



'Spotlight on...' learning toolkits aim to raise awareness and drive change. The toolkits provide resources including guidance, case studies and best practice examples from across the industry and beyond to help the construction industry to address these issues and raise their standards in these important areas of concern..



**CONSIDERATE  
CONSTRUCTORS  
SCHEME**

# Spotlight on...

## mental health

**BEST PRACTICE  
HUB**



**Spotlight on...**  
mental health

## 'Spotlight on... mental health asks why this silent epidemic casts a dark shadow over the construction workforce, what's being done to address the crisis and practical steps to support mental wellbeing in the workplace.

Mental health has become the biggest risk to life in the UK construction sector. In this 'Spotlight on...' we ask why this silent epidemic continues to cast a dark shadow over the construction workforce, what's being done to address the crisis and practical steps to support mental wellbeing in the workplace.

Please note this article includes discussion of suicide and depression some readers may find upsetting or triggering.

### INTRODUCTION

The demands of today's construction industry have taken their toll on the health and wellbeing of its workforce and mounting stressors have resulted in some dark statistics. Two people die from suicide in construction every single day, the highest suicide rate of any sector in the UK. A **recent report by Toolstation** through On The Tools network shows that **52%** of construction workers have experienced suicidal thoughts, and almost **1 in 4** employees know someone in the sector who has attempted suicide. **48%** of workers took time off due to unmanageable stress, **96%** have felt stress because of work and almost a quarter are considering leaving the industry in the next 12 months due to poor mental health.

It's not hard to see why the construction sector is so affected by mental health issues.

- Long-term fatigue and burnout from prolonged hours in a high stress, deadline driven environment. Fuelled further by the impact of the coronavirus pandemic placing additional strain on jobsites and individuals alike.

- Financial uncertainty and the feeling of being out of control due to the seasonal nature of jobs, the insecurity of contract work and late contract payments.
- Loneliness, isolation and exhaustion from long commutes and extended periods of time away from friends and family.
- Escalating pressure to meet client demands and financial strain on businesses struggling to compete due to rising material costs and an unprecedented national skills shortage.
- Low morale and self-esteem caused by discrimination, inappropriate behaviour and offensive language in the workplace.

The construction sector is steeped in a male dominated 'macho' culture, long drenched in attitudes and behaviours that place a huge stigma on mental health. This 'bravado' environment has made it difficult for workers to open up, making them feel ashamed or embarrassed to discuss their state of mind. Seen as a sign of weakness and opportunity to tease, it's easy to understand why **1 in 3 construction workers avoid taking time off despite stress** due to the shame of being judged.

An amalgamation of these unique factors and years of corporate failure to deal with stressors has led to a 'business as usual' attitude, destroying the lives of hundreds of thousands of workers, resulting in **70 million days off sick per year and costing the industry an estimated £70bn-£100bn annually.**

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### WHAT IS MENTAL HEALTH?

According to the **World Health Organisation** 'Mental health is a state of mental well-being that enables people to cope with the stresses of life, realise their abilities, learn well and work well, and contribute to their community. It is an integral component of health and well-being that underpins our individual and collective abilities to make decisions, build relationships and shape the world we live in. Mental health is a basic human right. And it is crucial to personal, community and socio-economic development.'

Mental health issues stem from a range of complex factors, from genetic and biological influences to family interactions, lifestyle experiences, financial and work pressures. Mounting stress and pressure are key factors effecting mental health if not identified and treated early. Stress and anxiety can impact at any time and lead to a downward spiral of depression and isolation, influencing how an individual feels, thinks and behaves. The repercussions can be fatal; lack of sleep, high blood pressure, breathing difficulties, drug and alcohol abuse, eating disorders, increased risk of a heart attack, long term physical illness and sadly even death. However, its impact is far greater than physical ailments. Mental illness can have a lifelong effect on a person's mental state and self-esteem. Those that suffer do so largely alone, often resulting in drawing back from society and a breakdown in relationships.

