

CIPD data shows absence rates are at their highest level in over 15 years, averaging **9.4 days** per employee, per year.

1 in 5 workers surveyed by Mental Health UK said they had taken time off because of poor mental health caused by stress

The top cause of long-term absence is mental ill health at **41%**.

WORLD MENTAL HEALTH DAY: LIVED EXPERIENCES HEARD: REAL VOICES, REAL CHANGE

Mental health at work - from listening to action

World Mental Health Day focuses on a simple but important idea: people with lived experience should have a meaningful role in shaping the policies, services and decisions that affect them. That matters in the workplace, too.

Mental health challenges are affecting absence, productivity and people's experience of work. But awareness alone isn't enough. Employers need to listen to what people are experiencing and use those insights to improve the support available.

MENTAL HEALTH, ABSENCE AND THE EMPLOYMENT RIGHTS ACT

From 6 April 2026, SSP changed:

- **No more three-day waiting period** - SSP is payable from the first full day of sickness absence.
- **No Lower Earnings Limit** - eligible employees can receive SSP regardless of earnings.
- SSP is paid at **80% of weekly earnings or the flat weekly rate**, whichever is lower.



These changes mean more sickness absences may now trigger SSP costs from the first day. But getting absence management right isn't simply about controlling costs. It's about understanding what's behind absence, having the right conversations and making sure people get appropriate support.

What does good look like?



Listen first - Don't assume you know what employees need. Create safe ways for people to share what's affecting their mental health and use that insight to improve support.

Make managers part of the solution - Managers are often the first people employees speak to. Give them the confidence and knowledge to have supportive conversations, recognise when someone may be struggling and know when to signpost or escalate.

Look at the whole absence journey - With SSP now starting from day one, early conversations and good absence processes matter. Make sure managers know what to do when someone is absent, when to check in and how to support a return to work.

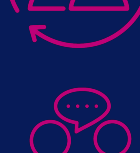
Make support easy to find - Be clear about what's available, whether that's an EAP, occupational health, mental health first aiders, reasonable adjustments or external support.

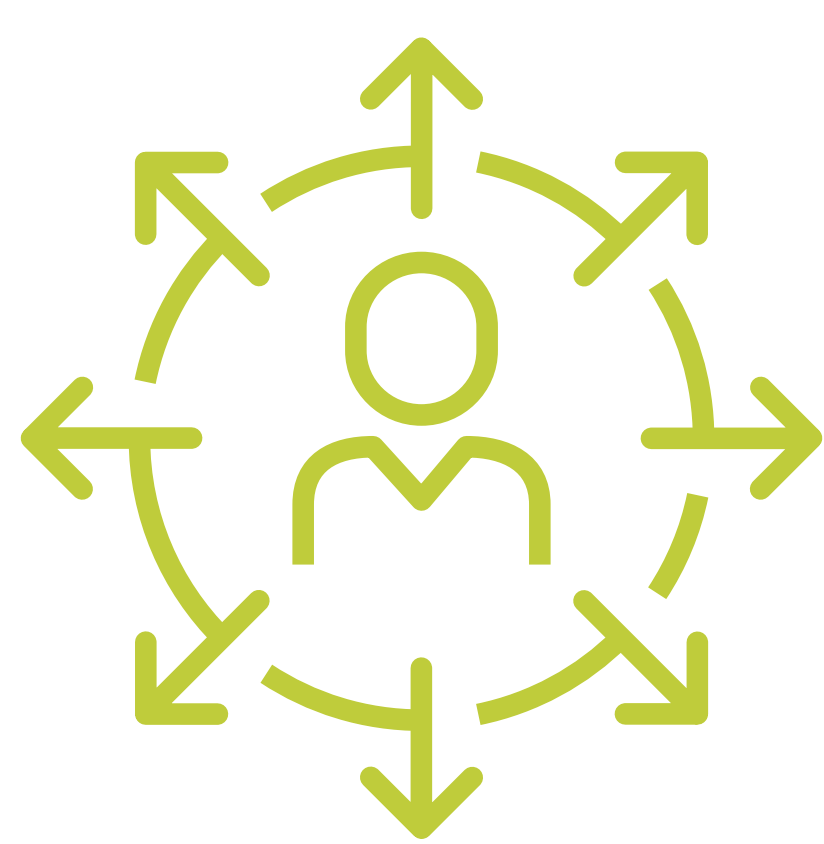
Turn what you hear into action - This is the big one.

Don't ask people about their experiences and then leave the feedback sitting in a survey. Look for patterns, review policies, change processes and check whether the changes are actually helping.

Managers: listen, don't diagnose

Managers don't need to become mental health experts. They just need to know how to:

-  Listen - give someone space to explain what they're experiencing.
-  Ask - use open questions rather than jumping to conclusions.
-  Support - understand what workplace support is available.
-  Act - know when to involve HR, occupational health or other appropriate support.
-  Follow up - don't let the conversation end once the immediate issues have passed.



From listening to action

World Mental Health Day is a useful moment to ask whether your organisation is really listening to its people - and whether what you hear is leading to change.

Because supporting mental health at work isn't about having the right statement on a policy page. It's about what happens when someone says, "I'm struggling."

- Is their manager confident about what to do?
- Can they access the right support?
- Are absence processes clear and supportive?
- And are you learning from what your people are telling you?

Real voices should lead to real change.



REAL-WORLD IMPACT

Read how our employee relations solution, which combines our award-winning technology **empower®** with our expert HR advice line, helped Starbucks UK reduce their absence rate by 10% in just 12 months, returning 15,000 hours to improve frontline services.

Read the case study to find out more

CONTACT US

Book a consultation with our experts.

