

August 2024

## Supporting colleagues with personal concerns

Sometimes managing a team means dealing with difficult situations regarding a team members' wellbeing. You should always speak to your own manager or human resources for help and support. This guides looks at some of the personal wellbeing concerns you may encounter when managing your team.



Team members who are living with depression or anxiety will have times when they need support from you as their manager.

## How to Support a Colleague with Depression, Stress or Anxiety

The following steps may be of use:

- Make sure team members are aware of any special counselling services and other benefits they have available through the Force.
- Develop an environment in which colleagues support each other. If a team member confides in a peer about stresses, medical problems or feeling generally depressed, colleagues should encourage that person to seek the help that is available.
- Be aware of any behavioural changes and that a supportive discussion around their duties maybe necessary.
- Ensure the team member knows you are there to support them. Those suffering from stress and depression are more likely to seek help if they believe they are being supported.
- Make sure a safety protocol is in place in the event that the depressed person is a risk to themselves or others.
- Encourage the team member to obtain help through their GP or mental health professional.

Effective treatment may shorten the duration of depression. Many treatments have proved effective including short-term counselling, long-term psychotherapy, as well as the use of medication. Good support in the workplace and effective counselling may help colleagues to deal with depression.

For more details on depression click [here](#).



## Supporting a team member who may have Post-Traumatic Stress

At some time during your Police career you or a member of your team will be involved in or witness a traumatic incident. This will lead to intense feelings which are normal feelings to abnormal events.

Post-traumatic stress (PTS) symptoms are common following exposure of a traumatic event and may improve or resolve within a month. Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) symptoms are more severe, persistent and interfere with daily functioning and will last for more than a month. Some people begin to show signs of PTS or PTSD after surviving combat, sexual assault, or another traumatic event. Symptoms may include having flashbacks, being easily startled, and avoiding reminders of the incident. Many types of treatment can help with PTSD, and family, friends and colleagues can play an important role in the healing process.

As a manager, you may be able to help a team member who is coping with PTSD by understanding the condition. Signs of PTSD may include the following:

- **Flashbacks, frightening thoughts, or nightmares** - these may contribute to a heightened state of anxiety for the team member. These are the primary symptoms characterising PTSD.
- **Trouble sleeping or eating** - you may notice a team member experiencing excessive fatigue or lower energy levels.
- **Difficulty concentrating** - a team member may make more mistakes than usual or show a decline in performance.
- **Increased absenteeism** or a general dread of coming to work.
- **Frequent irritability** - tense or angry outbursts may occur at work. People may also become startled more easily by sudden noises or movements.
- **Depression** - becoming withdrawn or apathetic, or losing interest in normally enjoyable activities are all signs of depression, for more details on depression click [here](#).



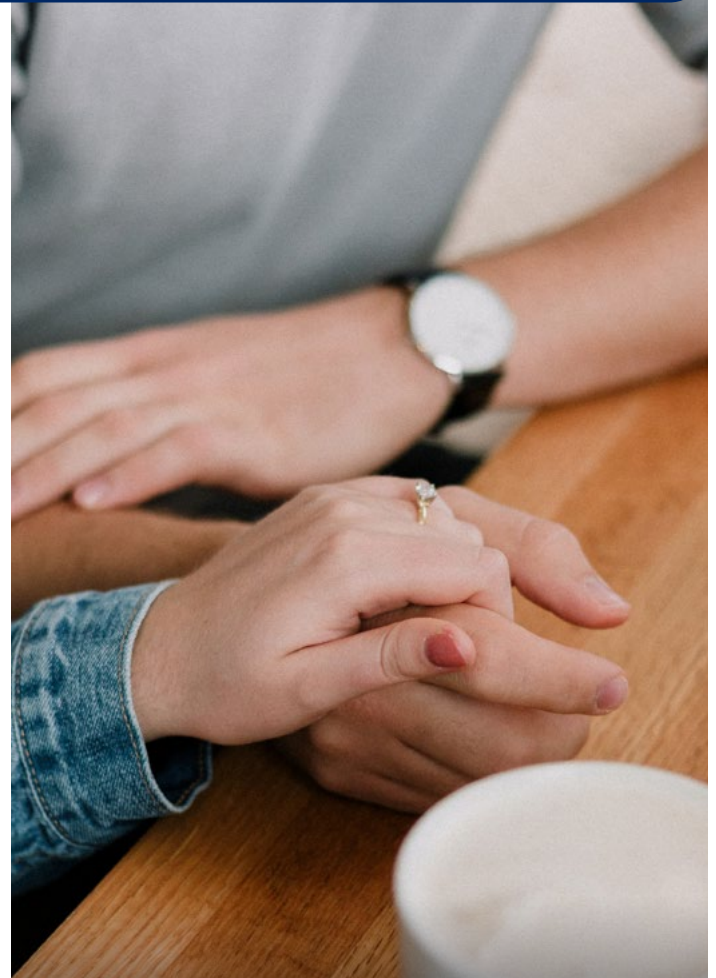
Someone who has PTSD may not show these signs every day. Symptoms may appear to go away for weeks or months but then flare up during highly stressful times or when the person is faced with triggering reminders of what happened.

