Tactical Security Options Limited

Welcome to your Mental Health Awareness training notes V1 2020

Throughout the training, we're going to talk about mental health like we're talking about the weather, the football or what's for dinner. This is because, even though most of us forget, our mental health is just as much a part of our everyday lives as our physical health, and the state of our mental health influences everything - everything we think, do and feel; it affects our relationships, our work, and even our physical health - but so many of us feel uncomfortable talking about it, managing it and dealing with it - and some of us just don't think about it at all.

Our mental health, or mental wellbeing, can change from day to day and year to year - which is why it's time to give it the attention it needs every day - then we'll have a much better chance of staying mentally well. How can we ignore it when our mental wellbeing decides how we're feeling, how well we cope, and how much we ENJOY everyday life?

It is tricky though, because you can't see a mental illness like you can a broken arm, and it doesn't hurt the way a headache does - it's invisible. And invisible illnesses are often misunderstood, dismissed or even ignored - whether it's our own, or that of a colleague or loved one. But as many as two thirds of people say they've experienced a mental health problem. So, we need to keep working at removing the stigma that surrounds mental health, and this begins by talking about it. So, this training is where mental health will be discussed without embarrassment or confusion or shame.

If you finish this training feeling more educated AND more confident to discuss mental health, to make improvements to your own - and to support others with theirs - then our job is done!

This course has been created to raise awareness of mental health and common mental health problems. It provides guidance, tools and support that you can use to manage and improve mental health on a daily basis - but it is NOT a substitute for professional medical advice - so if you're really struggling, make an appointment with your doctor.

This course isn't just about identifying and improving poor mental health, it's about promoting good mental health too - so you can enjoy your life, and be prepared to manage life's challenges when they come your way. Since you spend so much of your time at work, it's a great place to start implementing mental health and wellbeing practices in an environment that's committed to supporting you; and one of the best ways to go about this is to complete mental health awareness training - so this course is the perfect first step. If you're happy and healthy, you'll be more motivated, productive and successful in all areas of your life, including work; so it's a win-win for you AND your organisation to invest in your wellbeing.

There are a few common things that can have a negative impact on our day-to-day mental health, and over time they can take their toll. First of all, genetics can play a part, and so can chemical imbalances in the brain; and sometimes, there's no obvious cause. External factors also trigger mental health problems. For example, experiencing things such as:

- Grief or loss
- Loneliness
- Relationship troubles
- Poor physical health
- Financial worries such as low income or debt
- Or increased responsibilities, like being a single parent,
- Or being a carer for a loved one

- And then there's job stresses.

At work, it's not unusual to feel under pressure or overwhelmed from time to time, especially if things are difficult in your personal life too. But if you're always under pressure to meet tight deadlines, don't have any or enough managerial support, have an ongoing conflict with a colleague, or you feel you're being overloaded with work - these things can be very harmful to you, especially if you don't tell anyone what's going on. This is why poor mental health is such a major cause of absenteeism AND presenteeism, meaning people often take sick days and time off, or they're at work but not able to work productively, or even much at all. If any of this sounds familiar to you, it's best to talk to someone who can help. Talking about these things can be hard for many people because it makes them feel vulnerable, embarrassed, or even weak. But talking about your feelings is not a sign of weakness - it's actually the opposite. It's part of taking charge of your wellbeing and doing what you need to do to stay healthy - it's actually the braver choice.

Asking for help is one of the biggest challenges for people suffering with poor mental health, especially men, and especially at work. But many industries and workplaces have the type of culture that makes it very difficult for men and women to ask for help or approach management about poor mental health. People worry about what others think, and they don't want to look over sensitive or weak, and some people even worry that it will affect their job security. That's why it's very important that we challenge this culture and replace it with an open and supportive one. What gender you are makes no difference - we all need support. So it's important that management give the same amount of time to every member of the team, and encourage you all to talk about it. If you're stressed, tell someone. If your work is overwhelming you, tell someone. The sooner you address any issues, the sooner you can sort them. You want to avoid having to take time off or letting poor mental health turn into something even more serious.

It can be a due to a severe or sudden trauma, or it might pop up seemingly out of nowhere, but poor mental health can also build up over time, especially if the early signs are ignored. And one of the most destructive things to our mental wellbeing lies in something very simple. We often overlook these or don't even pay attention to them at all - negative thought patterns. We're creatures of habit, and our thoughts are no different. We actually make a routine of thinking the same things over and over, which means they become natural as months and years pass. If these thoughts are negative, they will have a negative impact on how we feel, what we think about the world, how we treat people and the decisions we make moment to moment, day to day. For example, how often do you find yourself complaining about the same things? The bad weather? Your stressful job? Money? Your partner, parents, children, friends? How often do you think things 'should' be different from the way they are? How about 'it's not fair' or 'this always happens to me', 'this is just typical,' 'I never win' or 'what's the point?' You're not alone - we ALL have these thoughts from time to time, and we're allowed to have a bad day. But if your mind is stuck like a broken record and you think these things again and again, it's time to try swapping these negative thoughts for positive ones. Looking at the glass as half-full on a daily basis is more powerful than you think - it actually makes a BIG difference. We'll look at the various ways you can approach this in a little while.

