

OUR RESEARCH TRIAL

Empowering employers to support their people's mental health

The top 10 findings from our help-seeking study

Showing our vulnerability and being able to open up when we feel stressed and overwhelmed takes bravery and courage. Not everyone is prepared to do that in the midst of a crisis. However, it has been shown that seeking help is one of the healthiest and most powerful coping strategies. At Thrive Mental Wellbeing, we try to encourage help-seeking through all that we do.

We believe that it's important to understand what helps people overcome their fears when it comes to asking for support and what might be creating the barrier to preventing them from reaching out.

From June to October 2021, Thrive Mental Wellbeing conducted a survey to understand employees' support strategies during and beyond the covid-19 pandemic. 451 full-time UK workers aged between 18-65 years took part in the study. This article presents our main findings and recommendations for employers.



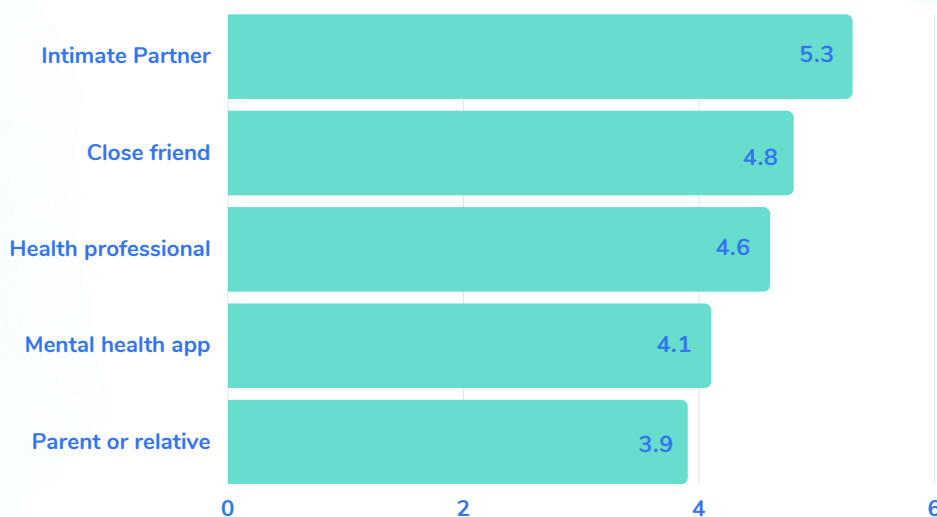
What we discovered:

- 1 When having a mental health problem, people are more likely to use a mental health app or a website than talk to a parent.
- 2 Compared to other employee groups, people working remotely are more likely to use a mental health app and less likely to access help at work.

If you were struggling with your mental health, how likely is it that you would seek help from the following on a scale from 1-7?

1 = Extremely unlikely

7 = Extremely likely



What this means:

When we feel vulnerable we want to share our feelings with someone we trust. For most of us these are partners and close friends, even if they don't have the specific knowledge or skills to deal with our mental health problems. In the moment of trouble, the quality of a relationship matters more than knowledge and skills. Interestingly, next after our loved ones and health professionals come digital solutions, including mental health apps, wellbeing websites and online peer support groups. It turns out that people are more likely to use an app rather than talk to a parent, relative, colleague or manager at work. This might mean that when a person does not have enough trust or confidence in a relationship, they would rather try a self-help solution.

Additionally, we have found that readiness to access help through a digital solution at the time of testing was significantly higher than before the pandemic, which could be due to increasing awareness of these resources since the pandemic started.

Compared to people working in a traditional office or a hybrid work environment, those working remotely are more likely to use a digital self-help solution than to access help at work. This is most probably linked to remote workers having more flexibility in arranging their time during the day and having more privacy to access mental health apps, but could also be due to work-related support being less visible and seemingly less accessible.

What employers can do:

- ☒ Give employees **complimentary access to digital self-help solutions**, such as mental health apps (e.g. Thrive Mental Wellbeing), especially if your employees are working remotely.
- ☒ Put additional resources into making support options that exist in the company **clearer to employees** (e.g. EAP, mental health app subscriptions, coaching, counselling, etc.).

