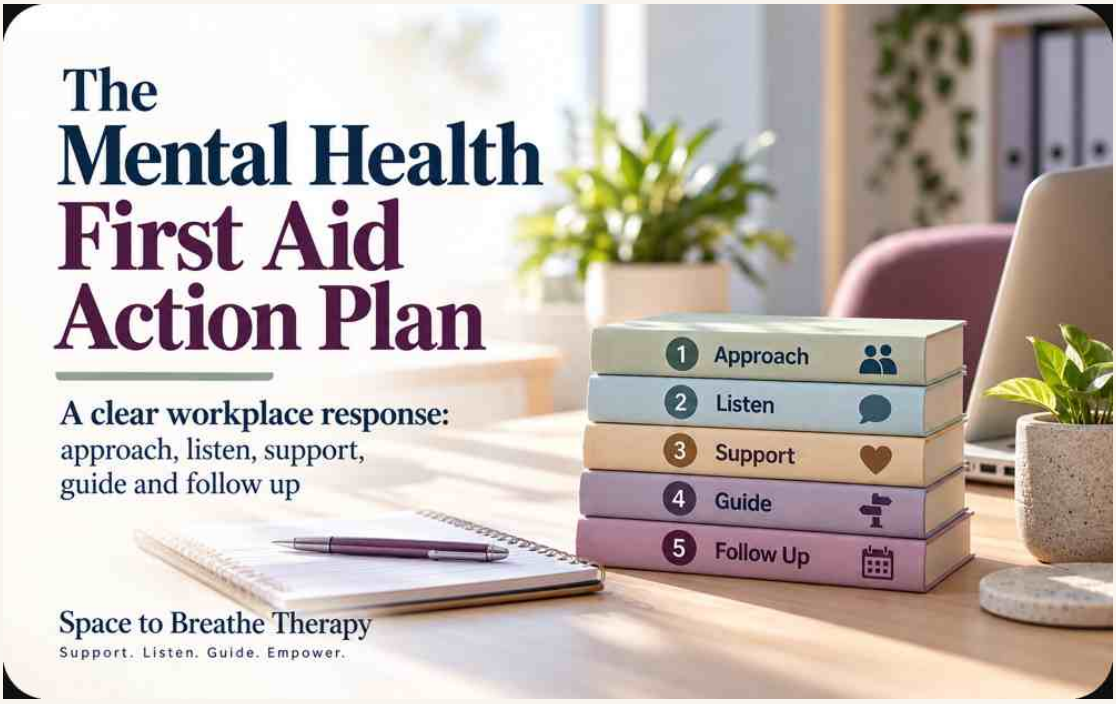
The Mental Health First Aid Action Plan

A clear workplace response



Five practical stages

APPROACH • LISTEN • SUPPORT • GUIDE • FOLLOW UP

A substantial, everyday workplace guide for colleagues, managers and supporters. The aim is to respond with care, respect individual choice, and improve working conditions when those conditions are contributing to distress.

Important: This is an educational framework by Space to Breathe Therapy, not an accredited Mental Health First Aid qualification or a substitute for emergency, clinical, safeguarding, HR or legal advice.

01 Understanding your role

Supporting someone without diagnosing or trying to fix them

What supportive mental-health first aid means

Workplace mental-health first aid begins with noticing that someone may be struggling, making an appropriate and private opportunity to talk, listening without judgement, and helping them consider sources of support. You do not need to be a therapist or diagnose a condition. Your role is to respond humanely, understand your professional boundaries, and act on immediate safety concerns.

Changes you might notice

- Increased withdrawal, irritability, tearfulness or unusual silence.
- Frequent lateness, changes in concentration, fatigue or difficulty managing tasks.
- Expressing hopelessness, distress, overwhelm or fears about attending work.
- Visible agitation or a shift in communication style, especially under pressure.

These signs are clues, not diagnoses

A change in behaviour can reflect health, bereavement, workload, sensory overwhelm, sleep difficulties or many other circumstances. Avoid assumptions and focus on observable changes.

Before you speak

Choose a private, calm moment. Check that you have enough time to listen. Consider whether the person would prefer speaking, writing, a brief walk, a video call, or a trusted colleague present. Be clear about confidentiality limits where safety or workplace procedures require information to be shared.

02 APPROACH

Begin gently, privately and without assumptions

Start with what you have observed

Words you could use

“I have noticed you seem under more pressure lately. I wanted to check how things are for you.”

“You do not need to explain anything personal. Is there anything at work that would make things easier right now?”

Keep the opening neutral. Allow the person to choose how much they disclose. Some people will welcome immediate conversation; others need time to think or may prefer written questions.

If they say “I’m fine”

Respect the answer without interrogating. You might say: “That is okay. My door is open if you want to talk later.” If there are ongoing work concerns, separately and sensitively discuss practical aspects of work without demanding personal medical details.

Make access part of the invitation

- Offer processing time and avoid requiring instant answers.
- Use direct, clear language rather than relying on implied meanings.
- Check sensory comfort and privacy; avoid busy or highly visible spaces.
- Allow writing, communication cards or other non-speaking responses.

