



Implementing MHFAiders Guide for employers



MHFA England

Contents

Welcome	3
Lay the groundwork for the whole organisation	5
Evaluate the support you have in place	9
Create a clear policy and role document	10
Recruit your MHFAiders	12
Support and develop your MHFAiders	15
Promote your MHFAiders	17
Helpful resources	19

Welcome

Whether you already have MHFA England® training in your organisation or are still considering it, this guide is for you.

MHFA England training is a key component for creating a safe, healthy workplace where the mental health and physical health of employees are valued equally. It gives people the tools to support their own mental health and that of their colleagues and encourages them to access timely support when needed.

To be effective and have a sustainable impact, the training needs to be implemented as part of a strategic, whole organisation approach to wellbeing. This guide will take you through the key considerations to help you embed positive, long-term cultural and behavioural change. Every workplace is unique, so we encourage you to identify the best ways to apply these in your organisation.

A recent CIPD health and wellbeing at work survey (2022) found that just over two-thirds (68%) of respondents believe their organisation actively promotes good mental wellbeing (down from 77% last year). Around half believe they are effective in tackling workplace stress (52%) or in identifying and managing the mental health risks arising from COVID-19 (48%). Nevertheless, there is still work to be done. As employers we are on this journey together, and MHFA England is here to support you.



Welcome cont.



70% of employees report that they've missed work this past year due to mental health issues. Only 28% of employees report feeling "very engaged" in their work.¹



50% of employees have experienced at least one characteristic of burn out due to greater job demands and expectations, lack of social interaction and lack of boundaries between work and home life.²



55% of CIPD's Working Lives Survey respondents who experienced depression in the previous twelve months said work contributed, with only 36% choosing to discuss it with their manager or employer.³



71% of workers say their employer increased focus on mental health as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, but only 25% say their employer has continued that focus.⁴

1. *Fourth Annual Workforce Attitudes Toward Mental Health*. Headspace Health. 2022

2. *Mental Health and Employers: The case for investment – pandemic and beyond*, Deloitte UK

3. *CIPD Good Work Index 2022, UK Working Lives Survey*. CIPD. 2022

4. *Fourth Annual Workforce Attitudes Toward Mental Health*. Headspace Health. 2022

Lay the groundwork for the whole organisation

The only effective, sustainable approach to employee wellbeing involves the whole organisation.

Attitudes filter down from leaders and must be backed up with policies and procedures. Alongside any training it's important to review how your organisation can create and nurture an open and supportive culture around mental health.



The role of senior leadership

Having a senior leader to champion your mental health initiatives is a very powerful way to break down stigma and gain traction across the organisation.

Senior leaders should:

- Position mental health as a boardroom issue, on par with physical health
- Understand the duty of care they have for employee mental health
- Consider that positive wellbeing has a well-documented impact on commercial value, productivity, performance and employee engagement. Supporting wellbeing is good business for everybody.

Six reasons why mental health and wellbeing matters for workplaces – MHFA England's workplace team can support you to make the business case to help engage senior leaders.

Mental health and employers. The case for investment – pandemic and beyond –

If your people are struggling, your business will struggle too. Research from Deloitte puts the cost of poor mental health to UK employers at £56 billion a year and yet the case for employer investment is stronger than ever. There was an average £5 return for every £1 spent on wellbeing support. And this is where we can help. By investing in our training, you are investing in your people and your organisation.

Lay the groundwork for the whole organisation cont.



How healthy is your workplace now?

Understanding where you are on the journey will inform your strategy or approach and how you communicate it to your organisation. If you are new to talking about mental health in the workplace, we recommend you gradually introduce the topic to the organisation, sensitively and raising awareness, before rolling out MHFA England courses.

You can begin to assess levels of staff wellbeing by placing confidential self-rating sheets in cafeterias or break rooms and sharing via online internal channels or intranet.



What is your strategy?

Build a wellbeing strategy which is centred around the whole person and promote this to your people. Mental health is one element of wellbeing, alongside others such as physical, financial and emotional wellbeing, which are all connected in a whole person approach.

