

Mental Health Awareness Week 2026



Equality and Diversity UK

Foreword

Mental Health Awareness Week (11-17 May 2026) comes at a time when many people across the UK are carrying fear, exhaustion, grief, and anxiety that extends far beyond the workplace.

For some, mental health conversations may centre around stress, burnout, or workload pressures. But for many communities, the reality is deeper and more painful. Mental health is also being impacted by what people are experiencing on our streets, online, in public spaces and within society itself.

Across the country, Jewish communities continue to report deeply distressing experiences, including intimidation, hostility, antisemitic abuse, threats, vandalism, isolation, and fear linked to visible identity, faith expression, and rising tensions within public discourse. Many Jewish individuals are describing anxiety about wearing symbols of faith, attending places of worship, displaying cultural identity, or simply walking through communities feeling safe and accepted.

At the same time, Muslim communities continue to experience Islamophobia, abuse, and suspicion. Black and ethnically diverse communities continue to navigate racism and racial trauma. Disabled people continue to battle exclusion and barriers. LGBTQ+ communities continue to face hostility and discrimination. Many people are absorbing the emotional impact of division, conflict, online hatred, and societal tensions every single day.

These experiences affect mental health.

Fear changes how people move through the world. Racism changes how safe people feel. Hate incidents change confidence, belonging and well-being. Repeated exposure to hostility, prejudice and discrimination can create trauma, hypervigilance, anxiety, depression, and isolation.

That is why Mental Health Awareness Week cannot be separated from Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion.

Mental health does not exist in isolation from race, religion or belief, disability, sex, age, neurodivergence, sexuality or lived experience. We must recognise intersectionality not as an optional conversation, but as essential to understanding wellbeing in modern Britain.



If people do not feel safe in their communities, workplaces, educational settings or public spaces, wellbeing initiatives alone will never be enough.

This week is therefore not just about awareness. It is about action.

- Action to challenge antisemitism, racism, Islamophobia, and hate.
- Action to create psychologically safe workplaces and communities.
- Action to listen without judgement.
- Action to support people experiencing trauma and fear.
- Action to ensure leaders, managers, educators, and organisations understand that wellbeing support must be inclusive, culturally aware and rooted in humanity.

Mental health support must recognise the whole person.

Because behind every conversation about wellbeing is a human being carrying experiences, identities, fears, hopes, and pressures that may not always be visible.

As Mental Health Awareness Week approaches, let us move beyond posters and performative statements and instead commit to creating communities where people genuinely feel safe, valued, heard, and supported.



Taking action through Inclusion, Intersectionality and Compassion

As Mental Health Awareness Week approaches, many organisations will once again share wellbeing posters, resilience quotes, and generic reminders to “check in” on colleagues.

But mental health cannot be reduced to a campaign week or a poster in the staff kitchen.

With one in six workers in the UK experiencing a mental health problem at any given time, managers, colleagues, governors, leaders, and community organisations are increasingly becoming the first point of contact — often without the confidence, training or understanding needed to respond safely and inclusively.

Mental health support must go beyond wellbeing slogans. It must recognise the *whole person*.

That means understanding how mental health is shaped by:

- Sex and gender
- Disability and neurodivergence
- Race and ethnicity
- Religion or belief
- Age
- Sexual orientation
- Socio-economic background
- Caring responsibilities
- Trauma and lived experience

This is where **intersectionality** matters.

Two people may both experience anxiety, burnout, or depression but their experiences, barriers to support, and fears around disclosure may look entirely different.

A Black male employee may fear being labelled “aggressive” if they express distress.

A neurodivergent colleague may experience sensory overload and exhaustion that is misunderstood as disengagement.

An older worker may fear being viewed as incapable.



A younger employee may struggle financially but feel unable to speak up.

A Muslim colleague may experience isolation or discrimination linked to faith practices.

A disabled worker may face mental health challenges connected to inaccessible systems or repeated battles for reasonable adjustments.

Mental health does not exist separately from equality, diversity, and inclusion.

They are deeply connected.

Why EDI must be embedded in Mental Health Conversations

Mental health support that ignores inclusion risks:

- Missing safeguarding concerns
- Reinforcing inequalities
- Increasing stigma
- Failing legal duties under the Equality Act 2010
- Creating workplaces where only some people feel psychologically safe enough to speak

Inclusive mental health practice means:

- Listening without assumptions
- Understanding cultural differences around mental health
- Recognising trauma and discrimination
- Making reasonable adjustments
- Ensuring support pathways are accessible
- Challenging stereotypes and bias
- Creating psychologically safe workplaces

Good mental health support is proactive, preventative, and human-centred.



