

# #WellNUS Guide for Managers

**This toolkit provides useful wellbeing tips and hacks as you embark on your journey as a people manager in NUS.**



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**By NUS Health and Well-being**

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# What is your role as a people manager?

People managers in NUS are expected to help their team succeed and ensure they have the necessary support to thrive.

Good managers approach the topic of mental health by breaking down stigma, demonstrating empathy and by being aware of the available resources to support the mental health and wellbeing of our colleagues.

Are you well equipped to create a safe, supportive, and mentally healthy work environment for your team?

Go through the checklist on the next page now to find out more!



# Manager's Mental Health Support Checklist



- ☐ I regard both mental and physical health as equally important
- ☐ I see my team's mental wellbeing as a priority
- ☐ I provide my team with a safe space to discuss their mental health and wellbeing
- ☐ I have a zero-tolerance approach to discrimination and harassment
- ☐ I am able to apply the flexible working practices as provisioned by NUS's HR policy
- ☐ I am trained to identify colleagues who are in distress
- ☐ I know how to support a colleague recovering from a mental health condition, including those seeking treatment and planning to return to work
- ☐ I know how to refer an employee to seek help and I am aware of the mental health support services available
- ☐ I check-in with my teammates, individually, on their wellbeing at least once a month
- ☐ I know how to manage confidentiality and handle sensitive information shared by my team
- ☐ I've visibly addressed the importance of mental health during periodic team meetings (e.g. inviting Wellbeing Specialist Partners or relevant partners to share about mental health and workplace resources)

It is perfectly ok if you do not have all the boxes ticked!  
Building a safe, supportive, and mentally healthy work environment takes time and is a continuous journey of learning and improvement. Reflect on areas which could use strengthening and start from there.

# Why is **mental health** important in the workplace?

“Mental health issues are much more widespread than what we think and leaders need to accept that it is prevalent in the workplace. As with all change, it begins with all leaders and they should walk the talk.”

Mr Hsieh Fu Hua, Chairman,  
NUS Board of Trustees

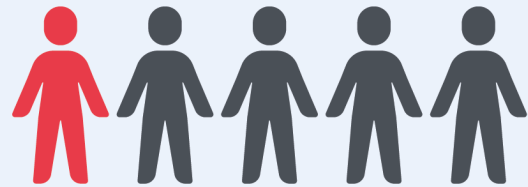
# NUS at a glance

Poor mental health can negatively affect a person's productivity, morale, and quality of life.

NUS conducted a survey in 2021 to understand the mental health of its staff and students and found:

## Approximately 1 in 5 staff had a poor mental wellbeing score

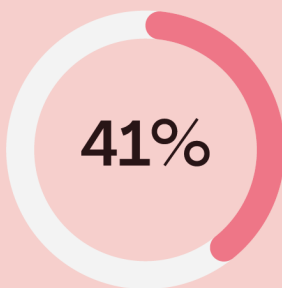
Poor mental wellbeing score is defined as scoring > 3 on the PHQ-2 score and is suggestive of elevated symptoms of depression. The PHQ-2 was developed by Drs. Robert L. Spitzer, Janet B.W. Williams, Kurt Kroenke, and colleagues, with an educational grant from Pfizer Inc.



## Compared to those aged 30 or younger, the age group of 51-60 displayed higher personal stigma

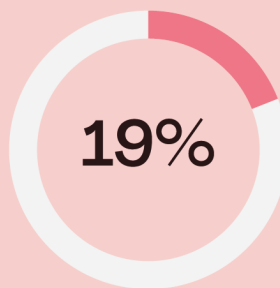


### Overcoming mental health conditions:



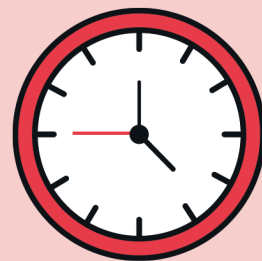
41% of staff felt that people could overcome their own mental health conditions if they wanted to.

### Disclosing mental health issues:



19% said that they were less likely to disclose mental health issues.

