

## EXERCISE: Putting yourself in your employee's shoes and thinking about how you communicate with an employee with mental health problems



When dealing with employees who suffer from mental ill health, it is often difficult to know what to say. Sometimes our own stress – for example, due to the pressure of having to deal with an increased workload/reduced team or manage sickness absence – gets in the way of our being able to manage the person in as calm a way as we would like.

This exercise will help you, as a manager, understand and communicate with a member of your team who has mental ill health and been off work on sickness absence. Take 5 minutes to do it as part of preparing for a conversation with them.

1. Bring the employee with mental health problems clearly to mind. Notice if you have any feelings of irritation, frustration, worry or other negative feelings. Acknowledge these feelings, without judging them or dwelling on them. Also bring to mind any positive feelings you have about this person, perhaps appreciation, kindness and compassion.
2. Write down 5 conceivable reasons for this person's mental ill health. If they are off sick at the moment, also write down 5 possible reasons for this current spell of sickness absence.
3. How would you think and feel at work if those reasons applied to you/if you had that history?
4. How could you connect with and support someone who *may* act for those *potential* reasons? Note down your thoughts on this to help guide you when you go into a conversation with the person concerned. For more on dealing with other people's negative emotions see the [Managing Mental Health Matters website](#).