Browne Jacobson

World Mental Health Day - 10 October 2020

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This year's theme is centred around global efforts to scale up investment and access to mental health support and, with stark figures coming out from the World Health Organisation (WHO), there has never been a better time to get involved:

- Worldwide, there are close to one billion people living with a mental disorder
- One person dies every 40 seconds by suicide

Further research conducted by Mind (UK) into the effects of work-related stress and poor workplace cultures in the UK identifies that almost 21% of people surveyed had called in sick to avoid the workplace, 42% had considered resigning and 14% had actually taken the drastic step to resign as a direct result of work related stress. Therefore, it is clear that not taking action to address issues creating a negative culture in your school(s) will be costly to education organisations and ultimately, could affect the quality and delivery of teaching.

The COVID-19 pandemic has undoubtedly added further complications as on top of the usual stresses of everyday life – work, finances, raising children to name a few – we now have additional worries to deal with that are largely out of our control. The restrictions of lockdown (and ongoing localised lockdowns in some areas) on top of the fears of becoming seriously ill with COVID-19 is affecting adults, and children, across the UK (and indeed, the rest of the world) and having a further negative impact on mental health.

You may be wondering how you can get involved in World Mental Health Day and how you can offer your staff some practical steps to look after their mental health without blowing the budget. However, there are some very simple, cost effective and quick wins that you can adopt:

1. **Wellness Action Plans (WAP's)** – A WAP is an informal plan that can be considered for employees who already have a mental health disorder or concern but they are also useful for an employee who is currently well, but who wants to take a more pro-active approach to staying mentally fit at work. A plan can be tailored to the individual's needs and seeks to identify any possible triggers to stress, how the employee wishes to be communicated with and steps/actions that the employee feels can be taken by the school to assist when they are not coping. If you'd like to introduce a WAP for employees in your school and would like some guidance in doing so, please do get in touch.

2. **Create a happy, positive atmosphere** - This may seem obvious, but in reality – amongst the pressures of reopening your school in September, with staffing issues and all of the other items on your busy agenda - it may have slipped down the priority list.

   Take the time to thank and praise your teams for their hard work and dedication, hold regular team meetings and encourage staff to take regular breaks and exercise/eat healthily. You

could also consider creating 'praise boards' in the staff room to encourage staff to leave messages of praise, recognition and positivity for their colleagues.

3. **Awareness events** - Here are just a few of the ways that you can raise awareness on World Mental Health Day:

4. 'Tea and Talk', coffee mornings or similar events that encourage staff to sit down and talk to each other (whilst maintaining protocol on social distancing of course!) – fostering an environment where relationships are strong, and staff feel comfortable and safe to talk about their feelings.

5. Drop-in bitesize awareness sessions covering topics on self-care, e.g. exercise, relaxation techniques, mindfulness, resilience and coping under pressure. If you don't have time for dedicated sessions, you could also raise awareness by conducting smaller, interactive activities within your regular team meetings.

6. Promote your EAP (Employee Assistance Program) services around the school as well as other support services on staff noticeboards and in your team meetings.

There are lots of great ideas for celebrating World Mental Health Day, but it doesn't have to end there. Why not introduce a monthly theme to promote health and wellbeing throughout the year, e.g. January is always a good time to focus on healthy eating and alcohol awareness whilst February may lend itself to initiatives around kindness around the Valentine's Day theme! It is also worth checking out the national Mental Health Awareness days/weeks that take place throughout the year – the full calendar is available at www.time-to-change.org.uk and includes, for example, "Time to Talk" Day in February and Mental Health Awareness week in May.

Many of you will also have relationships with Occupational Health providers – if you don't already do so, you could find out if they can help in running wellness campaigns such as quitting smoking, healthy eating and MOT health checks.

Remember – "there is no health without mental health".

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