

***This is a draft version of the workbook
and is subject to further change.
Please do not circulate beyond your
team.***



Compassionate Employers

CHAPTER 4- Managerial burnout

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Introduction

This is a draft version of the workbook and is subject to further change. Please do not circulate beyond your team.

Disclaimer

While great care has been taken to ensure the accuracy of information contained in this publication, it is necessarily of a general nature and neither Hospice UK nor the other contributors can accept any legal responsibility for any errors or omissions that may occur.

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Who is this workbook for?

This workbook is a reflective learning resource for managers of staff whose work may bring them into contact with grief, caring responsibilities, emotional labour, distress, death, dying or bereavement. It is designed to support individual reflection and team conversation.

It should be used alongside, not instead of, appropriate management support, supervision, occupational health, Employee Assistance Programme, HR guidance and organisational wellbeing provision.

How do I use this workbook?

This resource is for reflection and learning. It is not a substitute for clinical, psychological, occupational health, HR or emergency support.

Each chapter can be used as a standalone resource, however, the proposed order of chapters is:

- Team resilience
- Supporting teams with compassion
- Leading with vulnerability
- Managerial burnout.

Throughout each chapter there are opportunities for individual reflection and group reflection. See below for some guidance on how these activities should be facilitated:

Individual reflection guidance

- You do not need to answer any questions that feel too personal, unsafe or difficult.
- Pause at any point.
- If this content brings up distress, speak to someone you trust and access your organisation's support routes, such as your manager, supervision, occupational health, Employee Assistance Programme, HR, GP or urgent support if needed.

Group reflection guidance

- Participation is voluntary.
- No one should be expected to disclose personal trauma, bereavement, mental health experiences or private circumstances.
- Confidentiality expectations should be agreed at the start.
- Managers should not use reflective worksheets as performance management evidence.
- Teams should agree what can remain within the group and what may need to be escalated for safety or support.
- A facilitator is identified for more sensitive discussions, especially professional grief and burnout.

Our wider workplace

- Looking after ourselves matters, but wellbeing is not only an individual responsibility.
- Our workplace plays a large role in supporting our wellbeing.
- Workload, staffing, supervision, leadership, culture, psychological safety, fairness and access to support all shape whether people can stay well at work.
- *To access your organisation's support, please contact someone in your organisation for more information - such as your manager or HR team.*

About Compassionate Employers

The Compassionate Employers Programme launched in 2019 to provide organisations with the skills, knowledge, and resources needed to effectively support employees and customers through terminal illness, caring responsibilities, and bereavement.

We envision a world where all employers are equipped to advocate for and support employees and customers through significant life moments. Our programme is built around three key pillars: greater visibility, education, and connection.

If you would like more information about Compassionate Employers, we would love to invite you to book a meeting with our team here: [Compassionate Employers Intro Chat](#)

About Hospice UK

Hospice care eases the physical and emotional pain of death and dying. Letting people focus on living, right until the end. But too many people miss out on this essential care. Hospice UK fights for hospice care for all who need it, for now and forever.

Membership of Hospice UK is open to UK organisations that provide hospice care. Anyone who works or volunteers for a Hospice UK member organisation can access our member-only services and resources. For more information on how to make the most of your Hospice UK membership, see: <https://www.hospiceuk.org/innovation-hub/membership>

Workbook key

	Lightbulb moment: An interesting fact, extra information.
	Individual reflection: An activity for you to complete (participation is optional).
	Group reflection: An activity to do with your team (participation is optional).
	Important note!: Important information.
	See Glossary: Detailed definitions.
	Tool: You can use this reflection/information outside of the workbook.
	Quote/quotation: Relevant quote/quotation.
	Key term: Important definition.
	Reminder to be kind to yourself: This activity may feel challenging or emotional (participation is optional). Please do take care of yourself and take breaks as needed.

Managerial burnout

'Resources can act as a buffer against job demands, but if job demands outweigh the resources available, this can lead to stress and eventually burnout'.

Ravalier, McVicar and Boichat¹

In the current world we live in, burnout can feel like it is only one precarious step away. In juggling work and home we are not alone in wanting to shout, "I just can't do it all anymore!"

Burnout is something that anyone in any organisation can face, yet as managers in the hospice sector, we can face unique demands and challenges.