In the context of a work environment, mental illness is linked to low morale, poor timekeeping and impaired decision making. These can lead to safety risks, time off work, isolation and even hospitalisation.

### WHAT ARE WE DOING TO HELP SUPPORT MENTAL WELLBEING IN CONSTRUCTION?

At the Considerate Constructors Scheme we take the responsibility of promoting mental health awareness seriously. It forms an integral part of our **Code of Considerate Practice**. The 'Value their Workforce' section focuses on how registered activity consider the health and wellbeing of their workforce, paying particular attention to mental health and stress. We

help identify areas of improvement and provide access to the latest resources, advice, and best practice to strengthen policies and wellbeing programmes.

The Scheme's Code of Considerate Practice states that all registered organisations should value their workforce and provide a workplace where everyone is respected, treated fairly, encouraged and supported.

The Checklist used by Scheme Monitors asks the following questions:

- Q3.2.1 – How is the Registered Activity assessing the needs of the workforce to drive an improvement in wellbeing?
- Q3.3.3 – How has the Registered Activity supported other workforce needs?

The checklist also asks Registered Activity to proactively support safe working, mental and physical wellbeing at work.



## Law and legislation

Employers have a legal responsibility and duty of care to all employees, from senior management to onsite personnel to reduce the causes of mental illness that develop in the workplace environment.

Physical health and safety have been centre stage across all aspects of the construction sector for decades; investment in Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), toolbox talks, manual handling and lifting training, and fully qualified health and safety staff. Mental health and wellbeing have not been treated in the same way. The **Chartered Institute of Building** found **56%** of employees worked for organisations with no policies on mental health in the workplace. **72%** of construction workers feel there isn't enough being done to address the issue and **44%** believe there should be better access to professional support and treatment.

### HEALTH AND SAFETY AT WORK ACT 1974

Places a duty of care on employers for the wellbeing of its staff. Employers must take responsibility to control risks and ensure employees' health is not made worse by the work environment.

For government guidance on the act, visit <http://www.hse.gov.uk/legislation/hswa.htm>

### MANAGEMENT OF HEALTH AND SAFETY AT WORK REGULATIONS 1999

Requires employers to continuously monitor the health and wellbeing for all employees; undertaking risk assessments and taking steps to prevent health and safety risks.

For government guidance on the act, visit <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/1999/3242/contents/made>

### MENTAL HEALTH ACT 2007

Amendment to the Mental Health Act 1983, setting out the legal framework for diagnosing and treating mental health disorders.

For government guidance on the act, visit <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2007/12/contents>

### EQUALITY ACT 2010

Protects against discrimination at work and in the wider society through its aim to promote equal rights for all regardless of age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.

For government guidance on the act, visit <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/contents>

### MENTAL HEALTH (DISCRIMINATION) ACT 2013

Safeguards against discrimination based on mental illness by removing the legal barriers that contribute to a stigmatised view of mental health.

For government guidance on the act, visit <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2013/8/schedules/2013-04-28>



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## External resources

Mental health is a huge issue in the construction industry today. There are numerous organisations and initiatives committed to supporting good mental health in the construction industry.

### CHARITIES AND ADVICE ORGANISATIONS

**Acas** provide information, advice and training for employers and employees to prevent or resolve workplace problems.

<http://www.acas.org.uk/index.aspx?articleid=1461>

**Aware** are Northern Ireland's depression charity, delivering mental health and wellbeing programmes to schools, communities and workplaces.

<http://www.aware-ni.org/>

**Campaign Against Living Miserably (CALM)** are dedicated to preventing male suicide, the single biggest killer of men under 45 in the UK.

<https://www.thecalmzone.net/>

**Construction Sport** is a charity aimed to tackle mental health through collaboration and the power of sport.

<https://constructionsport.com/>

**Counselling Life Advice Suicide Prevention (CLASP)** are a charity focusing on the stigma of mental and stress related illness, trauma and suicide.