What Managers and Leaders need to understand

Managers are not therapists.

But they *do* have:

- A duty of care
- Safeguarding responsibilities
- Equality responsibilities
- A role in creating psychologically safe cultures

The first response matters.

When someone says:

“I’m struggling.”

The response should never be:

- “Everyone is stressed.”
- “You just need to be resilient.”
- “Leave your problems at the door.”
- “You don’t look anxious.”
- “We all have pressures.”

Instead:

- Listen calmly
- Avoid judgement
- Ask what support may help
- Consider adjustments
- Signpost appropriately
- Follow organisational procedures
- Maintain confidentiality appropriately
- Record concerns where needed

Recognising Intersectional Barriers to Support

Different groups may face different barriers when accessing mental health support.

Race and Ethnicity

Some ethnically diverse communities may:

- Experience stigma around mental health
- Distrust services due to historical discrimination
- Fear workplace stereotyping
- Experience racial trauma and microaggressions

Leaders should:

- Avoid assumptions
- Create culturally aware support systems
- Challenge racism and exclusion
- Ensure representation in wellbeing approaches

Disability and Neurodivergence

Mental health may intersect with:

- Autism
- ADHD
- Chronic illness
- Sensory processing differences
- Physical disability
- Learning disabilities

Support may require:

- Flexible communication
- Quiet spaces
- Adjusted workloads
- Clear expectations
- Reduced sensory overload
- Flexible working

Mental health support must be accessible, not one-size-fits-all.



Religion and Belief

Faith can be:

- A source of resilience and community
- Or a point of exclusion if workplaces are insensitive

Organisations should consider:

- Prayer needs
- Religious observance
- Inclusive wellbeing activities
- Avoiding assumptions around belief systems
- Respecting spiritual approaches to coping and healing

Sex, Gender, and Sexual Orientation

People may experience mental health impacts linked to:

- Sexism
- Sexual harassment
- Gender expectations
- Domestic abuse
- LGBTQ+ discrimination
- Men feeling unable to seek help due to stigma

Inclusive workplaces create environments where everyone can safely access support without fear of judgement.

Age

Mental health impacts people of all ages differently.

Younger workers may experience:

- Financial insecurity
- Social media pressures
- Isolation
- Anxiety around job stability

Older workers may face:

- Caring pressures
- Menopause impacts
- Age discrimination
- Loneliness
- Concerns about capability perceptions



Mental Health Is Everyone's Responsibility

Mental health is not solely an HR issue.

It is:

- A leadership issue
- A safeguarding issue
- An equality issue
- A culture issue
- A wellbeing issue

Creating psychologically safe environments requires:

- Compassionate leadership
- Inclusive policies
- Clear reporting pathways
- Trained managers
- Open conversations
- Accountability
- Action



Where to go for support (UK)

Immediate Crisis Support

If someone is in immediate danger or at risk:

- Call 999
- Attend A&E
- Contact local crisis services

National Support Organisations

Mind

- Mental health information and local support
- Website: mind.org.uk

Samaritans

- 24/7 emotional support
- Call 116 123

Shout

- Text "SHOUT" to 85258

NHS

- GP referrals and NHS mental health services
- NHS Talking Therapies available in many areas

Rethink Mental Illness

- Information and support for severe mental illness

YoungMinds

- Support for young people and parents

Muslim Youth Helpline

- Faith-sensitive support for young Muslims

SANE

- Emotional support and mental health information



Questions Organisations should ask themselves

- Do staff from all backgrounds feel psychologically safe here?
- Are managers trained in inclusive mental health conversations?
- Do our wellbeing policies reflect intersectionality?
- Are reasonable adjustments understood and implemented?
- Are reporting systems trusted?
- Are diverse voices included in wellbeing planning?
- Do staff know where to access support?
- Are we measuring wellbeing experiences across protected characteristics?

This Year: Move Beyond Awareness

Awareness without action changes little.

This Mental Health Awareness Week:

- Check policies
- Train managers
- Review support pathways
- Embed inclusion
- Listen to lived experience
- Challenge stigma
- Make adjustments
- Create safer cultures

Because mental health support should work for *everyone* — not just those already comfortable speaking up.

And because true wellbeing cannot exist without equality, inclusion and belonging.