Funding pressures, limited resources and balancing both the needs of senior managers, HR requirements and our team's wellbeing, it can feel really hard to put our needs first. We are in this sector because we care and are often passionate about supporting and inspiring our teams, even if we are really struggling ourselves.

However, over time if we are unsupported we can experience burnout and put pressure on ourselves, our wellbeing and the manager we want to be.



What we will cover

This chapter is a space to reflect, make notes, and think about ways in which we can look after ourselves as managers and be kind to ourselves when we feel squeezed in the middle.

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Important note! If this content brings up distress, speak to someone you trust and access your organisation's support routes or urgent support if needed.

Definition: what is burnout?

Burnout is a term we have heard a lot about over the last few years. It means a lot of different things to different people.



Individual reflection: What does burnout mean to you? What does it look like?

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The term we are using here is based on the World Health Organization's definition².

Key term

Burnout describes an experience of physical and emotional exhaustion including feeling overwhelmed and powerless at work.

It is often caused by **chronic workplace stress** that has not been adequately supported² leading to low work satisfaction³.



Burnout is different from compassion fatigue and secondary traumatic stress. See Glossary for further definitions.

Spotting the signs

How do we know it is burnout that we are experiencing?

Symptoms of burnout can vary person to person, however, there are often three areas where we experience burnout symptoms:



1.Exhaustion

Complete physical, psychological and emotional exhaustion:

- Feeling depleted and having no energy
- More emotional, irritable and upset
- Withdrawn and distant
- More prone to sickness
- Aches, pains and difficulties sleeping

2.Mental distance from work

Feelings of negativity towards work:

- Feeling more cynical - 'worst case scenario' thinking
- Feeling our work is no longer meaningful
- Small tasks/problems feeling overwhelming
- Feeling unfulfilled and underappreciated
- Low morale and feeling hopeless or bitter towards our work

3.Feeling unsuccessful at work

We cannot recognise our professional accomplishments:

- Because we are exhausted, we become more prone to making mistakes
- Not taking breaks and working longer hours to try to compensate
- Wanting to quit
- Difficulties completing tasks
- Feeling like we are failing/are a failure

Signs identified in World Health Organization², Taranu et al.,⁴ Shanafelt et al.⁵, NHS Newcastle upon Tyne⁶

What causes burnout in managers?

Burnout is something that anyone in any organisation can face, yet there are a few components which can make the experience of burnout for managers distinct.

According to Müller and Kubátová⁷ while the symptoms of burnout may be the same, the underlying causes differ due to responsibilities associated with their leadership role.

In this chapter we will look at some contributing factors which include:

1. Role ambiguity

Have you ever felt like you are 'wearing all the hats'? Hiring lead, disciplinary enforcer, budget manager and emotional supporter - all while managing our team's performance and doing our day job!

2. High job demands

Often with the complexity and ambiguity of our managerial roles, the scope of our role can continue to increase. Without additional support/resources, we can find the demands of our role overwhelming.

3. Work life balance

We are often in these roles because we really care and want to do a great job. However, if we continuously give too much of ourselves to our work without the right support in place, it can start to impact our wellbeing.

Headings adapted from
Müller and Kubátová⁷

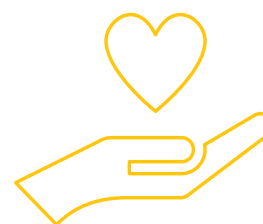


Lightbulb moment: For further reading on manager burnout compared to other job roles (including entrepreneurs) see Müller and Kubátová's⁷ systematic review.

Pause and reflect

Do some of those challenges sound familiar? Consider if any of these areas are impacting your workplace.

Be kind to yourself in this reflection. You do not need to answer any questions that feel too personal, unsafe or difficult.



Individual reflection: Which/if any pressures are your workplace currently experiencing?

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Individual reflection: What solutions can you identify? Who can support you?

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Important note! Personal strategies are helpful but are not always enough. If we are experiencing or at risk of burnout, it is important we get the right support.

Speak to someone you trust and access your organisation's support routes, such as your manager, supervision, occupational health, Employee Assistance Programme, HR, GP or urgent support if needed.

Role ambiguity

One area that we may face is 'role ambiguity'⁸. As managers we can be asked to take on many different roles. Over time our work changes without it formally changing our job description.