The [Thriving at Work](#) report sets out six 'mental health core standards' – a set of actions for employers to support mental health. You can use these to build the mental health element of your wellbeing strategy:

1. Produce, implement, and communicate a mental health at work plan
2. Develop mental health awareness among employees
3. Encourage open conversations about mental health and the support available when employees are struggling
4. Provide your employees with good working conditions
5. Promote effective people management
6. Routinely monitor employee mental health and wellbeing

Not sure where to start? Learn how you can improve your wellbeing strategies with our workplace mental health diagnostic service, Startwell. We can support you to develop an empowering and actionable mental health roadmap for your organisation, with sustainable and tailored recommendations for change: [Startwell | Empowering workplace culture through positive mental health \(mhfaengland.org\)](#)

Lay the groundwork for the whole organisation cont.



Working practices

Review your processes, working practices and policies throughout the employment lifecycle, from recruitment to exit, considering wellbeing and mental health at each stage. For example:

- When recruiting and inducting new employees do you make it clear that the organisation treats mental health and physical health as equally important?
- Do you promote the support available to employees at each stage of the employment cycle?
- Can you better support employees at milestones such as returning from parental leave, carers' leave, promotion or returning to work after a period of illness?



Training framework

We recommend training your people in mental health awareness and skills at a blend of levels. Consider what this framework will look like for your organisation.

Rolling out MHFA England training as part of your whole organisation approach can help you meet Thriving at Work core standards two and three, and training line managers will also feed into core standard five.



The role of line managers

- Make employee wellbeing a key responsibility for your line managers. Give them the time, resource, and training to proactively support the wellbeing of their teams
- Recruit, promote and support line managers with excellent interpersonal skills
- Put support in place for your line managers' own wellbeing

Lay the groundwork for the whole organisation cont.

Employer examples

Don't just take our word for it. Take a look at some organisations who have seen the impact of putting mental health at the top of their agenda.

PwC has asked employees to consider what will make the biggest difference to their life-work balance and to make a commitment to it. [Click to watch their video](#)

Thames Water promotes the importance of achieving a healthy balance between work and home life and accommodates flexible working requests wherever possible.

Three UK has implemented Wellbeing Wednesdays, Personal Days, and Wellness Boxes into their working practices. At office sites, no meetings are booked between 12pm and 2pm on Wednesdays - instead, employees are encouraged to use that time for activities that promote their wellbeing, such as exercising or reading a book to unwind. Personal Days give all staff the option to take three paid days per year to do something important to them, on top of annual leave. Many choose to spend this time with family or volunteer for a good cause. At various times throughout the year and particularly during busy periods, Wellness Boxes containing healthy treats and snacks are distributed to everyone to show their efforts are appreciated.

MHFA England offers a holistic package of employee benefits, including wellbeing sessions, exercise and meditation classes, office chair massages and exercise bikes, free subscriptions to Headspace meditation and sleep app, and two wellbeing weeks in each financial year, on top of annual leave allowance.

Links

Review the MHFA England Workplace Wellbeing Toolkit, on the [MHFA England website](#), before embarking on training. This three-step plan will help ensure your training roll out is underpinned by the strategy needed to make it impactful and sustainable.

Review the City Mental Health Alliance's [Guide to Thriving at Work](#) – developed for the financial, legal and professional services sector, its recommendations are mapped against the Thriving at Work core standards.

Read the original independent review by Lord Dennis Stevenson and Paul Farmer, [Thriving at Work: a review of mental health and employers](#).

Evaluate the support you have in place

A vital step in the MHFA England action plan is signposting to professional and other support.

You will need to develop clear referral and assistance pathways so your MHFAiders® can signpost their colleagues effectively and safely.

- **What support is available for employees now** and is this providing the level and type of support your organisation needs? For example, if you have an Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) in place, is there cultural diversity across the counsellors and support options offered?
- **What is the uptake of this support?** For example, how often is your Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) or Occupational Health programme used?
- **Ask for feedback** from your employees on the support available, and any barriers to uptake (for example, poor service, unaware it is available, concerned they will be judged for accessing the support).
- **Is the support widely promoted and easy for employees to locate?** If the service is confidential and/or offers culturally diverse support options, promote these details clearly to help tackle barriers to accessing help. Be transparent about the process for getting in touch with the service, what will happen next, and expected timelines.
- **If you do not have support internally**, are you connected with any local services/ organisations that may be able to offer support? If so, are these links promoted to employees? It is good practice to promote a range of alternative external support sources alongside this, such as [Mind](#), [Samaritans](#) and [SANElane](#).