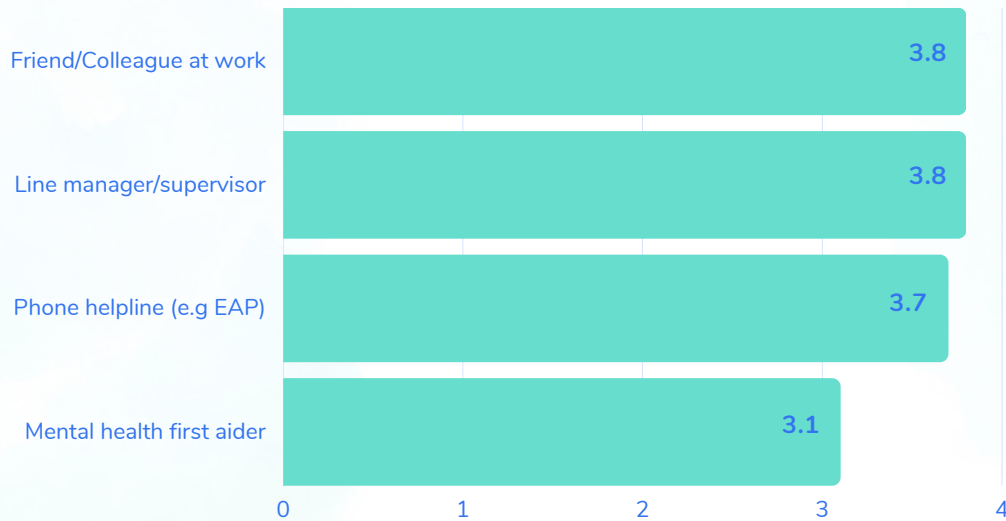
What we discovered:

- 3 Employees are more likely to seek help for their mental health from line managers when they feel that the organisation provides support for their mental health and when they themselves have a positive attitude to mental health.

If you were struggling with your mental health, how likely is it that you would seek help from the following source on a scale from 1-7?

1 = Extremely unlikely

7 = Extremely likely



What this means:

Sadly, there is a lot of stigma surrounding mental health problems. Many people think that people who have mental health problems are simply too lazy or don't make enough effort to overcome them. Fearing encountering such an attitude, many people refrain from reaching out for help at work. Many employees themselves have a negative attitude to mental health problems and feel embarrassed so prefer not to ask for help. It is therefore important to create a culture where mental health problems are openly and frequently discussed and thus normalised in the work environment. This will help people feel safe to open up about an issue they are experiencing.

What employers can do:

- ☒ **Organise educational wellbeing webinars, workshops** and other events at work to show appreciation for mental health problems, reduce stigma among employees and managers and encourage people to seek help when needed.
- ☒ Understand employees and their challenges (by means of surveys or focus groups) and **create self-help resources** aimed specifically at the problems they are facing.
- ☒ **Signpost people to other wellbeing initiatives** (charity websites, wellbeing-related websites / podcasts / video channels / social media, etc).

What we discovered:



At work, employees are more likely to reach out to a colleague or a manager than to a qualified mental health first-aider.

What this means:

Before going to a health professional, people are more likely to ask their partner or friend for help. In the same way, employees are more likely to reach out to a colleague or a manager rather than go to a mental health first-aider. When we need to open up, we value an established relationship rather than the expertise a person possesses. This means that having a handful of well-trained mental health first-aiders might not be enough - in your company, line managers and their ability to build relationships will always play a crucial and probably more important role in employees' wellbeing.

What employers can do:



Humanise company culture by hosting regular informal meetings and company retreats and introducing wellbeing initiatives to help people get to know each other better.



Encourage managers to get personal and focus not only on what their team members produce, but also on who they are as people, on their needs and struggles outside of work.



Make mental health first-aiders more visible and encourage them to establish relationships with other team members.