In this section we'll be raising awareness of common mental health problems, particularly anxiety and depression. But we'll also be looking at how stress and loneliness can have a big influence on your mental health. If you're interested in learning more, this section also has extra information on a small number of the other common mental illnesses.

It's important to remember that whether it's you or someone you know or care about, that a mental illness is only ONE aspect of a person's character, it's one of many parts that make them who they are.

So you need to be careful not to judge someone based on their mental health alone, including yourself.

No one should be defined by it, just as someone with arthritis, diabetes, asthma, or any other physical condition shouldn't be defined by theirs.

There are a few common signs that can suggest a mental health problem is developing or is already there. Unless there's been an obvious problem for a while, the key thing to look out for is change. Changes in behaviour, thoughts and feelings. These signs include:

- Becoming unable to cope with daily tasks and problems
- Experiencing unexplained physical problems
- Becoming socially withdrawn
- Experiencing dramatic changes in eating or sleeping habits
- Feeling sad, irritable or very angry
- Experiencing extreme emotional highs and lows
- Feeling overly fearful, worried or anxious
- Having confused or strange thoughts (possibly delusions)
- Seeing or hearing things that aren't there (like hallucinating)
- Substance misuse
- And having suicidal thoughts

Any one change is not usually a sign of a mental illness, but if someone experiences a few of these at a time, it's a good idea to talk to someone - a trusted colleague, manager, friend, family member or a doctor, to start getting some help. There's also so much information and support that's available online and at the end of the phone. If you're struggling, talk to someone. Don't worry about what they'll think. Chances are, they'll have a story of their own. Someone that cares about you will be supportive, and talking about your troubles is a very important step towards identifying and managing a problem.

Being lonely is not about being alone - some people like being alone without too much contact with others - while other people can be surrounded by others and still feel lonely. It's not a mental illness, but loneliness can have a very negative impact on someone's mental health and it can lead to a bigger problem. Loneliness can lead to isolation which contributes to things like anxiety and depression - and these in turn, can make them feel lonelier. The first step if you're feeling this way is to pick someone you trust and tell them how you're feeling. Even something this simple can make the world of difference.

Stress isn't classed as a mental illness either. It's the state of mental or emotional strain that comes from difficult or demanding experiences. So it's not a diagnosable mental illness like anxiety or depression, but it can be very damaging to someone's mental health. It can be difficult to tell the difference between feeling under pressure and actually being stressed; and as we are all different, with different circumstances, and different levels of coping - the best way to work it out is to pay attention.

For example, if you feel mentally or emotionally strained, and then you realise that this strain is having a harmful effect on your work, it's likely that you are stressed and this shouldn't be ignored. The biggest things to look out for are emotional changes, changes in behaviour and changes to your physical health - you should keep an eye on these things, and if you notice a combination of all three, this could very well be your warning sign.

If stress isn't dealt with and it goes on for a long period of time, it can trigger further problems and mental illnesses like anxiety and depression.

Work related stress develops when someone becomes unable to cope with the demands being placed on them at work. The Health and Safety Executive highlights six key areas that could be the causes of work related stress, poor health and increased accident and sickness absence. They give guidance on how managers and employees can tackle these and make things better. These causes are:

- The demands of your job
- Change - and how it's managed
- Your working relationships
- The support you get from colleagues and managers
- Your role in your workplace
- And your control over the direction of your work

There's a common misconception that stress is the price we pay for success. Like we're not working hard enough unless we're rushing from A to B, or we're not doing enough unless the adrenaline is pumping or we're pushing ourselves to the limit every minute of our shift. Working just outside of our comfort zone is a good way to keep us on our toes - it's great for keeping motivation and productivity high - but many of us are in the habit of pushing ourselves too far - sometimes to breaking point - just to feel like we're doing enough. If this is something you do, maybe it's time to change your approach.

Of course, you should work to the best of your ability, but it should never cost you your peace of mind.

If any of this sounds familiar to you - please don't suffer in silence - talk to your manager, HR or a trusted colleague so you can approach this together and find a solution.

