

Mental wellbeing for farm staff

Purpose:

To promote the importance of good mental health to farm/horticultural site staff.

Why:

To recognise poor mental health in yourself, spot the signs in others, and to know how and where to seek help.

TIAH Capability Framework area:

This aligns with the knowledge and skills in the Health and safety area.

<https://tiah.org/tiah-capability-framework>

Talk leader instructions:

- Prepare to do the talk in a suitable/quiet location with no distractions
- Consider using some of the resources as part of the talk, e.g. showing a video
- Engage with participants, ask questions and give everyday examples
- Conclude with a brief review
- Get everyone to sign the form. Make sure to write the name of the farm and the date. Keep a copy in your Health and Safety records
- Ensure all participants have access to a copy of this document to refer to once the session has finished. This could be electronic and emailed or printed

Background

This Toolbox Talk has been developed in collaboration with the Royal Agricultural Benevolent Institution (RABI).



By the end of this Toolbox Talk, you'll be able to identify signs of poor mental health and know at least three sources of support.

Mental health is about how we think, feel and behave. It's crucial for overall wellbeing, and how we handle stress. It supports a productive life, fulfilling relationships, and helps us to cope with life's challenges.

Anxiety and depression are the most common mental health problems. They're often a reaction to a difficult lifetime event, such as bereavement, but can also be caused by work related issues.

One in four people will experience a mental health problem at some point in their lifetime. While mental health problems are common, most are mild, tend to be short-term and can be successfully treated using professional therapies, medication, self-help techniques or a combination of these treatment methods.



The RABI Big Farming Survey highlighted worryingly low levels of mental health and wellbeing in the farming community.

- 47% of farming people experience anxiety
- 38% of the farming community is probably or possibly depressed
- 58% of farming woman experience mild, moderate or severe anxiety

Main learning points 10 minutes

Who can be affected by mental health?

Everyone can be affected by mental health whether it's directly or indirectly, through how it affects family, colleagues and the people around you.

When can mental health affect someone?

Anytime, although it's often brought on by a difficult life event, such as bereavement, divorce or work pressure. Where the stress is prolonged, it can lead to both physical and psychological damage including anxiety and depression.

Signs to look out for (in yourself)

- Losing interest in hobbies that you previously enjoyed
- Lack of motivation and performance at work
- Increased anxiety levels, feeling exhausted and restless
- Isolating yourself and not wanting to socialise with friends and family
- Changes in appetite, such as skipping meals or overeating/binging

Q: How can you help yourself if you spot any of these signs?

Responses might include:

- Try and get outside and have some fresh air
- Take up some form of exercise. There's evidence that exercise can help lift your mood. You can start gently with a 20-minute walk each day

Notes:

Notes:

- Break things down into small steps so you feel you're still achieving, and it's less overwhelming
- Try to make time to sit down and have a chat with someone you feel comfortable talking to and try not to isolate yourself
- Keep in touch with friends and family – Even though you may not feel like socialising, it can help improve your mood
- Try and keep a healthy routine with healthy meals and regular exercise
- If you drink alcohol, you may find you're drinking more as a way of coping, but alcohol can make you feel worse
- Try to keep to your normal routine by going to bed and getting up at your usual time. Not having a routine can affect your eating and mood

Taking the first step

It can sometimes be difficult to talk about your feelings with others. You may feel worried about upsetting those you care about or feel worried about what people think. There's no right or wrong way in who you tell first – whether that's a professional such as a doctor, or a family member. The important thing is that you **tell someone**.

Whenever you feel ready to talk, these tips might help you:

- 1. Find a method of communication that feels right for you.** This might be a face-to-face conversation, a phone call or even writing a letter
- 2. Find a suitable time and place.** It can help if you're somewhere quiet and comfortable without any distractions or someone disturbing you
- 3. Practice what you want to say.** You might want to make some notes, but starting a conversation with phrases such as "I've not been feeling like myself lately" or "I'm finding it hard to cope at the moment" can help as a starting point
- 4. Offer them relevant information and examples.** You may have seen something in a film or on TV, or read something in a book – you could use this to help explain how you're feeling
- 5. Be honest and open.** Sometimes it can feel uncomfortable sharing your personal feelings but explaining how your feelings are affecting your life can help others to understand
- 6. Suggest things they could do to help.** This might just be listening and offering emotional support, or it might be more practical things such as helping with a chore or going to an appointment with you
- 7. Don't expect too much from one conversation.** Some people may be shocked or confused so it's important to give them time to process what you've told them. If possible, plan another conversation with them, to give you more opportunity to explain what you're going through.

