

Guide to Wellness Action Plans

# Reflection and Recovery post Covid-19

## Welsh Ambulance Services NHS Trust

## April 2020



# Guide to Wellness Action Plans

We at WAST recognise that these have been challenging and unprecedented times not only for colleagues but their families and loved ones. Whether you have been on the front line continuing your operational duties, maintaining vital support services or redeployed into a role that is completely new to you, it is important to take time to reflect and readjust into the ‘new norm.’

Developing a Wellness Action Plan can help colleagues to actively support their own mental health by reflecting on the causes of stress and poor mental health, and by taking ownership of practical steps to help address these triggers.

This process can also help managers and team members to open up dialogue with one another, understand their needs and experiences and ultimately better support their mental health and start to build resilience back into the team.

The WAP is inspired by Mary Ellen Copeland’s Wellness Recovery Action Plan® (WRAP®): an evidence-based system used worldwide by people to manage their mental health.

We all need to support our mental health at work, especially after the challenges that we have recently faced. This means that all staff should be offered a WAP – whether they have a mental health problem or not. WAST cares about employee wellbeing and want to encourage people to be open and seek support whenever it is required.

Teams should work together to develop personal wellness action plans to proactively manage their mental health. This also offers an opportunity for teams to work together towards an emotional debrief following the coronavirus pandemic. Open dialogue with managers and within teams leads to practical, agreed steps which can form the basis for regular monitoring and review. An action plan should cover:

* actions and behaviours that support the employee’s mental wellbeing
* symptoms, early warning signs and triggers for poor mental health or stress
* potential impact of poor mental health or a mental health problem on their performance
* what support they need from their line manager and colleagues
* positive steps for the individual to take if they are experiencing stress or poor mental health
* an agreed time to review the support measures to see if they’re working.

It can be drafted by the employee, as a self-reflection exercise and then discussed and agreed with their line manager; or better still collaboratively as a team exercise.

Employees need only provide information that relates to their role and the workplace, and that they are comfortable sharing. The WAP is not legally binding but is intended to allow a line manager to agree with employees how they can be practically supported in the workplace and how to address any health needs, and allow teams to better understand their colleagues and how they can support each other through this extraordinary transition back to the ‘new norm.’

# Case Studies

Below are some examples of colleague experiences and how they have managed their own wellbeing and mental health throughout. Often the necessary adjustment is one of attitude, expectations or communication rather than a major or costly change. Teams should explore, with individuals, their specific needs and be as creative as possible when thinking about how to address these issues. These can then be captured in the colleague’s WAP.

***John***

John manages a small team of five in the Welsh Ambulance Service, and describes the team as being very close-knit. “The team have worked closely together on multiple projects and before the covid-19 outbreak, stayed in touch most days even at weekends.” Since establishing the team in 2018, Steve facilitated various team building days to strengthen working relationships and create an open and communicative environment for the team. “My whole team have been redeployed during the pandemic, including myself. I am concerned about how to bring the team back together at the other side.”

Although it has been difficult, John has tried to maintain contact with the team using new technologies such as Zoom and Microsoft Teams as often as possible. “In addition to re-establishing good working relationships, we have to consider how we restart the work programme, re-evaluate what we have been doing and what we can do differently, adapt to new ways of working and learn from each other following the various redeployments to different teams.” The team have arranged a series of catch ups and development workshops to ease themselves back into their ‘new norm.’

***Nicola***

Nicola has no history of mental ill health and before the covid-19 pandemic, experienced positive mental wellbeing. She managed her mental wellbeing by exercising regularly, eating well and maintain a structure and routine in work and at home.

Nicola was redeployed from the outset of the pandemic. This meant moving to another office, joining another team and taking on a completely new role. “The covid-19 pandemic brought with it a whole host of uncertainties. Overnight, everything had changed around me and I felt really anxious.”

For Nicola, even the feelings of heightened anxiety were new. A few weeks into her redeployment, Nicola took time out to speak with her new team and quickly learned that others were struggling with the changes too. The team discussed small changes they could make such as maintaining some continuity in their roles, taking regular breaks and talking often. Over the weeks that followed, Nicola felt more able to cope and supported by her colleagues to open up when anxieties returned.

***Liam***

Liam is a paramedic with WAST and, prior to Covid-19, had been settling in well. He had completed his 300 hours and had started to settle in to the routine of ‘ambulance life’. Things were great. He was having regular meetings with his CTL to discuss his clinical indicators and professional progression, he was exploring CPD; he was starting to find his routine.

