed after a period of absence due to mental health difficulties; for someone living with a mental health condition who remains in work; or for someone newly joining the workplace. If you think you might benefit from reasonable accommodations, it can be helpful to get advice about this from a mental health professional, such as an occupational health professional, job coach or an occupational therapist.

Some examples of reasonable accommodations that might be relevant for mental health difficulties are:

- Time off to attend mental healthcare appointments
- Flexible working hours or a modified schedule
- A phased return to work after a period of leave due to mental ill-health
- Providing different types of support at work such as regular supportive meetings with a supervisor
- Communication preferences, such as getting brief written summaries after key meetings
- Allowing extra time for completing tasks
- Getting additional training
- Changes to the workspace to support sensory needs, for example moving to a quieter spot
- Access to private spaces at times for rest.



## Information and guidance on reasonable accommodations

Employers for Change and partners have created a free and downloadable '[Reasonable Accommodation Passport](#)' for employees and employers. This helpful tool provides lots of information and guidance about reasonable accommodations in the workplace, and a template to help talk them through and implement them.

## Disclosing a mental health difficulty

Telling someone, such as a manager or employer, about a mental health difficulty is a personal decision, and you are not obliged to do so. However, if you would like to access reasonable accommodations, your workplace will need to be given relevant information to understand and put in place supports that may be necessary.

You do not need to give your full medical history nor share other diagnoses that aren't relevant to your workplace needs.

Taking time to think through what's right for you is important. If you decide to disclose a mental health difficulty, think about:

- What particular information you may need or want to share
- Who you will be sharing it with
- When, where and how you'd like to have the conversation.

A detailed guide on disclosure is available from [Ahead](#), including tips and tools to help you prepare.



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# SUPPORT FOR EMPLOYEES

## Employment supports

***"Recovery-oriented strategies enhancing vocational and economic inclusion - such as supported employment - should be made available for people with severe mental health conditions, including psychosocial disabilities, to obtain and maintain employment."***

*(World Health Organisation)*

As well as the right to reasonable accommodations in the workplace, there are a variety of supports available for any of us with ongoing mental health difficulties, who may be exploring work opportunities.

These include:

### Pre-employment training and programmes

There are a range of pre-employment training and educational programmes available around Ireland to support people entering or returning to the workforce. These include programmes specifically for people with disabilities, including ongoing mental health difficulties or psychosocial disability.

## National Learning Network

National Learning Network provides personalised education, training and development opportunities for people who need additional supports to access, engage and thrive in education and training courses leading to employment.

National Learning Network offers a range of specialist support services for people with mental health difficulties such as anxiety disorders, depression, schizophrenia, obsessive compulsive disorder amongst others. While on their journey with National Learning Network, students are facilitated to explore ways positive mental health and wellbeing can be fostered, supported and enhanced in order to support them to achieve their desired outcomes.



National Learning Network runs over 70 training programmes in colleges across the country that can open the door to exciting new career and employment opportunities for people aged 16 to 66. All courses are fully funded by either the local Education and Training Board or the HSE.

[www.nln.ie](http://www.nln.ie).

### Supported employment services

Supported employment includes support to both look for, and secure, employment and to sustain your job. Supported employment services often have links with local employers to help people find work. Support can be provided to prepare for work and can continue when you are in the role. This can include working with a 'job coach'.

The 'EmployAbility' service is the supported employment service in Ireland and has centres around the country. This service is free and is for people aged 18-65 who have a disability, an injury and/or an illness, which includes ongoing mental health difficulties.

You can find your local service [here](#), or by contacting your local Intreo office.

### Mentoring

The [Open Doors Initiative](#) runs a mentorship programme that aims to help people with disabilities meet their full potential for further education opportunities, employment, or self-employment. Mentors act as role models and share their experiences to help people on their own pathways to work or education. You can find more information [here](#).

### Intreo

Intreo is the name of the Irish Public Employment Services and has centres all around the country. Your local Intreo service can provide support and information on job-seeking, training opportunities and disability grants and supports. You can find your local centre [here](#).

### WAM programme

The WAM (Willing Able Mentoring) programme is a work placement programme for graduates with disabilities run by Ahead. Placements are six months in duration, are paid and include mentoring. There is an application and assessment process for the programme, and graduates must compete for available placement opportunities as they would when applying for a job. You can find more information [here](#).

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# ROLE OF THE EMPLOYER

## What can employers do?

***"Workers living with mental health conditions should be accommodated to work in a person-centred manner, according to their needs, requirements and preferences. Direct supervisors play a critical role in supporting workers."*** <sup>(iii)</sup>

*(World Health Organisation)*

Employers have a vital role in achieving workplaces free from stigma and discrimination. Being aware of obligations under national equality and discrimination law is essential. There are also a range of grants and supports available to employers to fulfil obligations under equality law.