Optional: In this video by the World Health Organization (WHO), writer and illustrator Mathew Johnston tells the story of overcoming the "black dog of depression". (4 minutes):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XiCrniLQGYc&t=3s>

When and where to seek help

Seeking help is often the first step towards getting and staying well and no 'one size fits all'. You may find that confiding in a friend, colleague or family member can really help you or you may require support from a doctor or an organisation such as RABI.

RABI provide free and confidential support to farmers and growers and have a **Click & Chat** online service – A comprehensive platform that provides safe, anonymous, text-based counselling, peer-to-peer chat groups and helpful articles on mental wellbeing.

Ask your team to scan the RABI QR code on the right. They can then take a look at the Click & Chat service and keep RABI's details if ever they need to contact them.



Scan the QR code, call free on 0800 188 444 or go to help@rabi.org.uk for 24/7 help and support.

Notes:

Suggestions/ ideas:

There are also other organisations that offer a range of mental health support services such as:

Mind – Promotes the views and needs of people with mental health problems. Telephone: [0300 123 3393](tel:03001233393) (Monday to Friday, 9am to 6pm). www.mind.org.uk

Samaritans – Confidential support for people experiencing feelings of distress or despair. Telephone: 116 123 (free 24-hour helpline). www.samaritans.org

YANA – Confidential mental health support for anyone involved in agriculture or another rural business. Telephone 0300 323 0400 or email helpline@yanahelp.org www.yanahelp.org

FCN FarmWell – Supportive links, advice and help, helping you to look after your personal resilience and wellbeing, whilst maintaining a safe and healthy working environment. Telephone 03000 111 999 or email help@farmwell.org.uk www.farmwell.org.uk/personal-resilience/

Discussion points 9 minutes

In this Toolbox Talk, we've looked at how you can spot the signs of poor mental health and what you can do to help yourself. But what about spotting the signs and supporting others?

Q: How can you spot the signs of poor mental health in others?

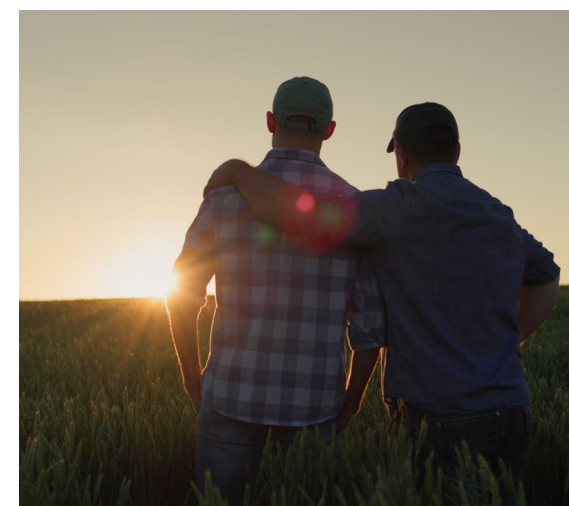
Responses might include:

- Making excuses to not participate in activities and hobbies they were previously enjoyed
- Underperforming at work with no apparent explanation
- Being more anxious or always saying they are tired
- Isolating themselves and not wanting to socialise with friends and family
- Noticeable change in weight, gain or loss
- Self-harming behaviour. Signs of cuts or bruising to areas of the body

Q: How could you help to support others?

Responses might include:

- Talk to someone, ask if they're ok, how they're feeling, then ask again
- Allow them time to talk while you listen
- Don't try and solve their worries and concerns but listen to what they're saying
- Don't compare their situation to others
- Try asking them to join you at social events so they don't have to go alone
- Know where they can ask for help and how to help them access it



Supporting people through difficult times can really have a positive impact on their mental wellbeing, so why not ask your manager if you can **sign up to RABI's Mental Health Training**.

<https://rabi.org.uk/how-we-can-help/mental-health-training/>

There are three levels of farming-focused training available, including half-day, one-day and two-day courses delivered on-site or virtually by one of RABI's specialist mental health trainers.

Having the right tools to start talking about mental health can make a big difference, break down barriers and help ensure farming people who need further support can access it more easily.

Print out the Wellness dashboard on the next page and put it in your staff area to remind your team to take care of themselves so they can continue to do what they enjoy most.