This experience can make us feel squeezed:

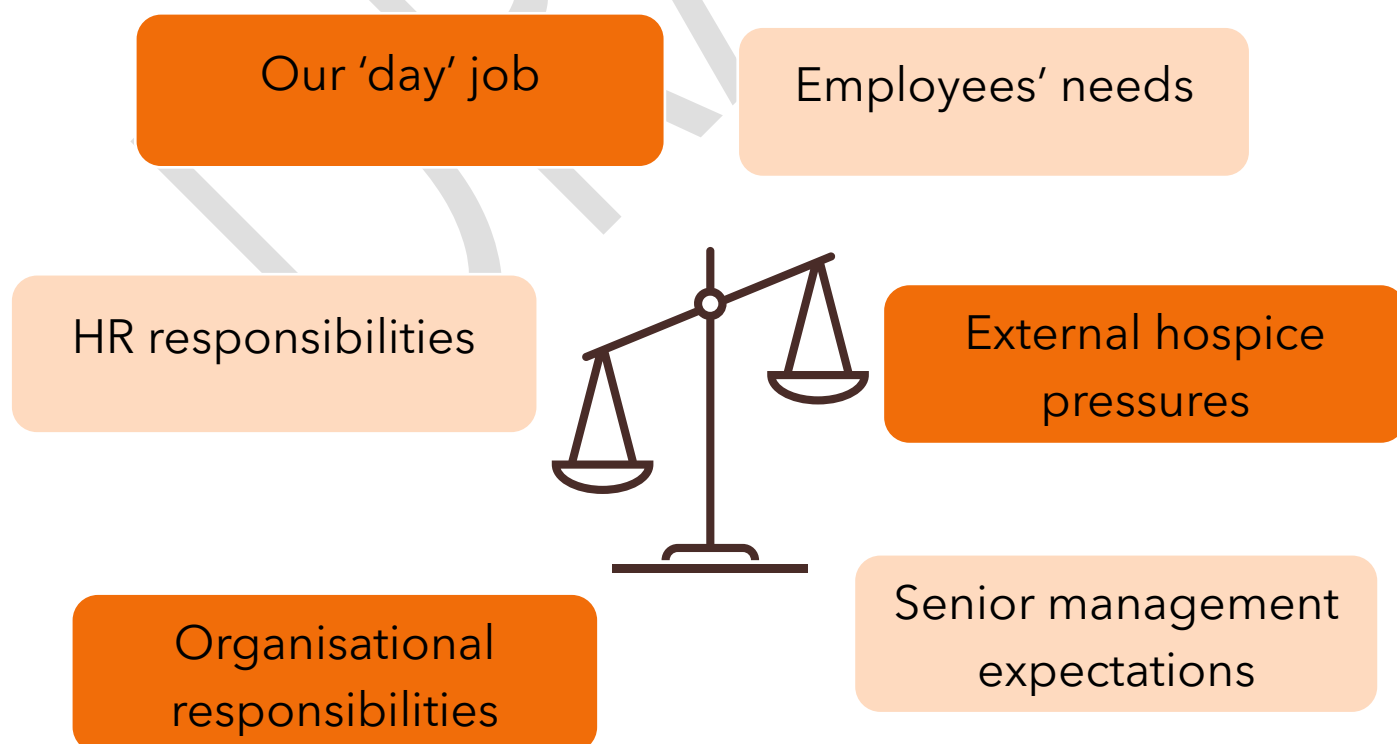
Key term

'Squeezed middle' describes experiences managers have of feeling the work pressure and expectation from multiple different areas of an organisation⁸.

This is more likely to happen when:

- there are unclear boundaries around a manager's responsibilities
- there's a mismatch between 'what HR want managers to do, what managers think they should be doing and what employees expect of managers'⁸.

It can feel like being weighed down by so many expectations that you don't know where to start or what is a priority. Some are detailed below:



Examples adapted from Bajorek⁸

Practical tool: clarify role expectations

Managers often have diverse responsibilities, yet we rarely have time to think about all we are doing. Without clarity on responsibilities, roles become blurry⁸ and we can be stretched too thin.

However, when we fully understand expectations, what is in our job description and what HR require, we can better plan our time and delegate duties.



Individual reflection: Some common manager responsibility types are noted in the previous illustration. Consider some of your responsibilities at your hospice and what challenges you face or what you would like clarity on.