**Signs of PTSD** usually appear within a few months of a traumatic experience, but signs sometimes don't emerge until years later.

A variety of treatments can help with PTSD, including medication and talking therapy. If you are concerned that a team member may be suffering from PTSD, you may consider the following:

- **Encourage** them to contact their GP or counsellor.
- **Continue supporting** – regularly check how the team member is feeling, but be careful not to intrude on their privacy if they are not willing to speak about their PTSD.
- **Avoid making assumptions** - remember that people with PTSD will experience symptoms differently.
- **Get support for yourself** - talk with your manager or HR department if you have questions about how to respond appropriately.
- **Encourage** them to speak to a representative from your Force trauma support programme.

PTSD is a complex condition that may last for just a short time or for years. With the right treatment, most people do recover. You can support someone who may have PTSD by keeping in touch, however long the recovery takes. For more information about PTSD [click here](#).

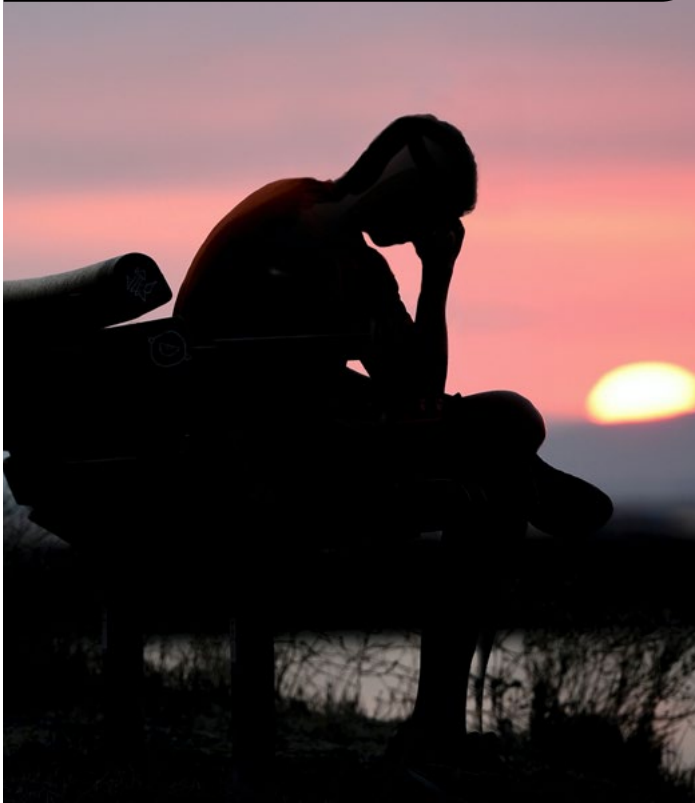


## Ways to support team members who may be under Stress

Stress is a natural part of life, and under normal circumstances it serves many valuable purposes. However stress can also interfere with your ability to function in a healthy way.

**Watch for signs of stress in yourself and others. These may include:**

- sleep problems
- feeling nervous, anxious or irritable
- trouble concentrating or making decisions
- overeating or having no appetite
- withdrawing from family or friends
- tense muscles, shakiness, or trembling
- stomach pain, upset stomach, or headache
- using unhealthy coping strategies, like drug or alcohol abuse



## Supporting team members who may be under stress is a vital part of every manager's job.

Job stress can be caused by numerous work-related factors, including workplace changes, overload, and communication problems as well as by personal issues, such as caregiving, divorce, financial worries, difficulty with a child, or a family illness.

Whatever the cause, stress can take a toll on people and have a negative effect on morale, productivity, and engagement. Stress can also result in higher rates of absenteeism, workplace accidents, and mistakes, so it's important to watch for signs of stress and overload in both yourself and the people you manage. This will help you to respond appropriately. For more information on stress awareness, read our guide [here](#).



## Ways to help team members manage feelings of stress:

**Be supportive** – regularly ask how people are doing. Make a point of asking how you can help. When a team member identifies an area of stress, be sure to follow up with them so that they feel genuine support.

**Consider simple adjustments** – this may make a team member's work easier or less stressful.

**Be sure that roles and expectations are clear** – lack of information or uncertainty about roles, goals, duties, or responsibilities is often a source of stress in the workplace. Offer consistent feedback after the initial expectations have been set so that team members know how they are doing.