Employer examples

Deloitte's EAP was underused, with an average utilisation figure of 7%. An internal survey found that people didn't know what it was, what it did or how to access it. Those who had some knowledge of the service thought it was only for clinical counselling for people with a diagnosed mental health issue – not a service for everyone offering a wide range of help and advice. Employees said that a simple descriptive name would improve awareness and uptake of the service. The EAP was relaunched as Deloitte's Advice Line and three years later its utilisation has increased to 27% annually.

Exterion Media advertises its own EAP and signposts to the National Advertising Benevolent Society helpline so that employees can access quick, independent support tailored to their industry.

WHSmith promotes a range of options for support on posters which are displayed on 'wellbeing noticeboards'. [View their example poster](#).

Find out how we can help you evaluate your workplace's existing mental health support. Talk to us about our diagnostic service, [Startwell | Empowering workplace culture through positive mental health \(mhfaengland.org\)](#)

Create a clear policy and role document

Setting out a written policy for your organisation's approach to MHFA England training will benefit your MHFAider network and those they support.

Always seek independent legal advice before finalising and implementing a policy. Give your MHFAiders clear documentation of the expectations and boundaries of their role within your organisation.

The documentation should include:



Self-care and opting out

Remind MHFAiders that they need to look after their own wellbeing. Encourage them to take a break or step down from the role if they feel they need to, and to communicate this with their named contact.



Support for your MHFAiders

Name a contact who is overseeing the initiative. Include details of who the MHFAiders should contact, with any questions or concerns about their role, or if they need support themselves (see page 15 for more detail).



Responsibilities

What are the specific responsibilities you have decided on for your organisation's MHFAiders, and how does this fit with their job duties?

After attending the MHFA course, **MHFAiders** can:

- Understand the important factors affecting poor mental health
- Identify the signs and symptoms for a range of mental health conditions
- Use a five-action plan to provide MHFA to someone experiencing poor mental health or a mental health crisis
- Listen non-judgementally and hold supportive conversations using the MHFA England action plan
- Signpost people to professional help, recognising that their role as an MHFAider does not replace the need for ongoing support

MHFA England courses do not teach people to be counsellors or diagnosis. Instead, the course prepares them to act as a point of contact, reassure a person who may be experiencing poor mental health, and signpost them to professional support.

If you'd like to find out more about how MHFA England training can transform your workplace wellbeing and improve performance and productivity, you can get in touch at workplace@mhfaengland.com.

Create a clear policy and role document cont.



How MHFAiders can make reflective notes after an MHFA conversation

We recommend asking your MHFAiders to make reflective notes using the MHFAider Support App® conversations feature, after an MHFA conversation. The reflections are not formal notes and should be written after the conversation to remind the MHFAider of how they felt, anything that concerned them, and any actions they took.

MHFAiders don't need to ask the person's permission to make notes, but it is good practice to explain the benefits, including: to support in processing a conversation and reflecting on how they used their skills, to be a helpful note for any future MHFA conversations, and to better understand the impact of the role, by seeing how many MHFA conversations they are having and how long they are spending in the role.

Optional fields in the reflective note taking feature are:

- 'Name' of the contact you've had the conversation with. You can also use initials or key words here if you prefer
- 'Notes' where you can note details of how the conversation went for you

Mandatory fields are:

- 'Date' of when the conversation took place
- 'Duration' of the conversation in minutes
- 'Situation' that describes the main issue/s discussed
- 'Signposting' that describes any professional or other support that you have encouraged

For information on data protection, see [MHFAider Support App: FAQs on data protection](#).



How to handle immediate danger

Remind MHFAiders that confidentiality never applies when a person becomes a danger to themselves or others. Include details of any actions they should take alongside their MHFA England training if they come across a situation at work where someone is in immediate danger, for example, if there is someone in the organisation that should be contacted as well as the emergency services.