Wellness dashboard for farm staff



Look at the dashboard below and think about how you feel right now. Do you see lots of green lights, or are you heading towards red? It's good to regularly check in with how you feel so you can spot if you're starting to feel stressed and prevent things from getting worse.

Green Healthy - Optimal

- Good sleep
- Good appetite
- Want to eat healthily
- More energy



Physical

Yellow Reacting - Stress

- Feeling tired
- Mild insomnia
- Want to eat junk food
- Don't feel like exercising
- Trouble relaxing without a drink



Mental

Orange Injured - Burnout

- Feeling exhausted
- Moderate insomnia
- Comfort/binge eating
- Drinking too much alcohol or taking drugs to relax
- Aches and pains

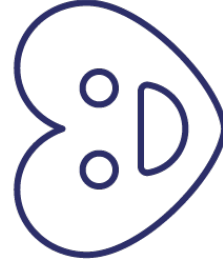
- Excessive worrying
- Distracted easily
- Indecisiveness
- Avoiding tasks or social situations
- Seeing obstacles
- Preoccupied
- Unable to concentrate
- Find it hard to make decisions
- Forget things
- Always focusing on problems
- Feeling negative

Red Illness - Depression - Mental illness

- Periods of no sleep or constantly sleeping
- Constant aches
- Trouble getting up
- Often unwell (low immunity)
- Only briefly finding relief from drugs, medication, excessive drinking

- Unable to make decisions
- Impaired judgement
- Thoughts or attempts at suicide
- Self-harm
- **Note:** if you are feeling suicidal or know someone who is, call the Samaritans 24/7 helpline on **116 123**

- Motivated
- Excited
- Enjoy socialising/good social network
- Realise potential
- Set and achieve goals
- Sense of satisfaction and emotional peace

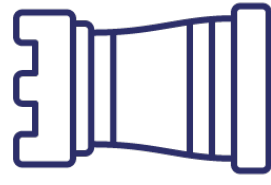


Emotional

- Feeling angry
- Feeling anxious or nervous
- Low mood
- Overwhelmed
- Avoiding social situations

- Lack of interest, concern or motivation for anything
- Feeling of hopelessness or helplessness
- Feeling like a burden to others
- Out of control: explosive or holding it all in
- Isolating yourself from friends, family and colleagues

- Self care - physical and emotional
- Take work breaks or holidays
- Set healthy personal boundaries
- Get restful sleep
- Practice gratitude
- Develop a sense of purpose



Strategy

- Reaching out to friends and family
- Doing something to relax
- Seeing your doctor

- Peer support, assistance, programs, mental health first aid

- Professional or clinical support such as your doctor or a psychologist

Summary/Wrap-up 1 minute

It's important for us to take care of our mental wellbeing just like we would our physical health. Helping to maintain our mental wellbeing or spotting the signs of poor mental wellbeing early on, can help us manage difficult and stressful times and reduce the risk of physical health problems.

Resources:

RABI: Click & Chat: <https://rabi.org.uk/ow-we-ca-help/click-and-chat>

TIAH: Wellbeing Hub: <https://tiah.org/wellbeing-hub>

Mind: Get help now: <https://www.mind.org.uk/need-urgent-help/using-this-tool/>

Mind: Tips for staying mentally healthy at work: <https://www.mind.org.uk/workplace/mental-health-at-work/tips-for-employees/>

Samaritans: <https://www.samaritans.org/>

YANA: <https://www.yanahelp.org/>

FCN FarmWell: Health: <https://fcn.org.uk/help-health-issues/>

NHS: 5 steps to mental wellbeing: [5 steps to mental wellbeing – NHS](https://www.nhs.uk/mental-health/)

NHS Mental health information and support: <https://www.nhs.uk/mental-health/>

Yellow Wellies: The little book of minding your head (downloadable pdf): https://www.yellowwellies.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/LittleBookOfMindingYourHead_8th-Edition_0924.pdf

BBC/ Open University: 5 ways to help someone struggling with their mental health (video):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wIUcc8g17wg> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wIUcc8g17wg>

FCM: Farming and better mental health (short film): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B6U7oT_kdVk

Toolbox Talk participants

Toolbox Talk: **Mental wellbeing for farm staff**

Name of farmDate

Talk leader name.....

Name	Signature	Date

Disclaimer: This Toolbox talk is intended as a general guide and is designed to be used to help increase risk awareness, safe work practice, and personal and team development. It's not legal advice and doesn't take the place of induction, work and health and safety training.

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