**Try to create solutions** – help find ways to manage job demands, minimise interruptions at work. Encourage people to set aside some private time. Lead by example and do the same yourself.

**Identify tasks where stress is a problem** – look for ways to reduce these.

**Understand the team member's personal commitments** – where possible ensure flexibility to meet these personal responsibilities and priorities outside work.

**Understand your Force's flexible work and time-off policies** – check with the HR team for answers to questions about flexible work hours, virtual or part-time work, working from home, and other alternative work arrangements.

**Help team members prioritise their work** – encourage people to talk to you if they have questions about deadlines or how to prioritise tasks.

**Encourage short breaks** – even a short break from a stressful or tense situation, to get a few minutes of fresh air or to practice deep-breathing or relaxation techniques can reduce stress and protect their health.

**Be aware of the hours people are working** – if someone's hours seem particularly long, step in and encourage the team member to take necessary time off. Also, are people taking their holiday time?

**Set a positive example** – when you take time for personal needs, don't hide it from the team. It helps to show them how you balance work and personal life.

**Make your team members feel valuable and supported** – take the time to listen to what's going on with team members. And remember the value of saying "thank you."

**If you feel a team member may be at risk of suicide** – don't ignore any warning signs that someone's life may be in danger. If someone in your team may be at risk of suicide, it is vital to get help immediately. For more help read our suicide prevention guide [here](#).

# Supporting a team member who is going through a Separation or Divorce

**Divorce is an especially challenging life stressor. It can have a negative effect on morale, productivity, and engagement and can result in higher rates of absenteeism, workplace accidents, and mistakes.**

People undergoing a divorce often experience a range of difficult emotions, including feelings of sadness, depression, worry, and anxiety. This can have an effect on your team.

Managers play a key role in offering support when personal or family issues are affecting a team member's overall wellbeing.

**Recognise the signs that a team member may be feeling** - this may include increased absenteeism, trouble focusing, crying at work, irritability, fatigue, spending a lot of time on personal phone calls, and suddenly working shorter or longer hours than necessary.

**Be familiar with the resources available in your Force that could provide support** - this may include the employee assistance programme (EAP), provide the team member with the phone number and website address.

**If two people are divorcing that work together** - consult HR for guidance on how to alleviate any difficulties or awkwardness.

**Avoid making assumptions about divorce** - everyone's situation is unique. Some people struggling with feelings of shock and grief surrounding a divorce may have a dip in productivity, while others may find work to be healing and therapeutic and may remain focused on the job. Some recover in months, others take longer.

**Show sensitivity and concern** - let the team member know you sympathise with their situation. Keep your comments brief and simple and be both professional and compassionate. Listen actively, but don't try to solve the person's problems.

**Support requests for time off or adjusted work hours where possible** - help with requests for time off needed to meet with solicitors or counsellors, or for new child care responsibilities.

**Maintain confidentiality and respect the team member's privacy** - respect the team members wishes regarding who else within the team is told about their situation.

**Ask the team member how you can help make things easier at work** - this may involve different types of work or shift changes.



# Financial Problems

## Supporting a team member who is in debt

According to the 2023 Police Federation's annual Pay & Morale survey more than half of Police Officers are not able to cover their monthly essentials and are worrying about money 'daily' or 'almost every day'.

Debt problems tend to build up over time, gradually getting to the point where finances reach crisis point. Often it's not until this late stage that the full situation becomes clear. Yet there are symptoms of debt which, if noticed, could make the difference at an earlier stage.

With many Officers at risk, there's a good chance you know someone struggling, even if they're trying to hide their problems. Keep a look out for any of these signs and talk to the team member to provide details of the support available to them.