<http://www.claspcharity.com/>

**Heads Together** is a campaign led by The Royal Foundation of The Prince and Princess of Wales, seeking to change the conversation on mental health and end the stigma.

<https://www.headstogether.org.uk/>

**Health and Safety Executive** is the national regulator for workplace health and safety. They offer a wide

range of resources on guidance on stress and mental health in the workplace.

<https://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/>

**Lighthouse Construction Industry Charity** offers emergency financial assistance, welfare and wellbeing advice, and emotional and legal support to workers and their families in times of hardship and stress.

<http://www.lighthouseclub.org/>

**Mates in Mind** is a UK charity raising awareness and addressing the stigma of poor mental health.

<https://www.matesinmind.org/>

**Mental Health First Aid England** (see also MHFA Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and Republic of Ireland) offer training to become a mental health first aider.

<https://mhfaengland.org/>

**Mental Health Foundation** are dedicated to finding and addressing the sources of mental health problems. They also organise the national Mental Health Awareness Week, to educate the public and promote better mental health.

<https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/campaigns/mental-health-awareness-week>

**Mental Health Ireland** is a voluntary organisation established as the Mental Health Association of Ireland to provide support, information, courses and campaigns on mental health.

<http://www.mentalhealthireland.ie/>

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**Mind** provide advice and support to empower anyone experiencing mental health problems and raise awareness and promote understanding to the wider community.

<http://www.mind.org.uk/>

**PAPYRUS** are committed to preventing suicide among young people under 35, providing a confidential support, advice helpline and training sessions.

<https://www.papyrus-uk.org/>

**Public Health England's** – Every Mind Matters campaign helps colleagues and members of the public to discover simple steps to achieve good mental health.

<https://www.nhs.uk/oneyou/every-mind-matters/>

**Rethink Mental Illness** provide expert, accredited advice and information to anyone affected by mental health problems.

<http://www.rethink.org/>

**Samaritans** provide confidential, non-judgmental emotional support for people experiencing feelings of distress or despair, including those that could lead to suicide.

<http://www.samaritans.org/>

**SANE** are a charity aiming to reduce the stigma surrounding mental illness.

<http://www.sane.org.uk/home>

**Scottish Association for Mental Health (SAMH)** is Scotland's leading mental health charity participating in national programmes and campaigning work.

<http://www.samh.org.uk/>

**The Movember Foundation** runs awareness and fundraising activities all year round, with the annual Movember campaign in November.

<https://uk.movember.com/>

**The Prince's Trust** provides vulnerable young people with practical and financial support, as well as helping to develop self-esteem and skills for work.

<http://www.princes-trust.org.uk/default.aspx>

**Time to Change England** is an initiative to help end the stigma and discrimination associated with mental health.

<http://www.time-to-change.org.uk/>

**Together** are working alongside people with mental health issues, providing support, services and representation within the community.

<http://www.together-uk.org/our-mental-health-services/>

## APPS

**Construction Industry Helpline App** is a free confidential service provided by the Lighthouse Club, providing information and guidance on wellbeing topics including stress, anxiety, depression, anger and suicidal thoughts.

<https://www.constructionindustryhelpline.com/app.html>

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### HELPLINES

**Lighthouse Club** delivers emotional, physical and financial wellbeing support to construction workers and their families. Construction Industry Helpline in the UK: **0345 605 1956**, Republic of Ireland: **1800 939 122** or Text **HARDHAT** to **85258** (UK) **50808** (ROI) for support over text.

<https://www.lighthouseclub.org/>

**National Health Service** offers a wide range of mental health resources and services. For urgent but not life-threatening situations, call **111**. In an emergency, call **999**.

<https://www.nhs.uk/>

**Samaritans** provides a lifeline for those in need with free impartial support. Call **116 123**.

<https://www.samaritans.org/>

### PROGRAMMES

**British Health Foundation** Health at Work programme provides advice, support, information and resources to help companies to get workplace health programmes up and running.