Anxiety is when someone feels tense, worried or afraid, especially about something that's about to happen, or could happen in the future. Anxiety is natural, which is why it's the second most common mental health problem in the UK - it's connected to the fight, flight or freeze response that we humans have when we think we're under threat. So most of us feel anxious at one time or another, particularly when we're trying to adjust to stressful events or changes in our lives. But for many people, anxiety can become an everyday occurrence, and it's very distressing. People can experience anxiety physically, like shaking or getting pins and needles for example; they can experience it mentally, by over-thinking or worrying; and they can experience it emotionally, by feeling scared or threatened. Anxiety is like an umbrella that covers a family of different anxiety-related illnesses, such as phobias, Social Anxiety, Obsessive Compulsive Disorder, Panic Disorder and Panic Attacks, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, and quite a few more.

The most commonly diagnosed form of anxiety is Generalised Anxiety Disorder or GAD, which causes someone to feel anxious about a wide range of things, often on a daily basis. How severe the symptoms are will differ from person to person, but they include restlessness, a sense of dread, always feeling 'on edge', feeling irritable and having difficulty concentrating. The physical symptoms can include a mixture of dizziness, tiredness, irregular heartbeat such as palpitations, trembling, stomach aches, nausea, and headaches, among other symptoms.
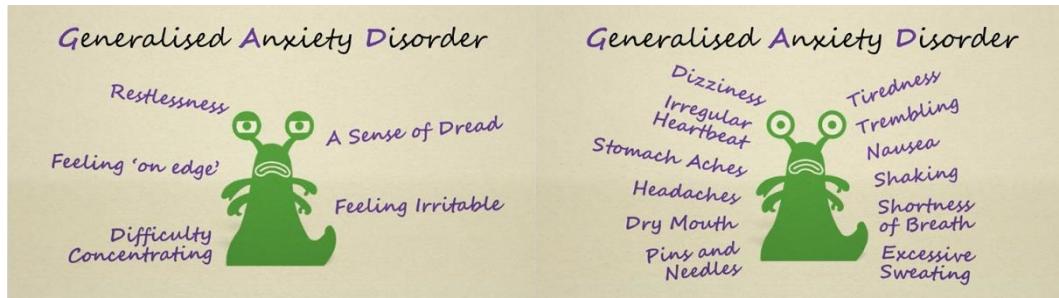
Someone with GAD may also have trouble falling or staying asleep. Like most anxiety-disorders, GAD can be managed with self-help remedies like lifestyle changes, healthy eating and exercise, talking therapies - especially Cognitive Behavioural Therapy - and medication, often antidepressants. With treatment, many people are able to improve and control their anxiety. In fact, with the proper treatment and support, many people learn to manage, and even recover from many mental illnesses.

Cognitive Behavioural Therapy, known as CBT, is a very popular and effective talking therapy that's used to help with quite a few mental illnesses. It's also very good to use in general day-to-day life to maintain good mental health. It's quite simple - just a practical problem-solving approach to dealing with emotional problems. It's based on challenging the thoughts in your head, and deciding how true they actually are. It's about finding out what's real, and what's been exaggerated, confused or blown out of proportion, and it's about identifying unhelpful thought patterns and training your mind to create new positive patterns. There's lots of information online about CBT, so we recommend reading up on it if you're interested.

The World Health Organisation has said that if "we do not act urgently, by 2030 depression will be the leading cause of the disease burden globally."

Depression is so common; it's the biggest mental health illness in the UK and one of the most common illnesses in the world. Many people don't quite understand how serious it is - even now in the 21st century, illnesses without a face are too often overlooked, underestimated or entirely misunderstood.
It's not a matter of simply 'feeling down' and you can't just 'snap out of it', and it shouldn't be confused with a bad mood, or grief, or even stress. Depression is an illness, and if it's left untreated it can have devastating consequences. Doctors split depression into three categories:

- Mild depression - which has some impact on daily life
- Moderate depression - which has a significant impact on daily life
- And severe depression - which makes it almost impossible to cope with daily life.

Some people may even have a lack of self-awareness, or experience psychotic symptoms such as hallucinations, delusions, or confusion and disturbed thoughts No matter how severe it is, people with depression will feel constantly sad, and often hopeless. They tend to lose interest in activities they would normally enjoy and they're often very tearful. It's also common to have a reduced sex

drive, loss of appetite, persistent tiredness and to have trouble sleeping. People with depression can experience symptoms of anxiety too.

It's not unusual for depression to creep up on people. Someone may just feel low and try to cope with it on their own without saying anything - they may not realise that they're actually unwell. With depression, the first sign to look out for is feeling consistently low for two weeks or more - if this happens it's best to go and talk to your GP. Sometimes there's a trigger for depression, such as a loss in the family, losing your job, or even having a baby can trigger postnatal depression. You're also more likely to suffer with depression if there's a history of it in your family; but sometimes, there's no obvious cause. If you've been diagnosed with depression, the treatment methods are actually quite similar to those for anxiety. You'll be encouraged to try self-help remedies like lifestyle changes, taking up regular exercise and healthy eating. Joining a support group or taking part in a talking therapy can also be really helpful, especially Cognitive Behavioural Therapy; and antidepressants can be prescribed too - but it's up to each individual to try what they think will work best for them. If this sounds familiar to you, never forget that the choice is yours. The good news is if people with depression seek help and go down one, or a few, of these avenues, they should find something that works and over time, they can overcome the illness.