More generally, creating workplaces that protect and promote good mental health and wellbeing for all employees is important to removing barriers such as stigma and discrimination. It is important to be aware that someone may be less likely to disclose a mental health difficulty and access available supports, if they feel the work environment may be stigmatising or unsupportive. The World Health Organisation recommends that employers have in place a specific policy or plan for protecting and promoting mental health at work which should be integrated into occupational health and safety systems.

*"Efforts to reduce mental health stigma at work and actively promote relevant equality or discrimination legislation may help to make persons who would benefit from disclosure feel supported to do so".*

WHO recommendations to protect and promote mental health at work include:

- Manager training for mental health
- Mental health literacy and awareness training for workers
- Availability of individual supports such as access to employee assistance programmes or stress management programmes.

A range of guidance toolkits, information and resources are available for employers about mental health in the workplace and supporting employees with disabilities.

These include:

- **Retaining employees who acquire a disability. A guide for Employers** from the National Disability Authority
- **An employer disability information service** from Employers for Change
- **Mental health and wellbeing - a line manager's guide** from IBEC
- **Reasonable accommodation in relation to mental health** from the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission
- **Mental health at work factsheet** from the World Health Organisation
- **Equality and mental health: What the law means for your workplace** from SeeChange and the Equality Authority
- **Information on employer grants and schemes** from Ahead.

# HELPFUL INFORMATION AND SUPPORTS

INFORMATION ON RIGHTS AND ENTITLEMENTS		
Name of organisation:	What do they do?	To learn more:
<b>Citizens Information</b>	The Citizens Information service provides free impartial advice, information and advocacy, including about your rights and entitlements living in Ireland.	<p>You can find your local service <a href="#">here</a>.</p> <p>You can call the Citizens Information Phone Service at 0818 07 4000, Monday to Friday, 9.00am - 8.00pm.</p> <p>You can find information about employment and disability <a href="#">here</a>.</p>
<b>The Workplace Relations Commission</b>	<p>The Workplace Relations Commission provides an information and customer service about employment rights, equality and industrial relations matters.</p> <p>They deal with complaints and disputes related to employment rights and equality.</p>	<p>You can call their information and customer service at 0818 80 80 90 from 9.30am - 5.00pm, Monday to Friday.</p> <p>More information is available on their website at <a href="http://www.workplacerelations.ie">www.workplacerelations.ie</a></p>
<b>Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission</b>	<p>The Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission is Ireland's national human rights and equality institution.</p> <p>Their 'Your Rights Service' provides information about Ireland's equality laws and how we are protected from discrimination.</p>	<p>You can contact the 'Your Rights Service' by phone at 01 858 3000, or by email at <a href="mailto:YourRights@ihrec.ie">YourRights@ihrec.ie</a></p> <p>More information is available on their website at <a href="http://www.ihrec.ie">www.ihrec.ie</a></p>



TRAINING AND JOB SEEKING SUPPORTS		
Name of organisation:	What do they do?	To learn more:
<b>EmployAbility</b>	EmployAbility is an employment support service for people with a health condition, injury, illness or disability.	You can find out about your local EmployAbility service via your nearest Intreo office, or via this online <a href="#">list</a> .
<b>National Learning Network</b>	The National Learning Network provides flexible training courses for people who have experienced a setback, have had an accident, a mental health issue, an illness, injury or have a disability and extra support needs.	You can find contact details for your local centre <a href="#">here</a> .
<b>Intreo</b>	Intreo is the Public Employment Service in Ireland. Intreo provides a single point of contact for all employment and income supports and services.	You can find your local Intreo office <a href="#">here</a> . You can find more information online <a href="#">here</a> .

(i) World Health Organisation (2022, p.2) WHO Guidelines on Mental Health at Work. Geneva: World Health Organisation.

(ii) World Health Organisation (2022, p.20) WHO Guidelines on Mental Health at Work. Geneva: World Health Organisation.

(iii) World Health Organisation (2022, p.21) WHO Guidelines on Mental Health at Work. Geneva: World Health Organisation.

## INFORMATION FOR EMPLOYERS

Name of organisation:	What do they do?	To learn more:
<b>Employers for Change</b>	Employers for Change is a disability information service for employers.	You can find more information on their website - <a href="https://employersforchange.ie">employersforchange.ie</a> If you are an employer looking for information you can contact them by email at <a href="mailto:info@employersforchange.ie">info@employersforchange.ie</a> or by phone at 085 157 9603.
<b>SeeChange</b>	SeeChange is a national organisation that works to end mental health stigma. They offer a range of information and resources for the workplace.	You can find more information <a href="#">here</a> .
<b>IBEC</b>	IBEC is Ireland's largest lobby and business representative group. They have created a guide for line managers on mental health in the workplace.	You can access their guide to mental health and wellbeing in the workplace <a href="#">here</a> .

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