How to create psychological safety in teams:

HAVE REGULAR CHECK-INS

Acknowledge emotions and experiences, and show genuine concern. Include regular personal catch-ups into the working schedule, separate from work meetings.

BE VISIBLE

Communicate your availability explicitly, especially when working remotely. Identify a particular time in your schedule when it's best to contact you regarding any issues or concerns.

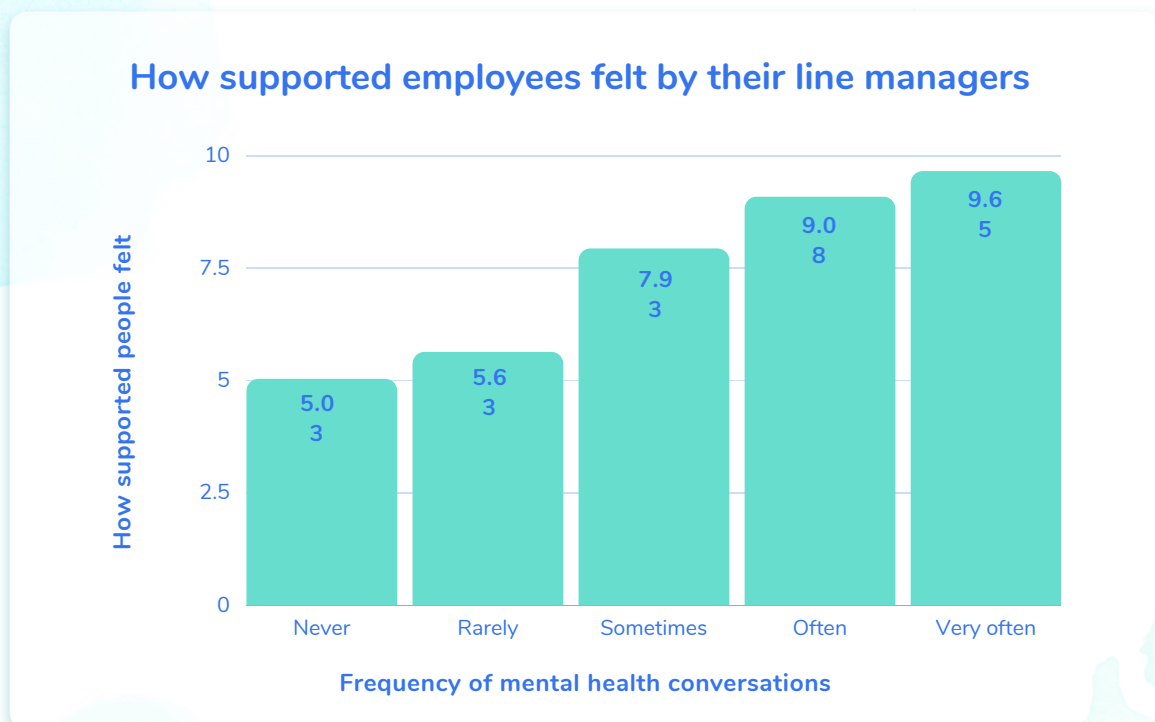
TAKE TIME TO KNOW MORE ABOUT YOUR EMPLOYEES

Understand their needs, circumstances and values. (What is going on in people's personal lives at the moment? What are they coping with outside of work? What are their personal goals and how do they align to their job tasks? Can you support them with any of these?)

Provide **feedback**, show **value** and **appreciation for ideas** and recognise **effort** rather than just achievements.

What we discovered:

- 5 The more often line managers encourage conversations around mental health, the more supported people feel at work.
- 6 1 in 3 employees reported that their line manager never or rarely encouraged conversations around mental health.



What this means:

A third of all employees feel that their managers almost never encourage talks about mental health, while having these talks is crucial for people to feel supported at work. Since mental health topics still largely remain taboo, many managers simply do not know how to approach them. "Is it OK to ask? Will it feel like an intrusion? Can these

issues be discussed between a manager and employee at all? Are there any situations when I must act? If this were my friend, I would know what to say". Questions and doubts like these lead to managers acting "professional" - even if and when they do notice some troubling signs, they act as if the problems their team members experience are outside of work and hence, should not be discussed.