<https://www.bhf.org.uk/healthatwork>

**Employee Assistance Professionals Association (EAPA)** represents the interests of individuals and organisations concerned with employee assistance, psychological health and wellbeing in the UK.

<https://www.eapa.org.uk/about-us-employee-assistance-in-the-uk/>

### WHAT IS THE INDUSTRY DOING?

Mental health is a hot topic in the media and boardrooms alike. High profile deaths from suicide have catapulted the conversation into the mainstream, placing a national spotlight on the plight of mental illness. Nationwide campaigns such as Movember and initiatives endorsed by leading figures in sport,

entertainment and royalty such as Heads Together have drawn mass media attention. Big brands are also showing support, Nivea Men for example is working with mental wellbeing charity Talk Club to teach young men about how to talk about their feelings. Together these initiatives are slowly breaking down the cultural barriers associated with mental health.

The construction sector is beginning to act. In recent years there has been a surge in campaigns targeting the unique struggles in construction.

**Help inside the Hard Hat** is an initiative from The Lighthouse Club to raise awareness of poor mental health in construction including signposting to training, a free downloadable app and 24/7 telephone helpline and text support service.

<https://ccsbestpractice.org.uk/entries/lighthouse-club-help-inside-the-hard-hat/>

**Building Mental Health** have created a freely available, industry-wide framework and charter to tackle the mental health crisis in the construction industry.

<https://www.buildingmentalhealth.net/>

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) have produced a set of **management standards, a 'Talking Toolkit'** and an anonymous online Stress Indicator Tool to support mental health standards and promote wellbeing in the workplace.

<https://books.hse.gov.uk/Stress-Indicator-Tool/>

**The Mind Your Head Podcast (MYHP)** is a digital platform for the construction industry to eradicate the stigma surrounding mental health with advice, support and real-life stories.

<https://themyhpodcast.co.uk/>

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**The Fairness, Inclusion and Respect (FIR) programme** is delivered by the Supply Chain Sustainability School to make workplaces better for everyone. The programme provides free industry-endorsed training, resources and guidance including the free FIR Toolkit.

<https://www.supplychainschool.co.uk/topics/fir/>

**The Working Minds campaign** brings together a range of tools and support to help businesses and workers understand the best ways to prevent work related stress and encourage good mental health.

<https://workright.campaign.gov.uk/campaigns/workingminds/working-minds-construction/>

**The Big Brew initiative** organised by construction charity Band of Builders encourages tradespeople from across the supply chain to stop and talk over a cuppa.

<https://bandofbuilders.org/pages/the-big-brew>

Lighthouse Club together with Toolstation and krow Group launched **'The World's Most Supportive Poster'** to encourage tradespeople to talk. The campaign also includes the Lighthouse Club support helpline on local Toolstation receipts and a six episode 'Mental Health Under Construction' podcast which can be found on all streaming platforms.

<https://www.lighthouseclub.org/toolstation-launches-mental-health-awareness-campaign-the-worlds-most-supportive-poster-launches-at-liverpool-lime-street/>

**The Lions Barber Collective** work to create non-clinical, non-judgemental safe spaces where hair and beauty professionals with the right skills and tools can help men to feel comfortable to talk about their mental health and to signpost them to support and information.

<https://ccsbestpractice.org.uk/entries/lions-barber-collective/>

National Grid together with the Scheme have formed a **Health in Construction Consortium** to help understand mental health issues and improve the wellbeing of construction workers.

<https://www.nationalgrid.com/national-grid-calls-support-construction-industry-improve-wellbeing>

The UK Government is taking action to tackle late payments with the **Prompt Payment Code**. The initiative will ensure large companies pay their suppliers on time and help support smaller organisations by removing the financial stress of late invoice payments.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-tackles-late-payments-to-small-firms-to-protect-jobs>

## REFERENCES

The Scheme has sourced information from across the construction industry as well as organisations and studies from the across the world.