Responsibility	What is involved?	Current challenges/questions
e.g. HR responsibilities- interviewing staff	• shortlisting applications • conducting interviews	• how regularly am I required on interview panels?
e.g. Senior management expectations- managing team budgets		



Tool: This tool can be used to identify questions we may have about our role. We ask HR to support us in clarifying our responsibilities.

High job demands

With our busy roles, our to-do list can feel never-ending. We may be great at stretching ourselves to get the job done, yet if this continues to occur over time without support it can impact our wellbeing.

Sometimes there are times when we cannot do it all. There are just too many tasks and not enough resources – we can become overwhelmed.

Key term

'Work overload' occurs 'where there is an incompatibility between the volume of work... and the time available to complete the work'⁸.

We can find it particularly overwhelming when we are experiencing:

Role conflict

Lack of time and capacity

This may not be any one person's fault. Our senior leadership may also be overstretched, and our colleagues are balancing busy workloads. Also we may worry about pushing further challenges onto our teams.

It can be really challenging so please be kind to yourself in these moments. We are only one person.



Important note! Looking after ourselves matters, but wellbeing is not only an individual responsibility. Our workplace plays a large role in supporting our wellbeing.

If we are experiencing or at risk of burnout, it is important we get the right support. Speak to someone you trust and access your organisation's support routes, such as your manager, supervision, occupational health, Employee Assistance Programme, HR, GP or urgent support if needed.

'Role conflict' is when tasks or roles we are required to resolve contradict each other making it difficult/impossible to achieve with the resources we have⁸.

However, if we are able to recognise and identify instances of role conflict early, share it calmly and factually with key stakeholders, we can mitigate the impact.

Your hospice's senior leadership team are asking for you to reduce staff clinical supervision due to limited staff and financial constraints. They ask that staff should spend more time in patient-facing work.

At the same time HR is concerned about your team's wellbeing and suggesting that supervision is increased. They ask for you to identify training need and ensure it is implemented.

Individual reflection: Often we don't have time to consider how the specifics of how our tasks conflict or the quantity of conflicts we are dealing with.

Note a specific scenario you have experienced and objectively list the conflicting elements:

[illegible]

High job demands: lack of time and capacity

Sometimes what we are being asked to achieve is not possible with the time and resources we have. When this occurs, it can feel frustrating and overwhelming - we are at 'work overload'⁸.

In these moments, communication is really important. If we can compassionately, calmly and clearly share our challenges with key stakeholders and be open to problem-solving, we can protect ourselves and our teams. This may involve '**compassionately pushing back**'.

Pushing back is not easy or always possible, however, some suggestions are below.



Individual reflection: Below are sentence starters that may help in considerably and specifically advocating for you and your team. What other examples can you think of?

This is an important task and I don't currently have the capacity to do it properly

It would be great to review priorities with you so I can best support both you and my team

I can do x not y because...

I understand this is a priority- what would you recommend I deprioritise?

I am concerned about the impact this may have on my team's other responsibilities- can we talk it through?

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Work-life balance

As managers we are often in these roles because we really care and we may go above and beyond in supporting our teams. Care and compassion are great qualities, however, we may find ourselves always prioritising others' needs above our own.

Without support, it can impact our work/life balance and wellbeing.

Key term

Work-life balance describes an overall state of equilibrium between someone's work and personal life where the demands of each area are equally valued⁹.

Effective work-life balance' is indicated as a key element in 'reducing burnout in managers'⁷ and a systematic review by Papworth et al.¹⁰ found improved work-life balance was associated with hospice staff's psychological well-being.

For many of us we know work-life balance is important but it can feel like an elusive, even impossible aspiration. Yet balance isn't a perfect static end point or only an individual responsibility.

Instead, we can think of **work-life as a pendulum** that acknowledges the natural ebb and flow of stressors and priorities while making space for rest and enjoyment in both.

Our workplace also plays a large role in supporting this. Workload, staffing, culture, fairness can play a role in establishing our working 'norm' which may or may not prioritise wellbeing.



Important note! Sometimes we may experience difficult life events which make balance impossible meaning we may need further support.

Speak to someone you trust and access your organisation's support routes, such as your manager, supervision, occupational health, Employee Assistance Programme, HR, GP or urgent support if needed.

Pause and reflect

It can feel really hard to prioritise our needs in and outside of work. We may not know what a good work-life balance looks like for us or what support we may need.



We don't have to do it all alone. We need people and resources around us to lean on when things are challenging. This activity can remind us who we can turn to for support.