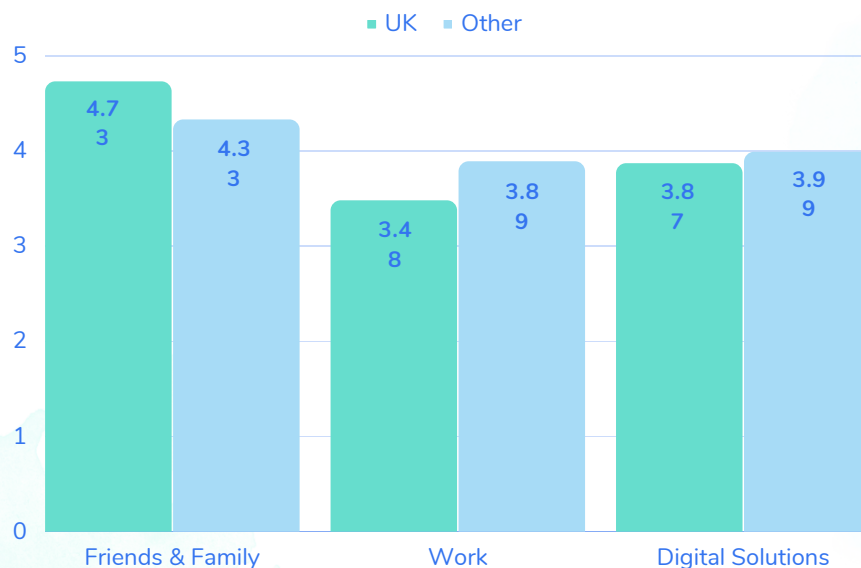
What employers can do:

- ✓ **Organise mental health awareness training for line managers** to raise awareness of mental health problems that might affect people at work, reduce stigma around mental health and normalise this topic in the work context.
- ✓ **Help managers improve their communication and listening skills** to give managers confidence in starting and conducting conversations about mental health.

What we discovered:

- 7 **People who are single, divorced or widowed and those who originate from outside the UK are particularly likely to benefit from support at work.**

Help-seeking intentions by country of origin



What this means:

36% of employees who were single, divorced or widowed stated that they would like their manager to make more time to discuss concerns or issues, in comparison to 26% of employees who were married, in a civil partnership, or living with their partner. People who don't have a partner are particularly likely to feel lonely, especially due to the pandemic. As we know, for most of us, a partner or a spouse would be our preferred source of support when experiencing a mental health issue. People who are single, divorced or widowed lack this essential emotional help.