<https://ccsbestpractice.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/REFERENCES.pdf>



## Examples of best practice

The Scheme aims to improve the image of construction through sharing best practice with the industry. Below are a number of best practice examples that have been witnessed by the Scheme's Monitors on their visits or submitted directly by registered organisations.

- A 'wellman pack' was created and issued to all operatives giving information and helpline numbers for various health, social, domestic and safety issues;
- Sites have arranged visits from occupational health nurses to advise workers on stress and mental health issues
- Confidential support and counselling was offered on site.
- Toolbox talks were held covering the topic of mental health at work and construction workplace stress
- The workforce were issued with 'stressbands' to measure stress levels throughout the day
- A scheme was introduced where professionals from a hospital mental health department, accompanied by volunteer patients, visited the site to deliver presentations on recognising mental health issues and the support that was available for anyone needing assistance
- The company held a mental health week across all sites to raise awareness of the topic
- One member of the site team voluntarily put together a case study of their personal experiences with mental health issues
- Posters and leaflets of organisations such as Mind and CALM, who support those affected by depression and suicide, were made readily available
- Notices to promote awareness of stress, bullying and organisations which support those affected by depression and suicide were displayed around site
- To reinforce worker consultation, a union official was invited to the site to assist in matters including worker conditions and stress reduction, in relation to travelling time, facilities, health and safety
- 'You said, We did' boards were installed, which showed that operatives' complaints and ideas were being listened to and action taken
- A suggestion box was installed for operatives to anonymously add complaints, ideas or comments
- Counselling was available to staff in the event of a major accident and this was used by some people for a considerable length of time;
- Healthy living promotion efforts included providing maths quiz sheets and Sudoku puzzles in the canteen to encourage mental exercise. These were reviewed and updated regularly
- The site established a wellbeing room for workers to unwind and de-stress.

To view Best Practice Hub entries relating to the 'Spotlight on... mental health' learning toolkit visit:  
<https://ccsbestpractice.org.uk/tag/mental-health/>

## Case Studies

The industry is increasingly widening its approach to raise its apprentice population in order to attract the next generation. Read a number of case studies detailing how the construction industry is better safeguarding it's workforce.

	<p>A-one+ have recognised the stigmas associated with mental health and have embarked upon a number of initiatives. These include a day to raise awareness of mental health, delivering presentations on stress management and training members of staff on the realities of mental health.</p> <p><a href="https://ccsbestpractice.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/A-One.pdf">https://ccsbestpractice.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/A-One.pdf</a></p>
<p><b>Balfour Beatty</b></p>	<p>Balfour Beatty is striving to prevent poor mental health in construction through improving mental health across its own business and working in partnership with Mates in Mind to raise awareness about the issue.</p> <p><a href="https://ccsbestpractice.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Balfour-Beatty.pdf">https://ccsbestpractice.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Balfour-Beatty.pdf</a></p>
	<p>BAM is aiming to improve the mental health of its employees through its comprehensive Healthy Mind Ambassador Programme and effective health and wellbeing initiatives.</p> <p><a href="https://ccsbestpractice.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/BAM-Construction.pdf">https://ccsbestpractice.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/BAM-Construction.pdf</a></p>
	<p>Bouygues UK have supported their workforce and tackled the issue of work related stress by displaying posters providing stress related tips and offering wellbeing helplines.</p> <p><a href="https://ccsbestpractice.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Bouygues-UK.pdf">https://ccsbestpractice.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Bouygues-UK.pdf</a></p>
	<p>Graham Bam Healthcare Partnership is working in collaboration to improve mental health and wellbeing on site and to support employees who might be suffering from a mental health issue.</p> <p><a href="https://ccsbestpractice.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Graham-BAM.pdf">https://ccsbestpractice.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Graham-BAM.pdf</a></p>



Jehu Group Ltd have worked closely with Mind to deliver talks about mental health, raise awareness and take part in a team triathlon to raise money for the Mind charity in Wales.