Individual reflection:

- What does an effective work-life balance look like to me?

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- Who can support me at work?

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- Who can support me outside of work?

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- What other support is available to me right now?

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- What can I do today to support future me?

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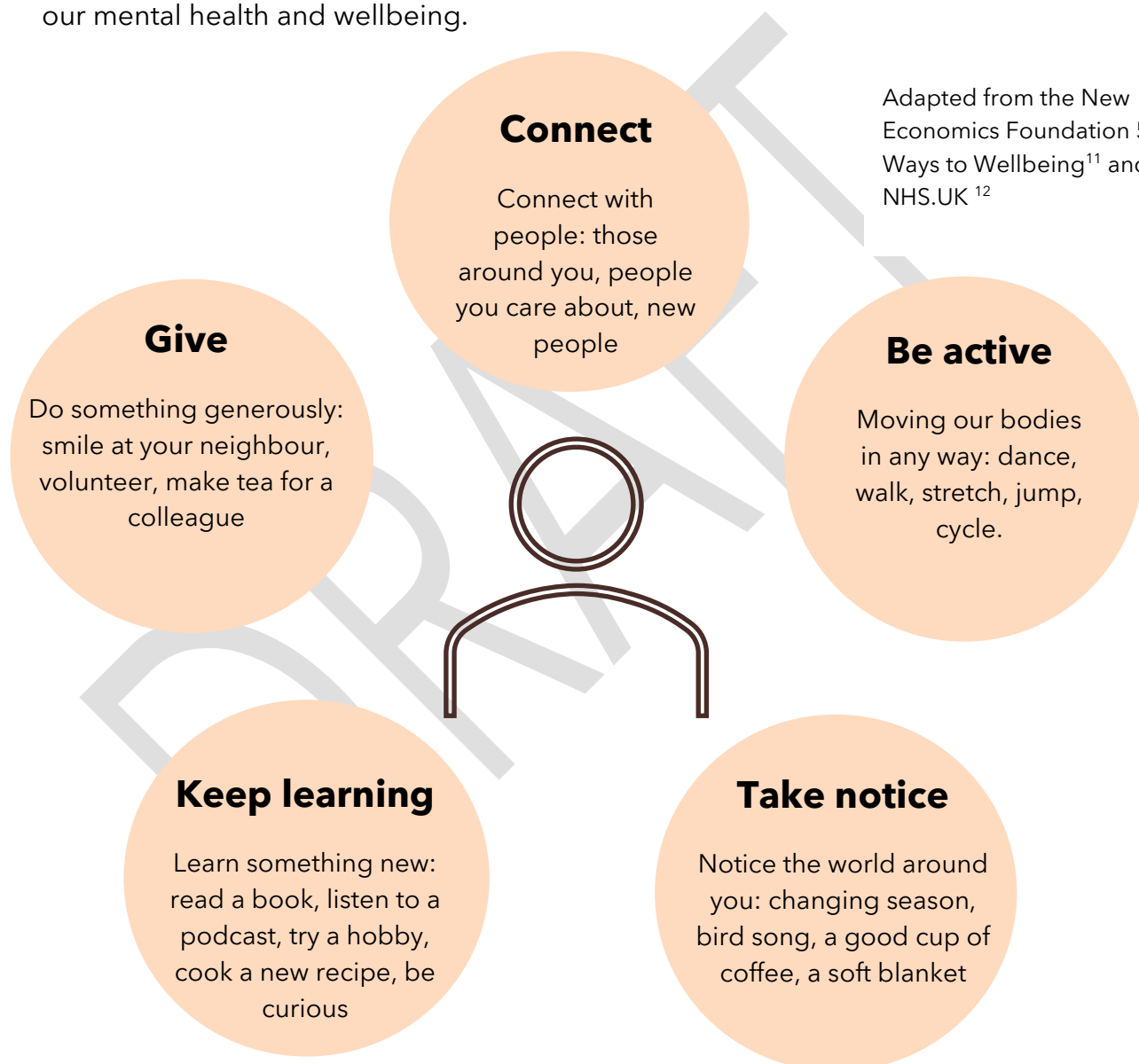


See Glossary for definition of wellbeing.

Practical tool: The 'Five Ways to Wellbeing'

When thinking about supporting our work-life balance, it can be hard to know where to start. Support from our communities at work and at home is key to preventing burnout. There are also other things we can do to support ourselves in our day to day.