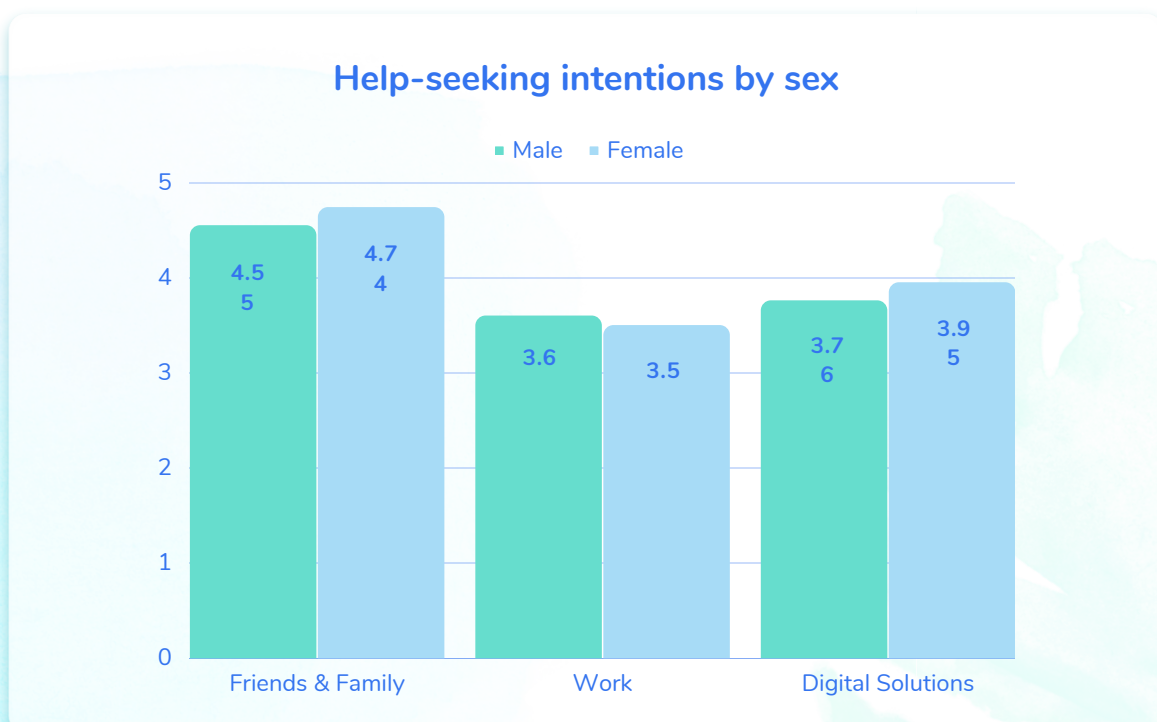
People who came to the UK from other countries for work might still have their family and friends abroad (which would be the second most popular source of support). For both these groups, work and work-related relationships might constitute a bigger part of their life and support they can get at their workplace might be especially important.

What employers can do:

- ☒ Encourage managers to schedule monthly meetings with their employees to specifically **discuss any concerns outside of work or stressors affecting their home life**. This would help determine who needs this extra type of support.

What we discovered:

- 8 Men and women are equally likely to reach out for help at work.



Although the graph does show some differences, these are not statistically significant

What this means:

In general, at all ages, females are more likely to seek help than males. This can be due to certain physiological sex differences but most probably is linked to stereotypes and social expectations that men should demonstrate strength and control and not appear weak by disclosing personal problems. Thus, although help-seeking is one of the most powerful coping strategies, men tend to perceive it as a sign of personal failure and inability to resolve their own problems. **In our survey, we saw that men and women were equally likely to ask for help at work.** This might indicate that the social norms are beginning to change ever so slightly and that employers may play a part in this paradigm shift by supporting male employees with their mental health.

What employers can do:

- ☒ Organise **wellbeing events aimed specifically at the male population** to educate men about the importance of mental wellbeing and seeking help and gender differences in stress response, coping strategies, resilience and other male health-related issues.

Did you know...

- On a psychological level, men have a stronger stress response and are more likely to develop chronic stress-related conditions, e.g. arteriosclerosis and cardiovascular disease.
- Men are 3x more likely to develop an addiction compared to women.
- 75% of all suicides are male.
- 1 in 8 men are diagnosed with a mental health condition, such as anxiety or depression.
- 34% of men would be embarrassed to take time off work for a mental health concern.
- 1 in 8 men say they have no friends to discuss mental health.
- Only 36% of referrals to psychotherapy through the NHS are men.

What we discovered:



People with a history of anxiety or depression and those who have taken sick leave due to a mental health problem are most interested in getting reasonable adjustments at work.

What this means:

37% of employees who had previously experienced a depression or anxiety episode stated they would like their manager to make more adjustments to help manage demands compared to 27% of employees who had never experienced an episode of anxiety or depression. Additionally, 41% of employees who had at least one day of absence due to mental health stated they would like their manager to make more adjustments for their demands compared to 29% of employees who had never taken sick leave due to mental health. This might indicate that employees with a history of mental health conditions or sick leave, may be more susceptible to work stress and are only able to perform at their best under certain specific conditions. Thus, they might need help in arranging those conditions for them.

It could also be the case that employees with a history of anxiety or depression are more aware of their internal state and when to look for support. Other people, who have never experienced any serious mental health issues, might be unaware of both their own limits and adjustments that can be offered to them. There is a possibility that some people are struggling in silence.