<https://ccsbestpractice.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Jehu.pdf>



Marks & Spencer have used their award winning employee wellbeing programme as a platform to start a company-wide conversation around mental health and drive awareness to employees.

<https://ccsbestpractice.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Marks-and-Spencer.pdf>



Multiplex have implemented a comprehensive mental wellbeing awareness and support programme with the aim of improving mental health in the construction industry.

<https://ccsbestpractice.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Multiplex.pdf>



## What can you do?

There are many ways organisations can make a difference in how we recognise and respond to mental health and strengthen wellbeing in the workplace.

### COMMITMENT TO MENTAL HEALTH AS A CORPORATE IMPERATIVE

- Does your organisation have a mental health strategy, policy or wellbeing charter? If not, demonstrate corporate commitment by creating a mental health plan as a top priority.
- Incorporate best practice and advice from mental health professionals as well as **HSE Management Standards**.
- Understand who has responsibility for supporting and delivering the strategy, make sure it is a corporate imperative that has the backing of the leadership team and is not just a tick box exercise.
- Establish an approachable culture free from judgement with an open-door policy employees can trust.
- Train line managers in how to identify and react to mental health issues, discouraging banter, teasing or the use of offensive language that may deter employees from approaching for help.
- Review benefits packages to include sick leave based on mental illness, free counselling services and flexible working arrangements.

### IDENTIFY AND ADDRESS WORKPLACE STRESSORS

- Conduct anonymous surveys or create open forums to understand workplace experiences and risk factors and then measure responses over a period to gauge the impact of initiatives.
- Create KPIs based on the survey results and establish corporate accountability as well as identifying key issues and take steps to tackle them.
- It's often managers who set the tone for the team, so help identify and tackle mental health issues at a management level.
- Assess current workplace resources that support mental health and ask whether they are fit for purpose, up to date and accessible across the company.
- Breakdown gender stereotypes and the stigma associated with mental illness through regular toolbox talks, posters, site inductions and access to supportive resources such as videos.
- Work with organisations and networks that can help strengthen existing resources with training, talks or accreditations.
- Take part in annual campaigns such as **Mind Mental Health Awareness Week** or create your own initiative.

### INTERNAL CULTURAL CHANGE

- Ensure leadership teams recognise mental health and wellbeing is an issue and that they are encouraged to be actively engaged in driving the conversation.

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### STRENGTHEN ACCESS TO SUPPORT

- Build an internal support network by introducing mental health first aiders trained to spot the early signs of mental illness and equipped to deal with colleagues in need of support.
- Ensure the support network has the capacity to listen and help when colleagues are experiencing distress.

### PROMOTE WELLBEING IN THE WORKPLACE ENVIRONMENT

- Design spaces that promote wellbeing at work; areas for recreation, spaces to workout, quiet and relaxing spaces for reflection and canteens offering healthy meals.

### CONCLUSION

The UK construction industry has a long way to go to combat the silent epidemic of mental health in the workplace. There is no doubt a huge cultural shift needs to take place to change the way construction professionals behave, respond and talk about mental health.

A key way to tackle this is through education; raising awareness, training and support across the supply chain from principal contractors through to the hundreds and thousands small businesses and self-employed individuals.

Tradespeople are suffering every day under the strains of the sector, so mental health needs to be addressed as a top priority with a coordinated effort by all involved stakeholders. By reshaping attitudes and redesigning the workplace environment we can start to reduce the root cause of stress to create a happy, healthy workforce.

Further reading on this topic can be found in the References and Useful Resources section.

The Scheme will continue to update this page as new examples and case studies of how the industry is tackling this issue are identified. If you would like to share how your company is addressing mental health, please contact the Scheme by emailing [enquiries@ccsbestpractice.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@ccsbestpractice.org.uk).