The New Economics Foundation¹¹ identified five key ways in which we can support our mental health and wellbeing.



Tool: If it feels safe for you to do so, try and introduce one new activity in one of the above categories today.

Self-compassion

Key term

Self-compassion is giving ourselves the warmth, care and understanding despite our failings or challenges¹³.

It includes self-kindness, a feeling of common humanity and mindfulness¹⁴.

Managerial burnout can be a really challenging topic. When things feel difficult, when our resources are stretched and our capacity is low, we can often be really hard on ourselves.

Here is a reminder to check in with that critical voice and take a moment for you.



Individual reflection: What one kind thing can you do for yourself today?

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See Glossary for definition of compassion

Prevention and support

Looking after ourselves matters, but wellbeing is not only an individual responsibility. Our workplace plays a large role in supporting our wellbeing.

Workload, staffing, supervision, leadership, culture, psychological safety, fairness and access to support all shape whether we can stay well at work.

To access your organisation's support, contact someone in your organisation for more information - such as your manager or HR team.



Individual reflection: Sometimes when we are struggling, we may not know who to speak to in our organisation.

Make a note of what support is available to you in your hospice:

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Important note! Personal strategies are helpful but are not always enough. If we are experiencing or at risk of burnout, it is important we get the right support.

Speak to someone you trust and access your organisation's support routes, such as your manager, supervision, occupational health, Employee Assistance Programme, HR, GP or urgent support if needed.

Worksheet: individual activity

Applying the Five Ways to Wellbeing

The New Economics Foundation¹¹ identified ways of improving mental health and wellbeing in the UK.

They identified five key actions that we can incorporate into our day-to-day lives. It can be difficult to find the time to prioritise our own needs, however, trying these things could help you feel more positive.

This activity is designed to help us think holistically about the five ways to wellbeing.

Important note!

Individual activity guidance

- You do not need to answer any questions that feel too personal, unsafe or difficult.
- Pause at any point.
- If this content brings up distress, speak to someone you trust and access your organisation's support routes, such as your manager, supervision, occupational health, Employee Assistance Programme, HR, GP or urgent support if needed.

Be kind to yourself. These are some ideas of things for you to reflect on, not a strict 'to do' list.



Individual reflection: Consider some examples of how we can support our wellbeing at work or elsewhere. The examples can be really small!

Area	What am I doing now?	What else could I try?
Connect Connect with people: those around you, people you care about, new people		
Be active Moving our bodies in any way: dance, walk, stretch, jump, cycle.		
Keep learning Learn something new: read a book, listen to a podcast, try a hobby, cook a new recipe, be curious		
Take notice Notice the world around you: changing season, bird song, a good cup of coffee, a soft blanket		
Give Do something generously: smile at your neighbour, volunteer, make tea for a colleague		

Adapted from the New Economics Foundation 5 Ways to Wellbeing¹¹ and NHS¹²

Worksheet: individual reflection

Discussing managerial burnout with our manager or HR team: discussion guide

These conversations can feel daunting and remember you do not need to share more than you are comfortable with¹⁶.

However, when everyone is working together and are open to different perspectives and solutions, you can find ways of better supporting your wellbeing.

This conversation guide aims to support you when having conversations with your manager or HR team about the risks of burnout you may be experiencing. By making notes ahead of time, you can feel prepared in the conversation.

Important note!

Individual reflection guidance

- You do not need to answer any questions that feel too personal, unsafe or difficult.
- Pause at any point.
- If this content brings up distress, speak to someone you trust and access your organisation's support routes, such as your manager, supervision, occupational health, Employee Assistance Programme, HR, GP or urgent support if needed.

Be kind to yourself. These questions can feel challenging so take your time and take breaks as needed.

1.About you

- **Confidentiality:** at the start of the discussion make expectations around confidentiality clear.
- **Impact:** what is the impact that the current situation is having on you and the risk/experience of burnout?
- **Contributing factors:** what personal and professional factors are contributing to how you are feeling (e.g. financial worries, bereavement, mental health, physical health)? How are they impacting you and your work?
- **Further guidance:** what further personal guidance would you find helpful to support the contributing factors? E.g. medical advice, financial advice, mental health support.

While you may not feel comfortable to share specific details, context can help your manager in understanding the impact on your personal and professional life and understand where they can take action.



