



STRONGER TOGETHER

CONGRESS

Irish Congress of Trade Unions

TRADE UNIONS &



Trade Unions and Mental Health

Context

Mental health is an issue for us all. According to *Mental Health Ireland* everybody will experience some kind of mental health issue during their lives, with the vast majority coping and making a full recovery.

The risk of mental health problems has been compounded during the Covid-19 pandemic with a large number of workers working remotely. People working remotely can be more anxious or stressed at the change in work environment. Working remotely can make it more difficult for workers to switch off, and they may feel under pressure to work longer hours.

Trade unions are key to promoting positive mental health and expect that their members should operate in an environment where high standards are the norm. These high standards require good working conditions and policies in the workplace to allow all of members to be treated with dignity and respect and to operate in an environment free of harassment, one where workers may flourish in their chosen occupation.

Traditionally, workplace health and safety initiatives have placed more emphasis on physical issues rather than on mental health. However, the effective management of all aspects of health and safety is good for workers, good for business and good for society as a whole.

Trade unions recognise that all concerned will benefit from workplaces which are proactive in protecting the mental health of workers and which take reasonable preventative measures. Protection of workers' mental health is a right and with all rights come responsibilities.

Everyone in the workplace, trade unions, management and workers, has a moral and - in management's case - a legal responsibility to create an environment that promotes well-being and where all are encouraged to look after their mental health.

Most people will experience stress and mental health issues during their working lives but with a supportive environment at work and with the right help, at the right time, they will cope and recover.

Trade unions and their members have the best understanding of the problems that can occur in their workplace. By sharing that knowledge with managers and employers, trade unions can help to shape, plan and implement solutions for the betterment of all union members. To this end we will positively engage both with employees and with the organisations where we hold representation rights.

This document sets out ways in which unions can respond. All Congress-affiliated unions are encouraged to respond in their policies and procedures to the commitments made, and to implement the actions points outlined under each commitment.

Trade Union Commitments

Trade unions make the following six commitments in furtherance of their promotion and safeguarding of the mental health of their staff and members:

1

To create an open and inclusive workplace for union employees and members, which upholds respect for all including those with mental health difficulties.

2

To work with and develop policies with the organisations where we hold representation rights to promote the mental health of our members and support those experiencing mental health difficulties in the workplace.

3

To promote equality of opportunity and challenge discrimination in the workplace.

4

To promote equality of opportunity in recruitment, selection and promotion of those with mental health difficulties.

5

To identify and provide sources of information, training and support for our representatives to allow them to provide support to union members experiencing mental difficulties.

6

To promote healthy lifestyles and wellbeing at work through a range of initiatives from campaigns promoting mental health to flexible working.

Associated actions are set out below for each of the six commitments.

1

To create an open and inclusive workplace for union staff and members which upholds respect for all, including those with mental health difficulties.

ACTION POINTS



We will seek to provide a workplace that supports positive mental health by:

Positively supporting union staff engagement and well-being and to implement the HSA's Work Positive tool in our unions

Providing Mental Health training and practical supports around mental health to prevent harm to workers and to help those who develop mental health problems

Developing a mental health policy in our trade unions which demonstrates commitment to union staff's mental health

Providing mental health awareness workshops, training in employment equality, and health and safety to assist union staff to maintain positive mental health.

Recognising that employees have the right to disconnect from work and to not answer any work-related emails, calls or messages outside of normal working hours

2

To work with organisations where we hold representation rights to develop policies which promote our members' mental health and to support those experiencing mental health difficulties in the workplace.



ACTION POINTS

To ensure that employees have the right supports in place, we will engage positively with employers by:

Providing support and training to our officials and representatives to enable them to develop and review all policies.

Negotiating mental health policies and good practice in the workplace.

Developing a mental health policy in our trade unions which demonstrates commitment to union staff's mental health

Monitoring key employment policies to ensure those with mental health issues enjoy equality of opportunity in accessing and remaining in employment.

Signing up to workplace campaigns which aim to start positive conversations around mental health and address the stigmatisation of this issue.

3

To promote equality of opportunity and challenge discrimination in the workplace.



ACTION POINTS

We will ensure, where at all possible, that our members and the workplaces where they are employed, have in place policies and procedures that promote equality of opportunity for people with mental health difficulties by:

Ensuring that all policies, practices and procedures will be reviewed to ensure they comply with equality legislation and promote good practice

Supporting union members to ensure that they can perform their job successfully following disclosure of mental health difficulties

Enabling trade union representatives to positively support and assist union members who experience mental health difficulties in the workplace

4

To promote equality of opportunity in recruitment, selection and promotion of those with mental health difficulties.



ACTION POINTS

We will support and encourage our members and future members with mental health difficulties to apply for and seek promotion by:

Engaging with our members with mental health difficulties to identify barriers to employment

Positively working with employers to create roles for individuals with disabilities including those with mental health difficulties

Reviewing recruitment and selection policies with employers to ensure they do not create barriers to recruitment or promotion

5

To identify and provide sources of information, training and support for our representatives to allow them provide support to union members experiencing mental health difficulties.



ACTION POINTS

We will provide sources of information and support by:

Developing with the assistance of Congress, a training course to create and support the role of a Mental Health Champion as a trade union role in the workplace

Awareness-raising and use of resources provided by relevant support organisations such as Aware, SeeChange and Mental Health Ireland

Providing information on the statutory obligations of employers to people with mental health difficulties

Developing policies that can be implemented in the workplace in relation to mental health issues

6

To promote healthy lifestyles and well-being at work through a range of initiatives from campaigns promoting mental health to flexible working.



ACTION POINTS

We will promote healthy lifestyles and well-being at work by:

Negotiating flexible working options with employers for union members

Engaging with union staff and offering flexible working options

Encouraging staff and members to partake of physical activity

Providing information and support to members on health and well-being initiatives and improvement activities

Working with employees, employers and members to allow all to enjoy complete physical, mental and social well-being

Assist union members to realise their own abilities, cope with the normal stresses of life, work productively, to flourish and be able to contribute to their community