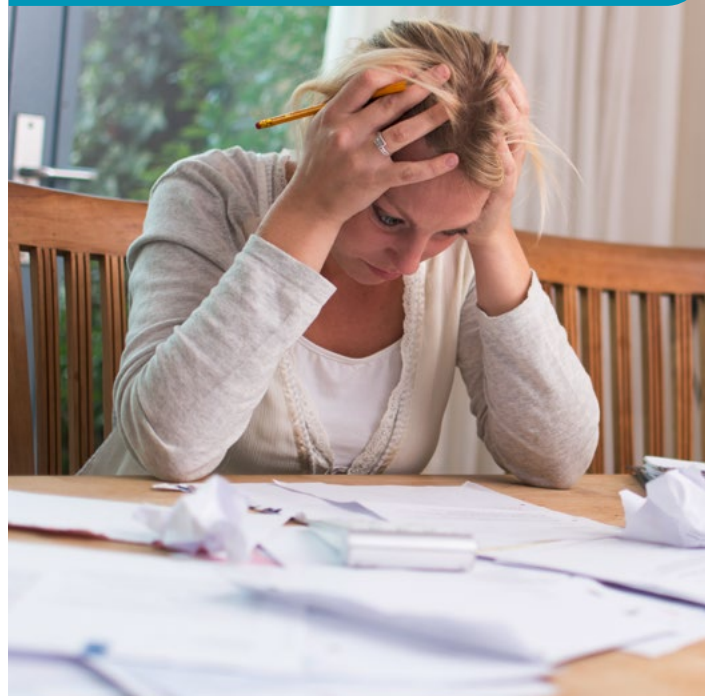
It's not always easy to notice someone you know is struggling with problem debt. Often when people have money worries they hide them due to embarrassment or to protect their family. They may not realise the severity of the situation or want to admit it. But there are things you can look out for.

- **Have they been in debt in the past?**
- **Are they asking for more overtime?**
- **Have they had a recent life event?** – an event that has resulted in a loss of income or higher spending for example having a baby, job change, illness, divorce or a death in the family.
- **Are they living beyond their means or overspending?** – do they always seem to have the latest items although they don't have the income to cover these.
- **Do they seem anxious, withdrawn or depressed?** – are they avoiding friends.
- **Have you noticed a change in their spending habits?** – either reducing spending (as if they are trying to cut back) or overspending (maybe putting items on credit).
- **Do they seem tired or are having trouble sleeping?**
- **Has their weight changed suddenly?** – either increasing or decreasing.

## Supporting a team member who is struggling with the current cost of living crisis.

The cost-of-living crisis is showing no signs of slowing down. People across the country are struggling to keep their heads above water. There may be many people in your team who are struggling.

**For help on how to spend less, read our guide [here](#).**



## How to help:

**If you spot some of these signs, it doesn't necessarily mean there are debt issues – but it may be worth starting a conversation about what you have noticed. Talk about your own personal experiences to get the conversation started. Make sure you keep the language non-judgmental.**

Let them know they aren't alone, there are free confidential services available for them. Police Mutual have teamed up with PayPlan\*. More details can be found on the last page of this guide.

If you think the debt may be due to a gambling problem, then click [here](#) to read our gambling guide.

For more details, read our Let's Talk Debt guide [here](#).

# Taking care of yourself

It's extremely important for you to look after your own wellbeing as well as that of your team. Supporting someone can be very stressful, so don't underestimate the effect on your own wellbeing. Find ways of reducing any immediate stress. Find someone to talk to about your experiences and write your own support list. This should include eating healthily, getting enough sleep, exercising regularly and taking time to do something you enjoy.

Self-care should not be seen as a 'selfish' activity. If we don't look after our own wellbeing, we won't be effective in supporting and helping others. Remember you can't pour from an empty cup.

Resilient managers, like resilient people, are more likely to be able to bounce back from adversity, stay focused and productive and make the best of challenging situations. They're also able to deal with uncertainty and react positively to change.



Worrying about money can be extremely stressful and may lead to mental health conditions. Police Mutual are here to help. We want to break down the stigma surrounding debt and get people talking about money.

We've teamed up with **PayPlan\***, one of the UK's leading free debt advice providers, who offer free and confidential advice to anyone in serious financial difficulties.

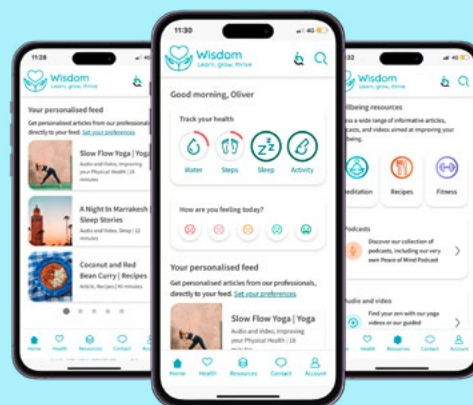
They're able to advise you on a range of debt solutions suited to your individual circumstances, helping to protect you and your family with a sustainable way to manage your debt.

Get free and confidential help to combat your debt, call **PayPlan\*** on **0800 197 8433**.

## Police Mutual Services

Our Care Line Service provided by Health Assured can offer advice and information, helping with a range of concerns including emotional support.

## Wisdom App



Download the **Wisdom App** provided by Health Assured and register today - your code is **MHA107477**



To read more of our wellbeing guides take a look at our **Wellbeing Hub** [here](#).

Call us **0151 242 7640** Visit [policemutual.co.uk](http://policemutual.co.uk)  
We're open from **9am - 5pm Mon - Fri**

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