Time commitments

Create clear guidelines on how much time your MHFAiders should commit to the role and any additional commitments such as meetings and MHFA Refresher training (see 'Expected time commitments for MHFAiders' on [page 13](#) for more information). Be clear that they should only make themselves contactable during work hours and should not give out personal contact details.

If you have an out-of-hours EAP service, make sure this is promoted throughout the organisation. Otherwise, advertise national out-of-hours support should this be needed, such as the [Mind urgent help pages](#) and contact details for [Samaritans](#), [SANElne](#) or an EAP helpline.



Links to other relevant policies

For example, if you have an organisational policy on responding to crisis situations, signpost to where the policy can be found and give guidance on the circumstances in which it should be used by your MHFAiders.

Recruit your MHFAiders

Legislation for MHFA provision in the workplace is not yet in place. The Health and Safety Executive recommends:

"You should consider ways to manage mental ill health in your workplace which are appropriate for your business, such as providing information or training for managers and employees, employing occupational health professionals, appointing mental health trained first aiders and implementing employee support programmes."

To meet these recommendations and demonstrate that your organisation views mental health as equally important to physical health, we recommend that you consider your organisation structure and the demands on the workforce. For some organisations it may be worthwhile aiming to have as many MHFAiders as physical first aiders.

If you want to know how MHFA England can teach your employees crucial mental health support skills for the workplace and self-care methods, get in touch here:
workplace@mhfaengland.com



How many MHFAiders do you need?

For multisite organisations it is important that there is always an MHFAider available to support employees at each location, both to support those on site as well as those who would prefer to remotely contact an MHFAider outside of their own office. Many organisations begin by piloting MHFAiders in one area of the business to establish what works for them before rolling it out more widely.



Who should be an MHFAider?

Although MHFA England courses are open to all, asking employees to apply for the training will help you to recruit the people within your organisation who are best placed for the role. We recommend that you train:

A wide range of individuals – encourage applications to represent the diversity of your workforce, from different seniority levels, locations, genders, and ethnic backgrounds.

People who want to learn more about mental health to support others, whether or not they have experienced poor mental health themselves. Make sure that all applicants (not just those who have disclosed personal experience) understand what the role will involve and have considered their own wellbeing to decide if now is the right time for them.

People who spend most of their working hours on site at the workplace for which they are nominated and can be called away from their normal duties at short notice if needed. For organisations with hybrid or remote working, the MHFAider should be easily contactable and communicate when they won't be available to respond.

People who can maintain confidentiality as appropriate and demonstrate an ability to relate well to others.

People who can commit to the time required and who have the support from their line manager to fulfil the role once trained.

Recruit your MHFAiders cont.



Expected time commitments for MHFAiders

Initial training:

Approximately 13hrs 50min over four sessions, either online or face to face

Breakdown

Session 1: 3hrs 20min

Session 2: 3hrs 45min

Session 3: 3hrs 45min

Session 4: 3hrs

Ad-hoc conversations with colleagues:

Best practice is conversations of up to 30mins. Encourage MHFAiders to record how much time they are spending on these conversations and review regularly (see page 11 for guidance on logging conversations.)

Taking part in an internal MHFA network:

Varies depending on the organisation but monthly or quarterly meetings are most common

MHFA Refresher training:

Half a day every three years

Supplementary training:

Optional, decided by the organisation

MHFA England MHFAider support and benefits:

Varies depending on the MHFAider's commitment to ongoing development in the role and time spent accessing MHFAider events and resources via the Online Learning Hub and MHFAider Support App.



Application process

Invite employees to apply for the MHFA training via an application form. You could follow this up with informal interviews and a reference check with their line manager.

When advertising the training you should outline:

- what the MHFAider role entails
- who should apply
- how it fits in with other strategies such as your employee training and development programme
- the time commitment involved
- the topics covered on the course:
 - the MHFAider role, self-care and boundaries in the role
 - mental health models
 - mental health awareness and risk factors
 - the ALGEE action plan
 - signs of common mental health conditions
 - skills and conversation practice

On the application form, you can ask questions to determine why the person would like to become an MHFAider, what they feel they can bring to the role, and whether they have their line manager's approval to apply. If you choose to follow up on the applications with interviews, this is a good opportunity to assess the person's suitability for the role and discuss in more detail what the role will entail.