Individual reflection: Make a note on each point, to help you stay on track in the conversation. This can include any questions you may want to ask

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2. Role ambiguity

- **Job description:** Review your job description. Often our work changes over time without it changing our role formally.
- **Clarity:** are you clear what management specific tasks are expected? Do these need to be clarified with HR?
- **Specific tasks:** What specific tasks do you have and what are the challenges you are encountering?
- **Potential solutions:** Do you have any ideas as to how your workload can be reprioritised?

Speaking about your specific workload with your manager or HR can help them to problem-solve areas or support you in reprioritising tasks.

Individual reflection: Make a note on each point, to help you stay on track in the conversation. This can include a list of your tasks and the challenges you are experiencing.

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3. Job demands

- **Role conflict:** Are you regularly experiencing tasks that contradict each other? Are there challenges in effective communication between key stakeholders? How could they be resolved?
- **Time and capacity:** Are demands exceeding your and your team's time and resources? What examples are there?
- **Wider picture:** Do you have a full understanding of your workplace's wider picture? Can you ask your manager/senior leadership for clarity on this and where your work fits?
- **Fairness, rights and policies:** Are you being treated fairly in the work you are expected to carry out? Are you familiar with your organisational policies e.g. Inclusion and Diversity, Complaints Procedures, Sickness Absence? Do you know where these are located?

If we feel like our workload is out of control it can feel frustrating and overwhelming - we are at 'work overload'¹⁸.

Further, if you feel you are not being treated fairly, it is important you fully understand your rights. Your HR team can help you in understanding your organisation's policies.

Individual reflection: Make a note on each point, to help you stay on track in the conversation. This can include a list of your tasks and the challenges you are experiencing.

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4. Work-life balance and support

- **Balance:** What is making balancing work life and home life challenging? Are there organisational factors? How can your organisation support you?
- **Rights and policies:** Are you currently experiencing external factors which are impacting your work life balance? Are you aware of your organisational policies e.g. Carers policy, Bereavement policy, Miscarriage and fertility policy, Sickness Absence? Are there any adjustments that you would find helpful?
- **One-to-one support:** Do you have regular check-ins with your manager/managerial peers? Can you ask for this? Can what you discuss in this meeting be reviewed at a later date? What/ if any wellbeing support might you find helpful e.g. Employee Assistance Programme?
- **Peer support Team support:** Do you have access to management supervision/group reflection? Do you have access to management training? How can you be supported in prioritising accessing that support?

By having these conversations, there may be further wellbeing support such as an Employee Assistance Programme could access.

Individual reflection: Is there any specific support that you would find helpful?

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Glossary

- **Burnout** describes an experience of physical and emotional exhaustion including feeling overwhelmed and powerless at work.

It is often caused by *chronic workplace stress* that has not been adequately supported ² leading to low work satisfaction³.

- **Compassion fatigue** is a state of significant emotional, mental or physical exhaustion. It results from prolonged *exposure to the emotional stress involved in caretaking*¹⁷.

It results in cognitive, emotional and behavioural changes and leads to a reduced capacity for someone to be empathetic.

- **Secondary traumatic stress** is the negative impact of indirect exposure to, witnessing or supporting in a traumatic incident. It can occur from a single event or over time¹⁸.

- **Squeezed middle** describes experiences managers have of feeling the work pressure and expectation from multiple different areas of an organisation. Overwhelm occurs when there is an incompatibility between 'time available [...] and volume of work'⁸.

This is more likely to happen when there are unclear boundaries around a manager's responsibilities, contributing to a mismatch between what HR require from managers, what managers think their roles are and what employees expect from their managers⁸.

- **'Role conflict'** is when tasks or roles we are required to resolve contradict each other making it difficult/impossible to achieve with the resources we have⁸.
- **Self-compassion** is giving ourselves the warmth, care and understanding despite our failings or challenges¹³. Neff included in the definition three elements: self-kindness, a feeling of common humanity and mindfulness¹⁹.

- **Work-life balance** describes an overall state of equilibrium between someone's work and personal life where the demands of each area are equally valued⁹.
While demands in work and personal life fluctuate, a good work-life balance indicates that someone can experience satisfaction in multiple areas of their life and that each area is valued.
- **Well-being** 'is a positive state experienced by individuals and societies. Similar to health, it is a resource for daily life and is determined by social, economic and environmental conditions'²⁰.

DRAFT

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