

# inpractice

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## Planning, Licensing and Ecology

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# Mental Health and Well-Being in the Ecology and Environmental Management Profession

Liza Oxford-Booth

It is easy to spot the member of staff who has broken their leg or hear the one who is sniffing, coughing and blowing their nose loudly with a cold virus. It is also easy to talk to those members of staff about their ailments, but what about the silent conditions that no-one wants to speak about. The ones that, despite much being raised by the media about them, still remain an uncomfortable topic.

We are talking about mental health and well-being. The World Health Organisation (WHO) defines good mental health as: *“A state of wellbeing in which every individual realises his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to her or his community.”*

Mental Health can also be referred to as emotional well-being and is as important as physical health.

The problem with mental health is that it is not always easy to spot, and due to the stigma attached to mental health, individuals may choose to hide their issues. This stigma makes it difficult for people to talk openly about the problems they are having, and the feelings attached to them.

Mental Health First Aid in England (MHFA) recently published the following facts and figures on mental health:

- One in four people will experience a mental health issue in any given year.
- Between one in five and one in six working age adults are depressed, anxious or experiencing stress-related problems at any one time.
- The Chief Medical Officer estimates that around 70 million working days are lost every year because of mental ill health, costing Britain between £70bn and £100bn.
- In 2014/15 anxiety, depression and stress accounted for 35% of all work-related ill health, and 43% of all working days lost to ill health, according to the Health and Safety Executive.

- The Centre for Mental Health estimates that ‘presenteeism’ accounts for 1.5 times more losses in productivity than absences.
- One in five people take a day off due to stress, yet up to 90% feel unable to be honest about this being the reason for their absence.
- Research from Time to Change found that 49% of respondents would feel uncomfortable talking to their employer about their mental health.
- In a BUPA poll in 2014, 94% of business leaders admitted to prejudice against people with mental health issues in their organisation.
- In a survey of UK adults, 56% said they wouldn’t hire someone with depression, even if they were the best candidate for the job, according to a report by Unum and the Mental Health Foundation.

Stress or anxiety at work doesn’t always lead to staff having days off. However, if an employee doesn’t feel there is a support structure in place to help them manage their concerns, the situation may develop into a more serious and longer-term problem resulting in long-term absence from work.

Mental health problems can affect anyone at any time in their life. Everyone deals with situations differently which means that each person’s mental health should be looked at as an individual case. There is no ‘one size fits all’ approach to mental health.

CIEEM is holding a one-day conference on 4 July 2019 in Birmingham to promote and support health and well-being in the ecology and environmental management sector. Practical advice will be available around topics such as:

- How to promote mental health and well-being in your workplace
- How to identify the signs of possible mental health problems in staff
- How to encourage conversations about mental health
- How to support staff with mental health issues

There will be case studies from speakers who have first-hand experience of dealing with mental health issues in the ecological sector and discussions from organisations who have successfully implemented well-being programmes across their staff teams.

CIEEM has also established a discussion on LinkedIn (<https://www.linkedin.com/groups/4306428/>) and would welcome comments on this topic from members on this topic.

Alternatively, if you wish to submit something confidentially to the Institute about your own experience please write to the Chief Executive, Sally Hayns, at [sallyhayns@cieem.net](mailto:sallyhayns@cieem.net).

### About the Author



Liza is a training and personal development professional and also a coach and counsellor. She has been supporting clients with mental health problems for over 20 years. Since 2011 she has worked for CIEEM on both long- and short-term contracts including the organisation of conferences, training delivery and development of the institute’s CPD programme.

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