### Poorer mental health amongst:



Staff who just crossed 1-year of working and staff aged 30 or younger tended to have poorer mental health than their peers

For the longest time, physical health has been prioritised over mental health. Poor mental health is often associated with having a lack of mental willpower or as being a “choice”, someone can just snap out of. This is simply not true and must be actively challenged.

Seeking professional help is not a sign of weakness, but of courage. Given that we spend majority of our waking hours at work, it is essential that we create a supportive environment where employees can safely access mental health support and be given the resources to thrive.

Talking about mental health may be uncomfortable, especially in the workplace. There is a general fear that sharing about one’s mental health conditions, will lead to stigmatisation or adversely affect their employment and career prospects.

Managers can help by listening non-judgmentally and discussing ways they can support and address the issues in a confidential and safe space.



# What is a **safe space** and how can I create it?

## safe space

/ˈseɪf speɪs/

noun

a place or environment in which a person or category of people can feel confident that they will not be exposed to discrimination, criticism, harassment, or any other emotional or physical harm.

Oxford Dictionary

- 1 Set clear team expectations to commit to being **respectful, supportive, and non-judgmental**.
- 2 Being **authentic and vulnerable** can help deepen the emotion connection with your team.
- 3 Affirm attitudes and behaviours of **inclusion** and treatment of all colleague as **equals**.
- 4 Create **opportunities and invitations** for others to share their diverse perspectives.
- 5 Show **respect for others** by not interrupting or dismissing their perspectives, listen attentively, and ask clarifying questions.
- 6 Take a learning rather than a blame approach in the face of failure. Encourage colleagues to **be kind to themselves and one another**.





# Common signs of employee distress

## Behavioural Indicators



Changes in usual behaviour  
e.g., aggression, withdrawal from social interaction,  
taking more sick leave, showing up late

## Emotional Indicators



Significant changes in mood, irritable, frustrated,  
emotional outbursts

## Cognitive Indicators



Poor concentration and productivity,  
poor decision making,  
making more mistakes

## Physical Indicators



Exhaustion, significant weight loss/gain

# Supporting employees and referring them for help

## Ask and Approach

A

Ask how you can help the individual. Use your concern for what you have observed as a reason for approaching

B

## Be Proactive

Show proactiveness by being empathetic, validating their emotions, clarifying their needs, and expressing support for them. Remember you're not expected to be a mental health expert or provide therapy.

C

## Connect and Contract

Signpost or connect them to the relevant resources. Check-in with them regularly (e.g. 1-2 weeks)



## Managing Confidentiality

Let employees know that with their consent, their information will **only be shared with relevant parties** to address their issues (e.g., engage HR to understand the benefits available to support employees).

Avoid promising absolute confidentiality as this may delay the provision of necessary help to affected employees.

# Suggested empathetic statements to use

## 1. Ask genuine and open-ended questions

"How have you been doing this week?"  
 "How have things been for you?"

## 2. Share behavioural observations to emphasise concern

"I've noticed you haven't been eating lunch with us."  
 "I'm worried because you seem quieter lately."  
 "You seem distracted at work lately. Has everything been alright with you?"

## 3. Acknowledge their difficulties and courage

"I'm sorry that you're struggling, this must be really difficult for you"  
 "Thank you for sharing with me so openly. It takes courage to speak about this."  
 "Seeking help is not easy but I'm glad you're trying to."

## 4. Offer your support without being imposing

"What do you think might be helpful in this situation?"  
 "Let's figure something out together."  
 "Do you think seeing a counsellor or Wellbeing Specialist might be helpful?"

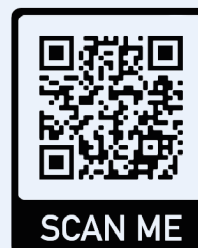
## 5. Follow up regularly

"How have things been for you since we last spoke?"  
 "Have you had the chance to access the resources that we spoke about previously?"