Recruit your MHFAiders cont.

Example questions for the application process

- Why do you think positive employee mental health in the workplace is important?
- Why are you interested in becoming an MHFAider?
- How do you see yourself using these new skills in your role?
- What would success as an MHFAider look like to you?

As part of the application process, review whether applications are from a diverse range of individuals and those selected are representative of the workforce.

Employer examples

Siemens Mobility looks to train MHFAiders who may or may not have exposure to poor mental health directly but have the right skills and characteristics for the role. Employees who would like to gain more understanding of mental health are encouraged to take an awareness course first and proceed to MHFA training if they wish to use their skills to help others.

The training opportunity and responsibilities are advertised business-wide and volunteers apply for the position. Applicants are invited to answer a series of questions on why they would like to take the course and why they are suitable for the role.

Once the applicant has passed the recruitment stage, their place on the course depends on a satisfactory behavioural reference from their line manager.



Support and develop your MHFAiders

Support is vital to successfully embed MHFA England training into an organisation, and to allow MHFAiders to perform their role safely and effectively.

Here are some examples of support strategies which have proven successful:

- **Follow up after the MHFA course** with a conference call or meeting. Make sure everyone feels comfortable in their new role, provide written documentation ([see page 10](#)) and answer any questions around how it works in your organisation.
- **Set up an MHFAider network** with a clear remit for support and idea sharing. This should be overseen by someone with an HR background or the person who is leading the initiative. The network should meet regularly and is an opportunity to remind MHFAiders to look out for their own wellbeing too.
- **Purchase MHFAider support and benefits to maintain their skills.** This includes access to the 24/7 digital support through the MHFAider Support App and exclusive resources and ongoing learning opportunities.
- **Empower your MHFAiders** with an internationally recognised Ofqual qualification. You can find out more [here](#).
- **Keep track of when people leave** the organisation and more MHFA England training is needed to maintain numbers.
- **Review and report** on the impact of the training regularly.
- **Raise mental health awareness and tackle stigma** throughout the organisation to help create an environment where people feel empowered to contact their MHFAiders for support. Some organisations do this by:
 1. Circulating free resources and information, e.g. campaigns material from the [MHFA England website](#) and [Mental Health at Work gateway](#).
 2. Inviting speakers with lived experience of poor mental health or subject experts to deliver a talk or lunch and learn session.

MHFA training doesn't stop when the course comes to an end. Our updated MHFA course offers continuous support for MHFAiders – well beyond their initial certification – to ensure support is always available for your people. This includes access to the MHFAider Support App, so they can access 24/7 digital support, as well as training resources and ongoing learning opportunities. If you would like to find out more about our new offer and unique support package for MHFAiders, please get in touch at workplace@mhfaengland.com.

Support and develop your MHFAiders cont.

Employer examples

Siemens Mobility's Health & Wellbeing (H&W) team runs a conference call for each cohort of newly qualified MHFAiders to put their new MHFA skills into context within the business and discuss how their role fits within the health wellbeing strategy.

Quarterly catch-up calls between the H&W team and the MHFAiders are an opportunity to discuss any trends or situations they have found particularly challenging. All MHFAiders have direct access to a Health Psychologist to discuss any cases they are struggling with or that overstep their boundaries.

The MHFAiders also attend supplementary courses, including Safeguarding, Managing Change and Resilience, to further enhance their bank of skills.

Thames Water holds quarterly engagement sessions for MHFAiders. A private discussion group on the company's online forum provides space for the MHFAiders and the clinical occupational health team to advise, share tips and support each other.

WHSmith facilitates a monthly meeting for their MHFAiders where they discuss:

- experiences since the training
- where the training has been useful
- questions about applying the training effectively
- tips on ensuring good self-care



Promote your MHFAiders: Face to face and remotely

Make sure the whole organisation is aware who the MHFAiders are, what their role entails, and how to contact them should they need support.

Each organisation approaches this differently but you may wish to consider the following guidance.



How to promote your MHFAiders

Easy identification

- Encourage your MHFAiders to include their digital MHFAider badge received after training in their email signature with agreed copy on how to contact MHFAiders or find out more.
- Provide MHFAiders with lanyards or badges.

