LONELINESS AND MENTAL HEALTH AT WORK

Loneliness can affect many of us at one time or another and we can encounter it in different walks of life. One in five workers feel lonely at work on a typical working day. This article contains information about loneliness at work, how loneliness can affect our mental health, and practical advice for supporting your colleagues who may be experiencing loneliness.

Our society and workplaces have changed in recent years. Employers and colleagues have embraced flexible ways of working for the better, allowing for greater face time with our friends, family, and housemates outside of work – but what has this meant for our connections at work?

Mental Health UK has conducted research to learn more about how loneliness is affecting workers in Great Britain right now. The research was conducted online in April 2022 and saw them ask 2,023 people (of which 1,105 were workers) about their experiences of loneliness in the workplace, and how it could affect their mental health.

WHAT IS LONELINESS?

'Loneliness' is "the pain we feel when our social connections do not meet our needs", while 'social isolation' is "the state of having a smaller number of social contacts, which may contribute to loneliness."

Loneliness affects many of us at one time or another. The UK research found that as many as one in five (20%) workers feel lonely at work on a typical working day.

We know that loneliness can be both the driver for and a product of poor mental health. Almost a quarter of workers (23%) agreed that feeling lonely at work has affected their mental health.

TALKING ABOUT LONELINESS AT WORK

When asked about the factors that could prevent them from talking about loneliness at work, 53% agreed 'Lack of own time or capacity within work hours to discuss this with others', while 50% agreed that 'a culture at work which does not actively encourage people to talk about mental health' and 'feeling that my line manager or senior leader does not have time to meet with me, or won't be able to support me' as key reasons that could prevent them from opening up about the topic at work.

HOME AND HYBRID WORKING

During the pandemic, we were encouraged to work from home unless we could not do so. Just under half of British workers (46%) have a fixed working location (such as an office), while 23% are 'hybrid' or 'agile' workers (i.e., a mixture of home and location-based working),

18% are home-based (i.e., working from home full-time), and 9% are field-based (i.e., based away from home, but at a variety of locations).

Regionally, fixed location working is most common in the Midlands (54%), home working is most common in Wales (23%) and hybrid or agile working is most common in London (35%).

SUPPORTING YOUNGER COLLEAGUES

Other key findings:

Those aged 18-24 are twice as likely to feel lonely at work than others (39% vs 18%). In fact, the older the age group we spoke to, the lower their likelihood of feeling lonely in the workplace.

41% of 18–24-year-old workers and 30% of 25–34-year-old workers agreed that loneliness at work has affected their mental health, in contrast to 17% of those aged 45-54 and 15% of those aged 55+.

Workers aged 45-54 feel most confident letting colleagues know when they're feeling lonely or isolated at work (49%), while 59% of workers aged 18-24 do not feel confident letting colleagues know when they're feeling lonely or isolated at work – just 34% do.39% agreed that 'insensitivity from other colleagues around culture and faith' could impact on their mental health at work.

LONELINESS AND THE FACTORS WHICH MAY IMPACT MENTAL HEALTH

When asked about the factors which could impact on peoples' mental health at work, 45% of British workers agreed that 'lack of contact time with my immediate team' could, 43% agreed that 'the cost of engaging with my colleagues physically' could, and 42% agreed that 'lack of contact time with my line manager or senior leader' could.

Younger workers agreed more strongly that lack of contact time with colleagues could impact on their mental health at work.

- 54% of workers aged 25-34 agreed 'lack of contact time with their line manager or senior leader' could impact on their mental health at work.
- 55% of workers aged 18-24 and aged 25-34 agreed 'lack of contact time with their immediate team' could impact on their mental health at work.
- 52% of workers aged 18-24 agreed 'lack of contact time with colleagues outside of their immediate team' could impact on their mental health at work.
- 49% of workers aged 18-24 and aged 25-34 agreed 'lack of physical space to work from and/or meet colleagues (e.g., an office)' could impact on their mental health at work.