Check out these videos created by HWB:

Busting Common Mental Health Myths:



Tips to Support Colleagues At Work:



# Do's and Dont's

## Do's

- R** Regular contact is essential
- E** Encourage help-seeking behaviour and refer to professionals
- S** Supportive and empathetic communication
- P** Practise active listening
- E** Early identification of distress and referral for support
- C** Consider flexible work options
- T** To be approachable and non-judgmental

Recognise and affirm employees' contribution in everyday work help to build a supportive environment where staff feel seen and valued.

Thanking an employee for his/her involvement in a project

Recognising and affirming the value of an employee's ideas

Leading a round of applause in a meeting to highlight the time and effort invested in a team project

Thanking an employee for his/her courage and perseverance in challenging working conditions

# Do's and Dont's

## Dont's

- ⊗ **Don't be distracted while they are talking**
- ⊗ **Don't break confidentiality**
- ⊗ **Don't initiate physical contact (e.g. hugs or touches)**
- ⊗ **Don't be dismissive or trivialise issues**
  - "You'll move on soon"
  - "You're just overthinking"
  - "Many people face the same challenges. It's not that bad"
- ⊗ **Don't shift the focus on yourself**
  - "Me too! When this happened to me, I felt..."
  - "I have it worse than you"
  - "My sister had a similar issue, and she..."
- ⊗ **Don't accuse or blame**
  - "It's your fault you're in this situation."
  - "You should have..."
  - "Why did you do that?"
- ⊗ **Don't impose patronising advice**
  - "You need to see a counsellor"
  - "You need to think positive"
  - "You should just get over it"
- ⊗ **Don't jump to conclusions, label or diagnose**
  - "You have depression"
  - "You're just lazy"
  - "You're being too sensitive"
- ⊗ **Don't joke about mental health or spread stigmatising perceptions**
  - "S/he is so crazy, even IMH won't take him/her"
  - "Only those who are weak have mental problems"
  - "Man up. Crying is for babies"

# Useful Resources



Help and Support  
is Always Available

Our Wellbeing Specialist Partners are Clinical Psychologists who support all NUS staff, especially those exposed to stressful events. They provide a range of **free and confidential** services available to all full-time or part-time Research, Academic, Executive and Administrative employees:

## Well-being Check-ins



For anyone who needs a safe space to explore any concerns that may be holding them back from being their best selves.

FAQs:



## Individual Well-being Sessions



For staff who want more in-depth conversations and sessions with a mental health professional.

## Team Well-being Sessions



For teams going through a challenging time, a wellbeing specialist can help to facilitate difficult team conversations and dynamics.

Arrange to speak to a Wellbeing Specialist Partner by emailing [hwb@nus.edu.sg](mailto:hwb@nus.edu.sg). Your privacy is important to us. We observe the Singapore Psychological Society Code of Ethics and all consultations are kept confidential.



# Useful Resources

## Connect with your HR Partner

Reach out to your designated HR partner or Office of HR to calibrate on helpful conversation approaches, mental health training courses, and the available support services for employees.

This is highly recommended for when there are employee performance issues due to medical challenges (mental or physical health).

## Other NUS Support Services and Resources

It is important that managers have a good grasp of these resources to signpost our colleagues. Learn about the resources that NUS has invested for our employees:

NUSHeart

E-learning  
modules

NUS Sports  
and Recreation  
Centre

Health and Wellbeing  
Specialist Team

Medical and  
hospitalisation leave

University  
Health  
Centre

University  
Counselling  
Services

Employee medical  
plan

For more information on health & wellbeing resources, click [HERE](#)

If you have any questions  
contact the NUS Health & Wellbeing at [hwb@nus.edu.sg](mailto:hwb@nus.edu.sg)

# Hello!

## About Us

The NUS Health and Wellbeing team aims to facilitate the state of physical, mental and social wellbeing, where we can realise our own potential, cope with the stresses of life, and work productively to make meaningful contributions to our communities.

This is in accordance with the World Health Organisation's definition of health – which is defined as a state of complete physical, mental and social wellbeing, and not just the absence of disease or infirmity.

**Check out the #areuOK video series HWB has created:**



SCAN ME



SCAN ME



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