Anxiety and depression may be the most common mental health illnesses at the moment, but they branch off into other illnesses - and that only scratches the surface - with over 200 diagnosable mental illnesses out there. Other common ones include personality disorders, eating disorders, bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, self-harming, dementia, and nervous breakdowns.

This section is the Wellbeing Toolkit that can help you look after your mental health on a daily basis. We appreciate that everyone has their own ideas about how to approach their mental health and wellbeing, so this section has a variety of insights, mini exercises, recommendations and some food for thought so you can use what suits you. Just remember that we all do our best when we're working just outside of our comfort zone, so don't be afraid to try something for the first time - you might be surprised. And never forget that lasting changes don't happen overnight - maintaining good mental health is a long term commitment. You don't go to the gym once and come out with a six pack - you have to train. And your mind is just the same; so whatever methods you choose, there's only three rules of mental-health practice: repeat, repeat, repeat.

Before we go any further, we just want to say that we know bad things happen, and we're not saying that you can't have a bad day, or even a bad week - you're only human. A situation may very well be negative, but the way you react to it can make things worse, or, it can make things easier to manage. The point is, the calmer and clearer your head is, the better chance you've got of coping with bad news, bad moods and bad days. In fact, it might do more harm than good to bury or fight negative thoughts and emotions. It's best to accept that they are there, then you know what you're working with.

Here's something you don't hear every day - our brain doesn't actually know the difference between imagination and reality. We don't realise how powerful our thoughts actually are - they can convince us that we're under threat somehow, even when it's not true. For example, we may lose sleep panicking about that contract deadline next week, or we may still feel angry about how our boss treated us yesterday... We're getting wound up by thoughts alone - these things aren't actually happening right now. We're probably just sitting on the sofa at home - BUT our brain and body behave as if we're under immediate threat... ...we react physically; our heart beats faster, we get butterflies in our stomach, sometimes we feel lightheaded, nauseous or even lose our appetite. This is because when we get stressed or angry, we release cortisol - a stress hormone. On the flip side, there's daydreams and relaxing thoughts - lying on the beach on a summer's day, thinking about a happy moment from the past... When we get lost in happy thoughts, our body relaxes and releases

serotonin, which is a happy chemical. But we're reacting to a picture in our head, it's not actually our reality right now - yet our brain and body think it is. It's just food for thought - but this is how powerful our minds are. We have the power to choose our thoughts - and positive thinking can be a very powerful tool.

Becoming aware of your thoughts gives you the power to learn from them and change them if they need changing. So even if it feels weird or unnatural at first - and it will if you're caught up in a cycle of negative thinking - just start to listen to yourself. When you think of something negative, or say something negative, try swapping it for a positive - even if you don't actually feel positive at the time.

Over time, your brain will get used to it and you'll naturally start to feel more positive. It can be as simple as changing 'I wish I could afford a nicer house' to 'I love my cosy home,' or 'I can't stand sitting in traffic' to 'I love listening to this playlist in the car' - it's all about perspective, and with day-to-day management of mental health, it's all about the little things. It can be as easy as thinking about someone you love, or something you're grateful for - your pet, your partner, the first of cup of tea in the mornings. Anything you like. It's your mind, your imagination - so as long as it's positive, you can't go wrong.

It's not just your mind that influences your body, your body influences your mind too - it's a two-way street. This might sound a little out-there, but recent studies show that body language has an influence on what hormones your body releases. **High Power Poses**, *such as the Wonder Woman pose - which means chin up, chest out and hands on hips - decreases the amount of cortisol your body releases. Cortisol is a stress hormone. And power poses also increase the amount of testosterone you release - both men and women - which is what gives you more confidence and a sense of power. You don't have to do the Wonder Woman, but the important thing is to be aware of your body language, of your posture. The key lies in your spine, shoulders, head, and your breath. Some people like to hold a high power pose for two minutes every day before work, some people do two minutes before a big presentation or important meeting, and some people just like to stay aware of their body language throughout the day. Do it alongside a few deep breaths, and you'll feel more confident and empowered in just two minutes. And remember - repeat repeat repeat - the more you do it, the better the results. Tiny tweaks can lead to big changes.*

One of the best things you can do at work is create a Wellness Action Plan or WAP. It's not a legal requirement, but it's a fantastic way for you to think about what you need to stay mentally well at work and to write it down. You can keep your WAP close to hand to use whenever you need to, because it's a useful tool when you're feeling stressed or start to experience poor mental health. Some parts of the plan - or all of it if you're happy to share - can be discussed with your manager so they can offer you as much support as possible. You can use a WAP template if you like. Ideally, everyone in your organisation should have their own WAP, as it's a very personal document. It can be a written Q&A that asks things such as:

- *What helps you stay mentally healthy at work? Maybe it's taking your lunch break away from your work, having enough space, or less noise perhaps*
- *What can your manager do to support you? This can include things like flexible working or regular catch ups*
- *Is there anything that triggers poor mental health at work for you? Maybe it's tight deadlines, a long commute, or conflict with a colleague*
- *What support do you need to help avoid these triggers? Maybe you need a mid-morning break every day, or a change to your shift pattern*
- *How does poor mental health affect you at work? Perhaps you get headaches, or have trouble concentrating? Or maybe even panic attacks*
- *What are your warning signs? Think about changes in your behaviour, or changes to how you approach your work*

- ***What steps can you take to improve things, and should your manager be aware of this?*** *This might involve you going for a two minute walk off-site when you feel stressed, or doing a brief breathing exercise in an empty office*
- ***Is there anything about your working style or personality that it's worth your manager knowing about?*** *This helps them understand you better. Maybe you prefer face-to-face conversation, maybe you prefer emails? Do you get low on energy at certain times? Do you like to talk aloud when you're brainstorming? Think about your behavioural patterns.*
- ***And last but not least*** *- is there anything else you'd like to share?*

Have a goal. It depends on what works for you, but the important thing is to make it realistic, so you get a sense of accomplishment when you've achieved it. Whether it is one daily goal, or a couple of weekly or monthly ones, the simplest thing to do is to write them down and tick them off when they're done. It'll feel good. Writing things down is a great way to clear your thoughts if you're feeling stressed or overwhelmed, so you can try daily to-do lists as well. You can start off with the smallest of things, like making a healthy lunch, or getting up 10 minutes earlier so you're not rushing to work. You can decide to do your least favourite task at the start of the day to get it out of the way. You can start a new hobby, aim for a long walk once a week, or commit to seeing your friends and family more often. Something you know you can do in the time frame you've given yourself.

Keeping yourself physically healthy is a crucial part of keeping you mentally healthy - a diet that is good for your body is good for your mind too. The obvious things to stay away from are foods that are high in sugar, salt and saturated or trans-fat. We all know that fast food, processed meat, cakes, chocolate, biscuits and fizzy drinks are bad for our health, but there are some less obvious things that you should try to stay away from too.

Alcohol is also one to watch. Even though a drink can calm your nerves, relax you, and even make you more sociable - drinking too regularly, or binge drinking, can disrupt your sleep and it just stops your body from working properly. It's also a depressant so alcohol can contribute to mental health problems, and it puts people at a higher risk of high blood pressure, weight gain, strokes and heart attacks. So, a balanced diet that's full of fruit, veg, fish, fibre-rich grains and healthy oils and fats will make you feel good, you'll have more energy, you'll be able to think clearly and it will help regulate your mood. And never forget to drink water - water is the oil, and your body is the machine - it just won't work well without it! Try to drink 6 to 8 glasses a day, and you'll feel the difference mentally and physically. Sleep. Just like water - we can't function without it. We're recommended to get between 7 and 9 hours of sleep every night, but yet most of us struggle to get 6. If your mental wellbeing needs a boost, or you're making it a priority - you may need to get to bed earlier. You'll feel like a new person if you can make this a daily goal. Ideally, we should do a mixture of aerobic exercises (such as walking, swimming and cycling) and strength exercises (like weights or yoga) every week. You can check out the NHS website for their ideas and recommendations. Exercising GIVES you energy, it helps you sleep, and it makes you release endorphins - which are natural relaxants and pain relievers - so it makes your mind and body feel good. Exercising can be done for next to no money and doing as little as thirty minutes a day can make the world of difference.

When many of us feel stressed it can be very difficult to calm down - but there's a lot to be said for simple solutions, and breathing is one of the best. We breathe automatically all the time, but how often do you breathe deliberately? That's effectively what mindfulness is. It's about becoming aware of what you're doing and then focusing on it. The key is to focus on one thing. Mindfulness is now recommended for people who suffer with poor mental health. It's also a great tool for maintaining good mental health. You can be mindful when you're doing absolutely anything - washing the dishes, writing emails, talking to your partner, exercising, eating, you name it. All you've got to do is be aware of what you're doing, instead of going into autopilot. By becoming aware of what you're doing, and keeping that awareness, you can stop your mind from darting off in a million different directions or worrying about a million different things. It's a great way to relax yourself

without having to stop what you're doing and without drawing attention to yourself. So to start off, simply become aware of your breathing, and then breathe deliberately. You may find it useful to count in your head as you breathe in and out, it can help you focus. Let's try right now. If you can, roll your shoulders back and place one of your hands on your stomach just above your belly button. Then slowly breathe in through your nose. And fill your belly with air so it expands and pushes against your hand; Then start to breathe out through your mouth, slowly. All the way out. And relax your shoulders. You can do this no matter what the time, no matter where you are. You can do it as many times as you need to. If you ever find yourself upset, stressed, anxious or confused - whether you're at work, at home, or in public - even doing three deep belly-breaths will focus your mind and calm you down. Some people do this as part of their daily routine. If you do - the more time you spend belly-breathing, the more you'll benefit from it.

