

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

is your team mentally prepared for a return to the office?

According to a report from [Marketing Week](#), 58% of people are feeling awkward about returning to normality. 33% are fearing the future and what that looks like for workspaces, with 96% of people in this category describing themselves as anxious.

[79 per cent](#) of businesses had seen a rise in staff requests for mental health provisions in May 2020, according to Unmind. We have compiled resources for you in this pack, so you can feel equipped in handling the difficulties of this transition for your employees, and be a compassionate force in leading your company forward into this next phase.

FIRST, DO YOU FEEL PREPARED?

Managing a team or a company can bring its own stresses and anxieties, so it's understandable if you feel overwhelmed, uneasy or anxious about being a supportive force to your employees, especially in such a difficult time.

Mindful, compassionate leadership is only doable when you feel supported with your own mental health.

Below are some organisations that can help if you feel you are struggling with your mental health, or need some support through this transition:





“Managers will need to be alert to the signs of poor mental health or increased stress and anxiety. They should be supported to have conversations that mix wellbeing with work priorities. It can be as simple as listening to and validating employees’ feelings and leading by example, by sharing their own worries and concerns and how they manage those.”

**Dr. Nick Zygouris, Consultant
Clinical Psychologist and Director of
Mental Health, Maximus UK.**

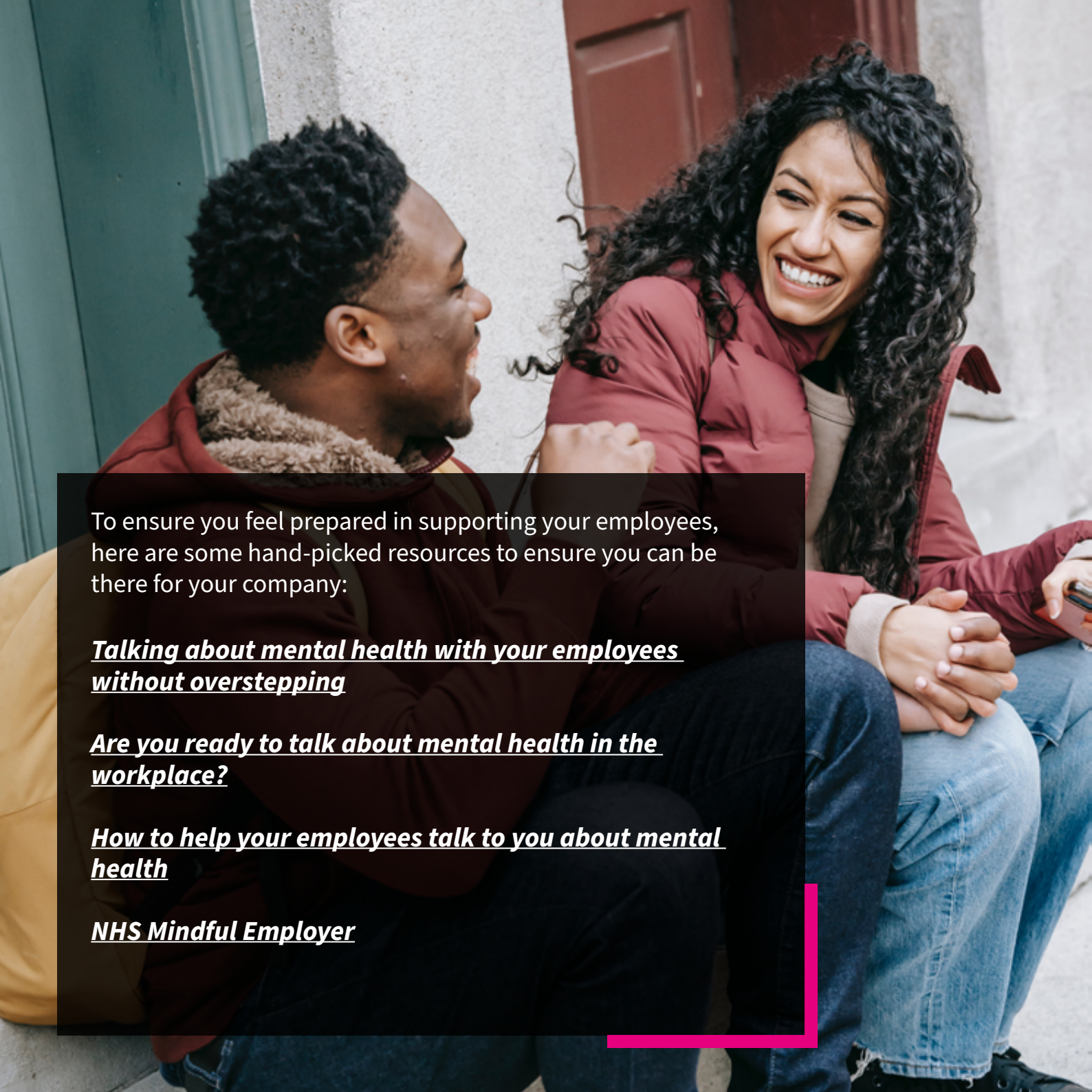


DO YOU FEEL CONNECTED TO YOUR TEAMS?

Be aware of the problems your employees may be experiencing. Even after communicating the changes to the office, employees may be experiencing a whole host of anxieties around returning to a populated workspace. This extends to their commute and how safe this may be, or whether their caring responsibilities may have to be altered, having been at home for a year.

Prolonged periods of isolation have been proven to increase the risk of depressive symptoms, creating physical difficulties and hindering people's ability to solve problems, achieve goals, manage relationships and social interactions - this extends to at home and work.

Being aware of these potential problems, transparency and authenticity should be at the heart of your management strategy. Companies should be ready to have candid conversations with their employees about the future of the business, how they are managing in this transition, and spotting any signs of poor mental health. One key way of doing this is by opening up communication so it's not fixed to email. Send a WhatsApp to check in, do a socially distanced meet-up rather than a zoom, and when they are back in the office, ensure you are there for their questions and queries in the most comfortable way possible.



To ensure you feel prepared in supporting your employees, here are some hand-picked resources to ensure you can be there for your company:

[Talking about mental health with your employees without overstepping](#)

[Are you ready to talk about mental health in the workplace?](#)

[How to help your employees talk to you about mental health](#)

[NHS Mindful Employer](#)

UNDERSTAND THE PREVALENCE OF LONELINESS

Not being able to engage in social activity will naturally increase feelings of loneliness. Loneliness can be associated with feelings of sadness and disconnection. While this occurs in periods of isolation, it's important to note that this can continue after social interaction resumes.

According to the 2020 State of Remote Work, loneliness ranks top of the list of issues employees face when working remotely, alongside difficulty in communication, collaboration, and an inability to unplug from work. With this in mind, returning to the office as soon as possible seems to be the logical resolution - but the work doesn't stop there. This problem has been rising even before the pandemic.

Common signs of loneliness can include:

- *Withdrawing from social events*
- *Avoiding collaboration or interaction with colleagues*
- *Lack of motivation*
- *Missing deadlines*
- *Not offering input in meetings or decision-making*
- *Irregular sick days or changes in schedule*
- *Keeping conversations solely focused on work*



Adults reporting feeling lonely “often” or “always”

5%

2.6
million
adults

Between April and
May 2020

Between October and
February 2021

7.2%

3.7
million
adults



SO WHAT CAN YOU DO?

Now more than ever, as a manager or leader you need to harness community rather than exclude those who may be suffering.

Engineering meetings between different departments, allocating time for discussion, check-ins, and organising post-work activities make a huge difference for employees experiencing loneliness.

Noreena Hertz, writer of *The Lonely Century*, believes employers can prevent this by encouraging communal work dynamics in the office.

“When you’re thinking about coming back into the workplace, the question is how you engineer connection and moments of greater communal spirit into the day. Some things are as simple as an allocated space for people to eat together, plus terms set from the top of encouraging people to eat together, to sit around the table... I think being lonely is also about feeling that you aren’t cared for.”

- Noreena Hertz, a UK-based economist and author *The Lonely Century*

PREPARATION, PREPARATION, PREPARATION...

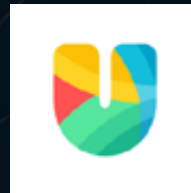
Before your employees return to work, it's practically a necessity to ensure you have a framework in place for wellbeing support and mental health resources. Communicate details of any resources to your employees well in advance of their return, and if there aren't any in place, seek out new initiatives that will aid in these areas - with all managers clued in on the processes going forward.



Wellbot



Perkbox



Unmind



Betterspace

HANDLE.CO.UK

Photography credits; Djordje Petrovic, Tatiana, Katerina Holmes, Fauxels, Keira Burton, Anthony Shkraba, Anna Shvets on Pexels,
Hannah Busing on Unsplash