Office or location resources

- Put MHFAiders' contact details alongside the physical first aiders' contact details in key areas around the workplace such as the photocopier, kitchen, or toilets.
- Download MHFA England's free poster templates, from the MHFA England website, to promote Mental Health First Aiders around your workplace or create your own.

Remote resources

- Feature each MHFAider's name, photograph and contact details on the intranet and signpost remote workers.
- Make the most of internal online communication channels to share information about your MHFAider network and how employees can get in touch.
- Create engaging content for internal newsletters, such as short videos of your MHFAiders introducing themselves.
- Utilise computer/laptop screen savers if your organisation uses backgrounds. Design a bespoke screen saver promoting your MHFAider network.
- Plan reminders in online meetings. Encourage MHFAiders to be proactive and explore having a slot during team meetings to talk through the role.

New starter and return-to-work processes

- Include contact details of all MHFAiders in new starter induction packs.
- Include information in return-to-work interviews or packs. Employees who have been away from work are then reminded of the support available to them, including how to contact an MHFAider should they need to.

Promote your MHFAiders: Face to face and remotely cont.

Face-to-face and virtual events

- Hold an MHFAider network launch event. We'd suggest linking the event with an awareness campaign such as World Mental Health Day.
- Consider your platform. Virtual organisation-wide launches, led by a senior sponsor and MHFAiders, have worked well for some organisations. It's an opportunity to bring your network to life and explain the benefits of MHFAiders and how they fit into your wider wellbeing strategy.
- Arrange regular drop-in sessions (face to face and/or virtual). These sessions could be led by MHFAiders on a rota system with the MHFAider network lead. This is an opportunity for employees to ask questions and have a chat with an MHFAider in a private physical space/ virtual breakout room.

the MHFAider is concerned that the person seeking support is at risk of harming themselves or others. Reflective notes made by MHFAiders following a conversation are held confidentially and identifiable and personal information is not shared or accessible.

Names, contact details and job titles for the MHFAiders across the business. Some people may not want to contact an MHFAider who is based at their own site or within their own team.

The process for getting in touch with them and what to expect

Manage expectations here – for example, an MHFAider may not be able to respond immediately but will arrange a time to call or meet up. Remind staff about the assistance pathways and other support services if they need help urgently.



What information to include

Clear information on the boundaries of the role

Colleagues must understand that MHFAiders are not there to give them ongoing support or counselling, but instead to act as a point of contact and reassurance. Be clear that MHFAiders are not available outside work hours. Include signposts to alternative out-of-hours support should this be needed, such as [Shout](#), [Samaritans](#), [SANEline](#), or an EAP helpline.

Colleagues should also be assured that conversations with an MHFAider are confidential, except in situations where

Helpful resources

[MHFA England website](#)

Information on training courses and free toolkits for your workplace.

[ACAS Mental Health in the Workplace guidance](#)

Business in the Community's [Mental Health Toolkit for Employers](#): This will help you build a culture that champions positive mental health and provide a greater understanding of how to help those who need more support.

Business in the Community's [Suicide prevention and postvention](#) toolkits.

[City Mental Health Alliance guide](#) to Thriving at Work.

Health and Safety Executive guidance on:

[Mental health conditions, work and the workplace, Work related stress](#)

[Mental Health at Work gateway](#)

A hub of links to information and resources for workplaces of all sizes.

[This is Me campaign](#)

Encourages organisations to share their employees' lived experiences about mental health. [PwC's video](#) is a great example.

[Thriving at Work: a review of mental health and employers](#) An independent review of mental health and employers by Lord Dennis Stevenson and Paul Farmer.

Hear from other organisations on how they implement MHFA England training

Read case studies from organisations across a range of sectors at [mhfaengland.org](#)

Watch video case studies on our [YouTube channel](#).

[MHFAider Support App: FAQs on data protection, for corporate use](#)

For information on data protection for the MHFAider Support App.

Get in touch

Find out more about mental health training for your employees: [Workplace · MHFA England](#), or talk to us about investing in an employee mental health strategy: [Startwell Enquiry Form · MHFA England](#)





MHFA England

MHFA England™ © 2023. All rights reserved.

V3: Implementing MHFAiders. Guide for employers. June 2023