*Most of us are in the habit of **chest-breathing**, which means the chest rises and falls when we breathe - this is known as 'shallow breathing' - and it's often caused by stress or hypertension - and it can actually increase stress, tension and anxiety! But, with **belly-breathing** (try inhaling through the nose, and exhaling through the mouth), you are 'deep breathing' and this is good for many reasons. The diaphragm sits just above the stomach, and when you inhale, the diaphragm muscle contracts and goes down, which draws more oxygen into your lungs and pushes your stomach out. This type of breathing (known as Pranayama breathing in yoga) has been shown to have positive effects on immune function, hypertension, asthma, the nervous system, and poor mental health such as stress and anxiety. **And here's a tip** - keep one hand just above your belly button to check that you're breathing properly - your stomach should always push against your hand when you breathe in. It's also a good idea to place a hand on the side of your rib cage (in line with your breast bone) so you can feel your rib cage expanding to the side as you breathe in.*

*Meditation has been shown to boost the function of your immune system and there's actually evidence that it increases the grey matter in your brain - especially the areas that are related to self-control and regulating emotions. It increases your ability to multi-task, focus and create. Meditation also calms your mind and your nervous system, which is why it's a great way to relax, and to relieve stress and anxiety. **Mindfulness** is a good place to start with meditation - which is nothing more than focusing on what you are doing in the moment - or to become aware of what you are doing. If you're washing the dishes, simply let your mind become aware that you're washing the dishes. If you're out on a walk, let your mind focus on the walk - on your feet consistently touching the ground, or on the sounds around you, for example.*

*A popular way to practice mindfulness is to simply become aware of your breathing, and then to focus on it for as long as you need to. This focus is the key - with practice, you'll find that the more attention you give to your breathing, the less attention you give to worrying, which reduces stress and anxiety. When you breathe deliberately, and you focus on it, you're practising mindfulness. Even though this method is very popular, there are actually many different types of meditation - there's **vipassana**, which is an extension of mindfulness, then there's moving meditations such as **tai chi**, or **yoga** - which is recommended by the NHS. You have **transcendental meditation**, which involves repeating a mantra or a sound for around 15 to 20 minutes. And there's **guided meditations**, which involve following instructions to direct your thoughts; some ask you to observe your body by focusing your thoughts on one part at a time, and relaxing the muscles as you go - from the top of your head to the tip of your toes! No matter what type of meditation you do, it's about finding just one or two things to focus on at any one time - whether it's your breathing, a sound, a movement - and the benefits can be huge, especially if you meditate frequently. Beginners are often recommended to do between 10 and 20 minutes when they wake up, as it sets the tone for the rest of the day. And the more you do it, the more you'll benefit from it - even squeezing in a few minutes once a day will make a difference. There's apps, books and websites that you can check out for more information, but YouTube is a great place to start for a variety of meditation videos.*

Most of us have so much control over our mental health if we just decide to sit in the driver's seat. We have the ability to take action to strengthen our mental wellbeing and reduce the risks of becoming unwell. And we have the choice to help our friends, families and colleagues do the same. It takes courage to do anything that makes you feel uncomfortable, worried or scared. That's why there's nothing weak about asking for help or talking about how you feel. Problems rarely disappear

on their own, so tackling them is important - but there's no need to tackle them on your own. If you know someone needs help, you help them, especially if they ask.

But your needs are just as important as anyone else's, so it's ok for you to ask for help too. Even though you may have never asked for help before, even if you've been suffering in silence for years or even if the problem is fairly new, whether you have no idea on how to say it or where to start, you owe it to yourself to put your wellbeing first. All you need to do is choose someone you trust - it can be a colleague, a friend, your partner, a family member; or it can be a doctor, a support worker, or even someone on the end of a helpline like the Samaritans. Just start that conversation, it won't be long before you see how many people are in the same boat as you. Once you've started - working on improving your mental health can just ease itself into your day to day life. And by going first, you may just inspire someone else to do the same thing. You may already be a support to someone - maybe a loved one away from work, but you can make a big difference at work too. It's as simple as asking a colleague how they are, especially if you're worried about them. You don't have to pressurise them into talking about it, but if they do open up, the best thing you can do is simply listen and help them to feel comfortable talking to you - putting the kettle on helps. Even the smallest of gestures like an email, a text, or a quick word in the kitchen can make a huge difference to someone, sometimes it's just nice to know you're not alone.