When the Pandemic started Liam noticed a change. Everything seemed different and this familiar environment felt wrong. There were new practices, policies and procedures; things felt like they were changing daily. Suddenly Liam felt nervous about his workplace, about the patients he cared for and the people he loved; this was not how the university described it, putting on a protective suit at a cardiac arrest felt wrong to him.

# Supporting colleagues to develop a Wellness Action Plan: Top tips for advocates and managers

As a wellbeing advocate or line manager; when supporting your colleagues to develop their WAP, be positive and encouraging, but do not try to influence them. Throughout the process provide a sense of supported empowerment and help them to feel trusted and capable. Remember:

* People are often experts when it comes to identifying the support or adjustment they need and how to manage their triggers for poor mental health.
* The plan must be written by individuals: expressing their own personal choice, reflecting their voice and their personal experience and needs, and given an opportunity to share with the wider team however this is not a requirement.
* The plan needs to include all the things that are important to the individual and their mental wellbeing.

Ask the person you are supporting to think about:

* what are they like when they are feeling well and flourishing at work
* what their environment is like when it is supporting their wellbeing
* what are the things they need to do to maintain good health and wellbeing
* coping strategies they already use and what makes these effective – have these been affected by the pandemic and how could this impact further on maintaining wellness or recovery?
* how they’ve managed to work through challenging situations previously.
* what hasn’t worked in the past and why they think this might be.



# What advocates and managers can do to promote wellbeing

The WAP is intended not only as a tool to support colleagues when they are experiencing problems, but also as a means of identifying how an individual’s wellbeing can be proactively promoted. When it comes to supporting a member of staff’s wellbeing, the following actions and approaches can be helpful.

Supportive managerial and leadership style:

* Be supportive, approachable and responsive
* Be available for regular conversations and increase the frequency of support or catch-up time with the team member if required
* Proactively support colleagues to monitor their workload and encourage healthy working hours and a positive work/life balance
* Ensure realistic targets are being set and be clear about priorities
* Management styles can be tailored to suit the needs of each team member and task by asking colleagues what support they need from you
* Use one-to-ones and catch-ups to cover a wider agenda than just your employee’s to-do list, including reflecting on what has gone well and what has been difficult in the past month, and forward planning together, for example by identifying upcoming pinch points, challenges and required support
* Encourage positive relationships with colleagues and provide mediation where necessary
* Provide staff with meaningful work and opportunities for personal development and growth
* Ensure people are working in an appropriate physical environment
* Providing support
* Encourage staff to talk and be open about problems they are experiencing
* Ensure confidentiality and provide an appropriate place for confidential conversations
* When talking about an individual’s mental health listen, be respectful and do not make assumptions
* Be positive – focus on what colleagues can do, rather than what they can’t, providing training, mentoring or coaching if there are skills gaps
* Work together and involve people in finding solutions as much as possible
* Support staff to develop personal resilience and coping strategies
* Involve staff in dialogue and decision-making and remember that people are often the expert when it comes to identifying the support or adjustment they need and how to manage their triggers for poor mental health
* Recognise and praise good work and commitment, providing regular opportunities to discuss, review and reflect on positive achievements – this can help people to build up positive self-esteem and develop skills to better manage their triggers for poor mental health
* Encourage staff to seek further advice and support (for example from buddying or mentoring schemes), and seek advice and support yourself.

# Wellness Action Plan template

1. What helps you stay mentally healthy at work? (For example: taking a lunch break, keeping a to do list)
2. What can your manager/team do to support you to stay mentally healthy at work? (For example: regular feedback and supervision, explaining wider developments in organisation)
3. Are there any situations at work that can trigger poor mental health for you? (For example: conflict at work, organisational change, something not going to plan)
4. How might stress / poor mental health difficulties impact on your work? (For example: find it difficult to make decisions, hard to prioritise work tasks)
5. Are there any early warning signs that we might notice when you are starting to feel stressed/ mentally unwell? (For example: changes in normal working patterns, withdrawing from colleagues)
6. What support could be put in place to minimise triggers or to support you to manage symptoms? (For example: extra catch-up time with line manager)
7. If we notice early warning signs that you are feeling stressed or unwell – what should we do? (For example: discuss discreetly, contact someone on your behalf). Please include contact names and numbers if you would like your manager/wellbeing advocate to get in touch with someone if you become unwell.
8. What steps can you take if you start to feel unwell at work? (For example: take a break from your desk and go for a short walk, ask your line manager for support)

Colleague signature Date

Advocate/Manager signature Date

Review Date

For further information and support around mental health and wellbeing, please visit the [WAST Keep Talking Portal](https://wastkeeptalking.co.uk/)