What employers can do:



Be inclusive and let people know that you are ready to support them with some special requirements or requests they might have as a result of their physical or developmental disabilities, mental health conditions or sexual orientation and gender identity. This will help people to feel safe to raise those issues with their manager.



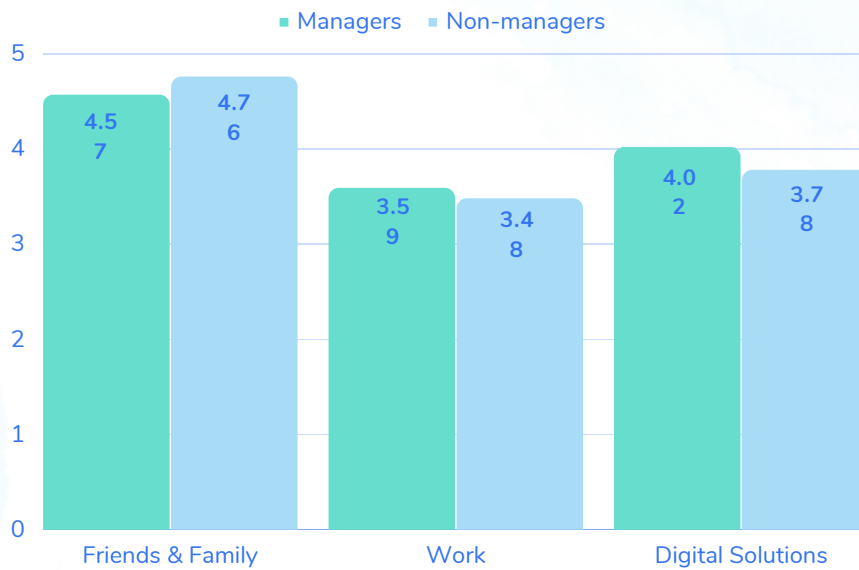
Be flexible and consider reasonable adjustments, e.g. let employees organise different aspects of their work for themselves, including work schedule, workload distribution, or workspace.

What we discovered:



Compared to non-managerial staff, managers are slightly more likely to reach for help at work.

Help-seeking intentions by role in the company



What this means:

This interesting finding can be interpreted in different ways. It might be that managers have been with the organisation for a longer period of time, participated in defining strategy and vision and feel more personal connection with the company. This might lead to managers having more trust and perceiving their workplace as a safe place to open up. On the other hand, managers might be simply better informed about support options and procedures at work.

What employers can do:

- ☒ Provide **mental health awareness training for middle and senior management**, so that they are able to support line managers with their issues.
- ☒ **Encourage managers to serve as role models** to their teams by showing their own vulnerability, open-mindedness and readiness to access help when needed.
- ☒ **Make sure that all staff are aware** of wellbeing programmes and/or support options that your organisation has to offer. These should be mentioned not just during onboarding but become part of a frequent conversation.

Who are we?

Our Mission

To improve mental health by empowering individuals to access the right level of support sustainably and without barriers.

Our Vision

We want to create a world where people are empowered to take control of their mental health and provide them with ready access to the right level of support according to their needs. We aim to do this at the lowest possible cost to them and to those institutions that commission mental health services.

Our Team



Founded by psychiatrists and psychologists we have combined years of clinical experience with technology. We have a team of in-house therapists, experienced scientists, UX/UI experts, qualified business psychologists, researchers, and engagement/partnership teams dedicated to ensuring that we're supporting people in the most effective way.

Our research team is dedicated to making sure that we are tackling our users' needs in the most scientifically rigorous and clinically effective way. We run randomised clinical trials to assess the efficacy of our solution in reducing mental health distress, and we are continuously trying to improve the way we deliver our content so that our users can make the best out of it.

Find out more about Thrive Mental Wellbeing

Visit thrive.uk.com or follow our social media below to find out more about how we are breaking down barriers to mental health support.



Thrive Mental Wellbeing



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Acknowledgements

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