Sometimes, it's just about knowing when to stop and take 5. We're always so busy, and our mental wellbeing seems to be what's sacrificed when we're running low on time. But this can mean we don't stop to eat a healthy meal, or we don't get enough sleep, or we have an argument with someone and don't take the time to resolve things or even just let it go - instead we spend the rest of our day tired, angry or miserable and we might take that out on ourselves, on our work, or on other people. It's important to shift priorities, and make sure that we're not too busy to look after ourselves. And there's loads of things you can try to help keep you on top of things. Just a few include… Taking a moment to think before you act. This is very useful when you're problem solving at work, or have a conflict with someone. A calm mind makes better decisions. Go outside - even if it's for 30 seconds. Fresh air and a few deep breaths can reset you. Take regular breaks - little and often is best to keep you refreshed, energised and productive. Stop before you're tired or stressed. Stretch and move your body - try not to stay in one position for too long Take your breaks away from your work. If your organisation has a break area, or a relaxation room, use it Drink water regularly, and eat food that's good for your brain and body.

Tactical Security Options Limited

An option for organisations who are keen to support their employees' mental health, is to train certain members of the team as Mental Health First Aiders. Mental Health First Aid England provides training for chosen employees:

- To identify the warning signs of poor mental health
- To learn about common mental illnesses, including depression, anxiety, bipolar disorder, eating disorders, etcetera
- To listen (not advise) and to offer a confidential support for those who need to talk
- To discuss various options and signpost an individual for additional help if it's needed
- To know how to handle a case where an individual has suicidal thoughts
- And to know how to handle emergencies, such as acute distress or psychosis.

Offering such a service helps employees share their concerns, receive appropriate help, and even nip problems in the bud before they develop. It also highlights the one thing that so many people seem to miss, which is... regardless of gender, age and job title, poor mental health is extremely common. Would such a scheme exist otherwise?
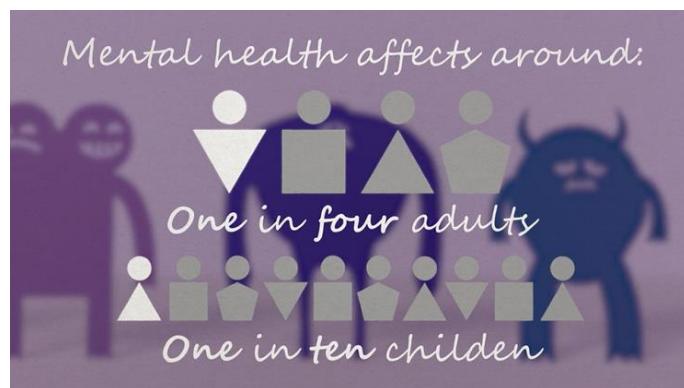
"Suicide is the leading cause of death among young people aged 20-34 years in the UK and it is considerably higher in men, with around three times as many men dying as a result of suicide compared to women. It is the leading cause of death for men under 50 in the UK."

-Mental Health Foundation

Negative Thoughts = Negative Impact

Positive Thoughts = Positive Impact

We're creatures of habit, and our thoughts are no different. Swap the negatives for positives and see how you feel after a while.

Tactical Security Options Limited

If your wellbeing is becoming a top priority for you, and you feel like you need extra support, there's plenty of avenues you can go down - or even suggest to your family, friends and colleagues if they need some guidance. Like we've said throughout the course, the most important step is to talk to someone, and ask for help if you need it. We've also created a printable PDF that lists many options for you to explore… It contains useful websites that provide a lot of information on mental wellbeing and how to manage and improve mental health. It lists the different types of counselling and therapies that are out there and how to get started. It suggests books, magazines, YouTube videos and Ted Talks that you can take a look at to learn more about the mind and get support. It lists various apps that you can use on your smartphone to help you relax - particularly meditation and breathing exercises. And it includes important phone numbers and emergency helplines.

Thank you for completing your Mental Health Awareness course. Our goal has been to create a space where mental health can be treated for exactly what it is - an important and normal part of our everyday lives. Now you've completed this course, we hope that you feel more comfortable talking about mental health and asking for help if you need it. By recognising the quality of your thoughts and looking at how you behave in your working and personal life, you can begin to notice patterns and start to make small changes that will help to improve your everyday mental and physical health - never forget that the two are connected. We all approach things in slightly different ways, and we all handle challenges and stressful situations the only way we know how - but sometimes we need to try something new - and we hope this training has shed light on some tools you can use, and some avenues you can go down to find something that works for you. If you make your mental wellbeing a priority and commit to improving it, it won't be long before you start to notice that your energy levels and productivity are increasing, that you're happier, and you'll find that you're better equipped to handle the bad days - whether they're at work or at home.

