**SAGEA TOOLKIT SERIES**



# Mental Health and Wellbeing for Graduates: A Toolkit to Guide You

sagea | South African Graduate Employers Association

# Mental Health and Wellbeing for Graduates

Mental health, wellbeing and fulfilment at home and at work has been in the spotlight since the pandemic. And rightfully so.

When investigating the costs of poor mental health at work, the figures that come up are staggering and range from *$210.5 billion per annum* to the equivalent of 12 billion working days lost per annum, at a cost of $1 trillion in lost productivity, according to the *World Health Organization*.

An *article published by Investec* in February 2023 refers to economic losses of up to R161 billion per annum due to unaddressed anxiety, depression and other mental health conditions in South Africa.

Whichever way you look at it, investing in the mental wellbeing of your graduates will be money well spent.

Navigating mental health in the workplace is complex and multi-layered. The information included in this toolkit is by no means exhaustive though we hope it will help you to cut to the chase in getting some of the basics right for your graduates.



## Wellbeing and its importance at work

**Many young people entering the world of work for the first time will feel that they have a lot to prove, big shoes to fill and much to learn.**

Opening up and asking for help when feeling overwhelmed or battling with issues like Imposter Syndrome will not be easy. But not speaking up or seeking help or advice will lead to bigger problems.

Best practices in workplace mental health and wellness involve comprehensive strategies that address prevention, intervention, and support for employees' mental wellbeing. In this toolkit, we share some of our best practice tips.




## Do you know your graduates?

**Getting to know your graduates before and after they join the business is an important component of managing their wellbeing at work.**

Yes, you have interviewed them and probably put them through an assessment or two – and of course they would have put their best self forward to impress you! But do you really know who they are or what challenges they may have faced growing up and getting to where they are now?

It is helpful that Millennials and Generations Z are more comfortable about wearing their mental state on their sleeve, but creating opportunities to share stories that will acknowledge where people come from, what their background is and how it has shaped them is highly recommended.



**53%** of newly employed graduates anticipate that looking after their mental health and wellbeing might be a challenge as they adapt to the new world of work.



**40%** say that the mental health and wellbeing support they have received in the workplace has exceeded their expectations.

*Source: SAGEA Candidate Insights 2023*

# Prevention is better than cure

**Mental health risks at work are closely related to Psycho-social risks and having the right culture and tools in place will go a long way to preventing un-wellness and the consequences thereof.**

**Here are some of the best practices your organisation should embrace to prevent losses caused by poor mental health or wellness:**

## Leadership support and resource allocation

Like most things in medium to large organizations, creating the right culture and having the necessary resources to enhance mental wellness in the workplace starts at the top! Leaders must buy-in to all aspects of the programmes, policies, and the culture of support you want to create, and they must be prepared to commit the necessary financial and human resources to make it work.

Promoting a healthy work-life balance, prioritizing mental wellbeing through leadership behaviour, and having clear boundaries around after-hours communication will further enhance your organisation's stance on wellness.

## Getting the basics right

Interestingly, most employees think that pay and flexibility are the most important drivers to promote wellbeing. But according to a study by *McKinsey* the top three factors that will lead to a high wellbeing score are:

1. Feeling energized
2. Belonging
3. Trust

Focusing in on six modifiable drivers of mental health can deliver the greatest benefits in the workplace. These six key areas are social interaction, mindsets and beliefs, productive activity, stress, economic security and sleep.

**92%** of employers are focused on developing adaptability in their newly employed graduates. **74%** are developing their persistence and grit.

*Source: SAGEA Development and Retention Insights 2022*

## Line Manager Commitment

Your senior and executive leadership are, of course, crucial to establishing norms of behaviour and attitude towards mental wellbeing. But don't forget your line management. They are often your first line of defence against unhealthy team cultures. They are also likely to be the first people to be faced with drops in productivity or quality of work, unusual absenteeism, and behavioural changes in employees. Make sure they are trained to recognise these as potential indicators that something is amiss with an employee, and that they have some training in how to approach these issues and refer effectively.

## Use Champions to promote Wellbeing

A critical component of creating the right culture is ensuring that people feel safe to come forward if they have issues or need support. Promote inclusive language and behaviours and appoint designated, trained champions at all levels in the organisation.

## Training and Resources

Mental wellbeing is everybody's responsibility! Host workshops and training to create awareness and educate staff about mental health, stress management and the importance of maintaining a healthy work life balance. Make sure people are aware of the early warning signs of deterioration for both themselves and colleagues – and what they should do when they pick up these signals.

Resources might include articles, books, an online portal and access to independent counselling and advisory services or an employee assistance programme that the company subscribes to.

## Flexible Work Arrangements

Where possible, give staff flexibility to work remotely, or from home once or twice a week. Having some flexibility can improve productivity, reduce the stress of lengthy commutes, or help with responsibilities at home. The downside of too much remote working can be loneliness and lack of connection, so it's an important balance to establish and individual needs will differ.

## Physical Wellness and Social Connection

Getting enough sleep, enough exercise and following a healthy diet contribute greatly to mental wellbeing. Do you offer access to gym facilities, organize fun runs or walks, and ensure that healthy food and snacks are readily accessible at the office? Make sure staff are taking enough leave and regard excessive leave balances as a red flag.

Regular get-togethers, team building events and celebrations are wonderful for creating a healthy and happy work environment. Online forums and groups can also be created to facilitate engagement, though in-person events are first prize.

## Regular Check-Ins

Do your managers and team leaders have regular check-ins with staff to review workloads, get feedback on any issues, monitor job satisfaction, and identify anyone who is taking strain? Are they empowered to make decisions that will help reduce workloads or resolve issues if anyone in their team is showing signs of strain? And do they have avenues available to refer people if the issues in question are serious and require assistance from a mental health professional?

## Monitor, Evaluate, Measure and Get Feedback

Develop metrics to monitor the effectiveness and success of wellbeing initiatives – their impact on productivity and engagement. Regular dip-stick surveys or focus groups and monitoring of absenteeism and performance ratings are examples of what you can do.

As already stated, mental wellness is a complex and multi-layered concept. By implementing these strategies and providing resources for mental wellbeing in the workplace, you can create a supportive environment where employees feel valued, motivated, and empowered to thrive both personally and professionally.

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