



Guidelines for employees wishing to access a Mental Health First Aider

The role of a Mental Health First Aider:

A Mental Health First Aider is a person who has been formally accredited to administer mental health first aid in the workplace, by attending and passing an assessment in a Mental Health First Aid Course that has been delivered by an Accredited Mental Health First Aid Instructor.

The role of a Mental Health First Aider is to be the first point of contact for a colleague who is experiencing a mental health issue or emotional distress. This interaction could range from having an initial conversation through to signposting the person to get appropriate help.

Mental health is complex and it takes skilled treatment by qualified medical practitioners to heal the mind. This does not form part of the Mental Health First Aid training or remit. It is therefore important to understand that Mental Health First Aiders are not trained to be therapists, counsellors, or psychiatrists. Neither are they trained to diagnose mental health conditions or provide any form of treatment or on-going support. The Mental Health First Aider merely listens in a non-judgemental manner and helps the person experiencing mental or emotional distress to take personal ownership. Their primary role is to act as a sign poster – encouraging their colleagues to access professional support if needed, whether this is internally, through the Council's support services (NOSS and Occupational Health), or externally, via a GP, or mental health organisation. It is important to remember that the role of the Mental Health First Aider is to act as a first point of contact and reassurance for colleagues who may be experiencing a mental health issue. The Mental Health First Aider will encourage, support, and signpost colleagues to access professional help; however, the decision to access professional help will ultimately reside with the individual.

Mental Health First Aiders are trained to: -

- spot the early signs and symptoms of mental ill health.
- start a supportive conversation with a colleague who may be experiencing a mental health issues or emotional distress.
- listen to the person non-judgementally.
- assess the risk of suicide or self-harm.
- encourage the person to access appropriate professional support or self-help strategies. This might include encouraging access to internal support systems such as Shropshire Council's Counselling Service NOSS.

- escalate to the appropriate emergency service if an urgent risk is identified.
- in undertaking their role, Mental Health First Aiders may provide anonymised reports of their interactions with colleagues to the appropriate persons within the organisation.
- communicate and share important messages relating to mental health that remove stigma and reduce discrimination. We want to make Shropshire Council a place where it is commonplace to talk about mental health without fear of recrimination or repercussions, in the hope of reducing the stigma and discrimination which is often associated with mental ill health.

How do I contact a Mental Health First Aider?

- You can access any Mental Health First Aider within the Council – you do not have to access a Mental Health First Aider in your own Directorate if you do not wish to do so. The Mental Health First Aiders' contact details are listed on the intranet, on the **Wellbeing Page**, under the **Be Mindful** section in **Useful Resources** <https://staff.shropshire.gov.uk/how-do-i/your-health-and-wellbeing/useful-resources/>. The Mental Health First Aiders can also be identified by the green lanyards that they wear.
- You can decide how you would like to speak to a Mental Health First Aider – via telephone, a video/Skype call, or a face to face meeting at an agreed workplace.

Confidentiality

Mental Health First Aiders are trained to maintain confidentiality and treat all matters sensitively and privately. They are, however, morally obliged to report any concerns where there is an immediate risk to life or a significant risk to the individual or a third party. Please note that any significant concerns about the mental health and well-being of anyone in the workplace may be communicated to an appropriate manager.

Managing your expectations:

- It may not be possible for a Mental Health First Aider to respond immediately to your request for support. When they are able to, they will arrange a time to call or meet up. In the event that you need to access support urgently and a Mental Health First Aider is not available, please click this link to the **Useful Resources** section on the **Be Mindful** page on the intranet which details a list of local and national mental health organisations/helplines. <https://staff.shropshire.gov.uk/how-do-i/your-health-and-wellbeing/useful-resources/>
- Mental Health First Aiders must only be contacted during their working hours.
- Mental Health First Aiders are not there to give on-going support or counselling and are not trained therapists, counsellors, or psychiatrists.