Remember that asking for help is a sign of strength - and if you go first, it will encourage the people around you to do the same. Once this training finishes and you go back to work, remember that there's other work to be done too - taking care of your mind as well as your body.

It's estimated that poor mental health costs UK businesses between 33-42 billion pounds a year!

Mental Health Awareness Training is a perfect first step towards managing and improving mental health and wellbeing.

Have you ever considered approaching every minute of your day as your "me time"?

It's not limited to the 10 quiet minutes you get to yourself before bed. It's true, you may not always be doing something you want to be doing, **but** you still have the power to make the best of it, or enjoy it anyway!

All you have to do is approach each task **as if you have chosen** to be doing it. This perspective will help you to see the silver-lining in any situation, and you'll never feel like your wasting your time.

It will present you with at least one or two opportunities too; maybe financial, social, to teach a lesson, to give you a break, or even to help you improve somehow. You may appreciate the things you've taken for granted before.

You can have "me time" **whenever you want**, it's your choice to find value in everything you do - whether you're brushing your teeth, busy at work, at the dentist, snowboarding down a mountain, going for a walk, or spending time with friends and family.

Try starting your day by listing three things that you're grateful for. You can write them down if you want. See how you feel after a week!

...Then keep going!

Tactical Security Options Limited

Give Kudos

One of the simplest ways to boost morale at work is to show appreciation for each other's hard work and to give kudos for a job well done! Positive feedback reaffirms your team are doing well, it boosts confidence and it continues to ensure good results. It's as easy as a quick email, a fist-pump, or a high-five.

Offer Flexible Working

It's natural for us to work well for people, and with people, who look out for us and show they care. Having flexible working hours is a great way to keep team members performing well – some may have young families that need them at certain times; some may prefer to avoid rush-hour traffic by starting later and working later etc.

Send Birthday Love

Depending on the size of your company, this can be done in different ways. It could be as simple as a card signed by everyone, or a 'Happy Birthday' email from the boss with the team copied in (so everyone can then flood your colleague's inbox with a bunch of birthday wishes). And it never goes amiss for the birthday boy/girl to bring in cakes or other goodies for everyone to share. We always look forward to the 'cakes downstairs at 11' email. 10:58 – KETTLE ON.

Raise Money for a Local Charity

It feels good to do good, and it can be great fun to raise money together, especially for a local charity where every little bit goes a long way. It's also the perfect excuse to socialise and get creative with fund-raising ideas.

Become Workout Buddies

Maybe you have a gym on-site or just around the corner, where a group of you can go on your lunch break, or before/after work? It can be great to take part in a fun run, weekly fitness classes, or even take walks with a work friend at lunchtimes. The more endorphins, the better!

Breakfast Club

Too many of us press snooze too many times, get up late, race to work and clock-in thirty seconds before we're due to start for the day. Then our tummies are growling within half an hour because we forgot to eat breakfast. So why not try it? Introduce a Breakfast Club into your morning routine – you can all get to work a little early and eat breakfast together – and since you're already at work, there's no panic about being late.

Netflix & Ch… ess

Any board game lovers in your workplace? Footy fans? Westworld addicts? The idea is to find a common interest and choose one day every week, or fortnight, to stay late and order a takeaway while you play a game or watch a TV show. We all do it at home anyway – but it can be nice to relax with your colleagues after a hard days work.

Celebrate

We always work hard and do our best. But balance is important, so it's important to celebrate your achievements. Celebrating and socialising doesn't just have to be kept for the Christmas party, so get busy organising activities! It gives everyone something to look forward to… paintballing, ice-skating, a trip to the pub after work? And top tip – include families!

Create a Recoup Room

Is your workplace one of the many (including ours) that often has everyone eating lunch at their workstations? Even though we should all move and stretch regularly throughout the day, we often don't! And it's too easy to get either super stressed or super tired if we don't take the occasional time-out. It will make a huge difference to create a space, or Recoup Room, where the team can chill during breaks – to eat, nap, stretch, read, enjoy a quiet cuppa. Getting back to your workstation feeling relaxed and refreshed is always good for energy levels! To maintain maximum productivity it's crucial to take breaks - little and often is key – see our Display Screen Equipment course for more information on this.

Support Passionate Projects

What are the people in your team passionate about? Gardening? Writing? Animals? Jazz? Showing an interest in each other's outside interests is a good way to strengthen your working relationships and to keep conversations engaging. You can always find local specialists or innovative thinkers to come and talk to the team about subjects they're interested in - it can be a refreshing way to break up the day on occasion!   Managers can even set aside some time once a month for a Creative Project - where every employee is allowed to work on a project of their own making, as long as it relates to your company's service or product.