03 LISTEN

Be present without rushing to solve the problem

Helpful listening behaviours

Allow pauses. Reflect what you have heard in plain language. Ask permission before offering suggestions. Stay curious rather than giving reassurance that minimises their experience. Avoid comparisons with other colleagues or advice based only on what worked for you.

Listening phrases

“Would it help to tell me what feels hardest at the moment?”

“Would you like me to listen first, or would it be useful to explore options together?”

“Have I understood correctly that the biggest difficulty is the changing workload?”

Avoid common traps

- “Everyone feels stressed sometimes.”
- “At least it is not as bad as…”
- “You should just speak up / exercise / think positively.”
- Promising complete secrecy when safeguarding or safety duties may apply.

You can validate feelings without agreeing with every interpretation or making commitments you cannot keep. Listening well can be especially important where someone has previously felt disbelieved or dismissed.

04 SUPPORT

Explore practical help and workplace responsibilities

Support the person and examine the environment

Distress at work is not always an individual problem. Excessive demands, low control, poor relationships, limited support, unclear roles and poorly managed change can increase workplace pressure. Managers should examine the source of strain rather than only advising the person to become more resilient.

Examples of workplace adjustments

- Agreeing priorities, deadlines and one clear point of contact.
- Written instructions, agendas, follow-up notes and extra processing time.
- Quiet space, headphones where appropriate, lighting or seating adjustments.
- Flexible start times, breaks or a temporary phased return.
- Accessible ways to raise concerns and meaningful review dates.

Ask rather than prescribe

“Which part of the day feels most difficult?”
“What would make this task or environment more manageable?”
“Could we trial an adjustment and review it together?”

Reasonable adjustments may be a legal duty under the Equality Act 2010 where applicable. Individual needs, organisational procedures and any safety considerations should guide decisions; seek appropriate HR or occupational-health advice.

05 GUIDE

Offer choices and know when to escalate

Help the person consider support routes

Ask what they have already tried and what support they would like. Depending on the situation, options may include a GP, an employee assistance programme, occupational health, a union representative, HR, a trusted manager, specialist therapy or external support services. Obtain consent wherever appropriate, and never force a disclosure.

When urgent action is needed

Immediate danger

If someone is at immediate risk of serious harm or needs urgent medical help, call 999 in the UK. Do not leave a person alone if doing so would be unsafe; follow emergency and safeguarding procedures.

If someone mentions suicide or self-harm, take it seriously. Ask clear, non-judgemental questions about immediate safety rather than avoiding the subject. In England, people needing urgent mental-health help who are not in immediate danger can contact NHS 111 and select the mental-health option. Check local NHS provision elsewhere in the UK.

Support is also available from Samaritans on 116 123, 24 hours a day in the UK and Ireland. Samaritans provides emotional support but does not replace emergency services.

Confidentiality and role boundaries

Explain who may need to know workplace information and why. Share only what is necessary, use appropriate records and organisational procedures, and avoid becoming the person’s sole source of support.

06 FOLLOW UP

Turn a caring conversation into sustainable change

Close the conversation clearly

Summarise what has been agreed. Ask the person whether they want notes or a written action summary. Clarify who will do what, what will remain confidential, and when you will check in again. Make sure suggested workplace changes are actually considered and implemented where appropriate.

Follow-up wording

“We agreed to trial written priorities and quieter meeting arrangements for two weeks. Shall we review how that is working next Thursday?”

Questions for managers

- Are workload and expectations realistic and clearly communicated?
- Is the person able to influence how and when tasks are completed?
- Are relationships, dignity, fairness and belonging being actively protected?
- Are changes explained early, accessibly and with a chance for questions?
- Have adjustments been reviewed with the employee rather than assumed successful?

Supporting the supporter

Notice your own reactions and capacity. Use supervision, appropriate debriefing, professional support and boundaries. You can be compassionate without being continuously available or taking responsibility for someone else’s recovery.

07 Action tracker

A practical page to print, complete or revisit

Use this page after a supportive conversation. Keep records according to workplace policy, data protection and confidentiality requirements. Avoid unnecessary medical details.

Date / person responsible:

What was noticed (facts only):

What the person wants or agrees to share:

Immediate safety or safeguarding actions, if any:

Agreed workplace changes and who will do them:

Support routes discussed and chosen:

Follow-up date and preferred contact method:

08 Reflection & further support

Keep the focus on choice, dignity and sustained action

Personal reflection

What helps me feel safe enough to speak?

What communication or sensory adjustments support me?

What parts of my work environment contribute to pressure?

Who can help me, and how would I prefer to contact them?

UK routes and further guidance

- Emergency services: 999 for immediate danger.
- NHS 111: urgent healthcare advice, including mental-health crisis pathways in England.
- Samaritans: 116 123 (free, day and night).
- HSE: Management Standards on work-related stress (hse.gov.uk).
- ACAS: workplace adjustments, employment relations and guidance (acas.org.uk).
- Mind: mental-health information and support (mind.org.uk).

A message from Space to Breathe Therapy

You do not need to fix another human being. Notice, listen, respect boundaries, make practical changes and help someone access support. Real workplace wellbeing requires both individual compassion and organisational responsibility.

Educational notice: This resource does not award Mental Health First Aid accreditation and does not replace professional medical, emergency, safeguarding, employment or legal advice.