Wellbeing Plan

You're a people manager, we recommend using our Wellbeing Plan (See below) as a tool to help you identify what good wellbeing looks like for your team, as well as what it looks like when things aren't so good.
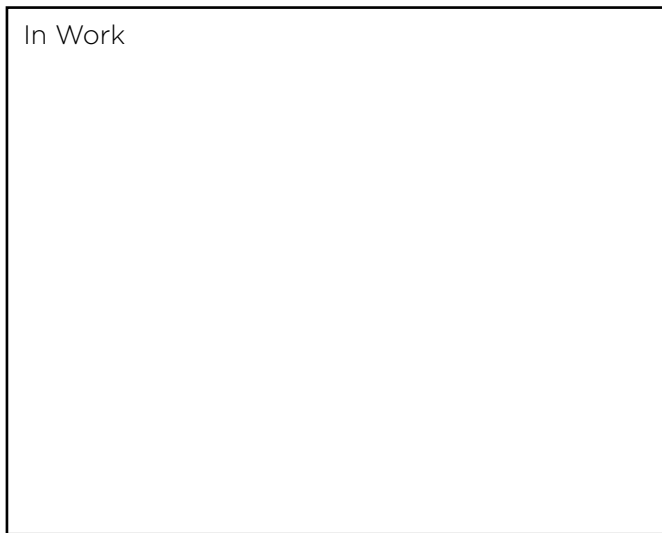
You could share this resource with your team so that you can help to look out for each other.
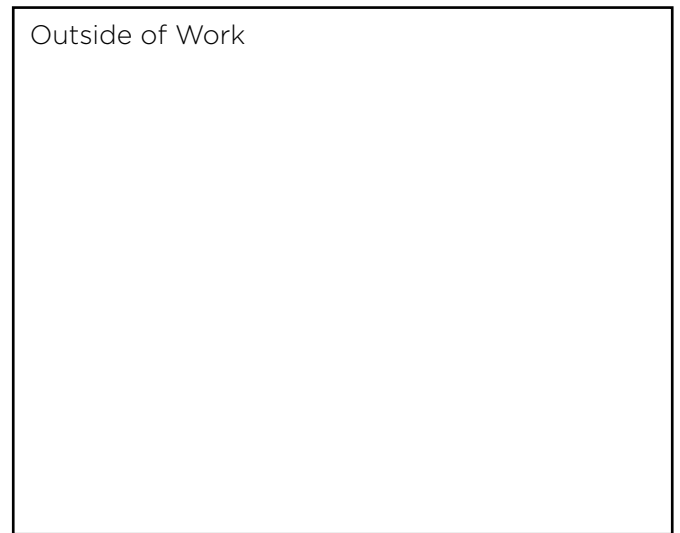
WHAT DOES GOOD WELLBEING LOOK LIKE FOR ME?

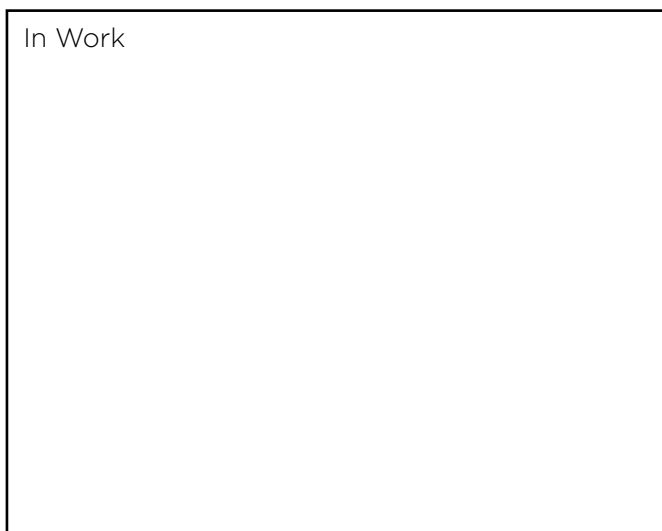How do you feel? How do you behave? What would others notice?

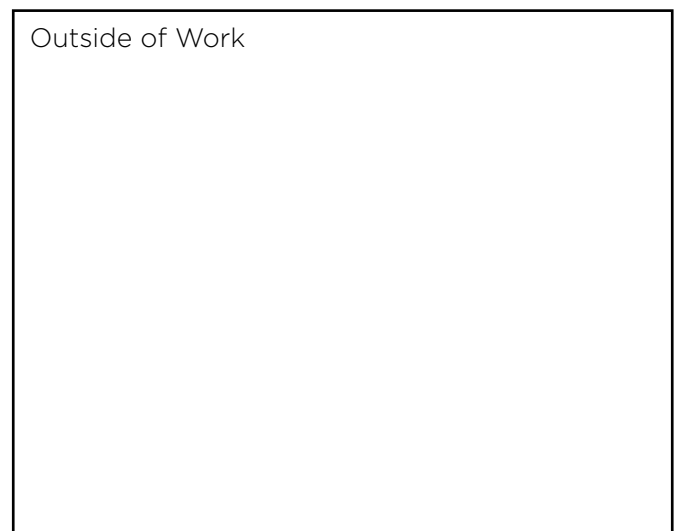| In Work	Outside of Work

HOW DO I ACHIEVE / MAINTAIN GOOD WELLBEING?

This could include activities, people, a way of thinking etc. Don't forget the day-to-day things – they're easy to take for granted!
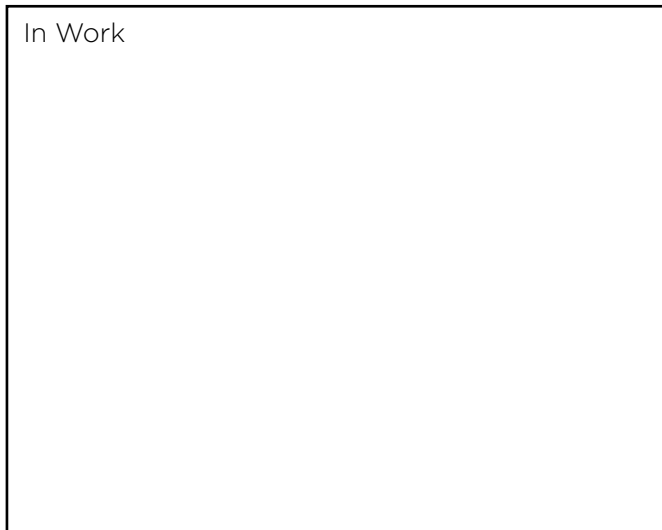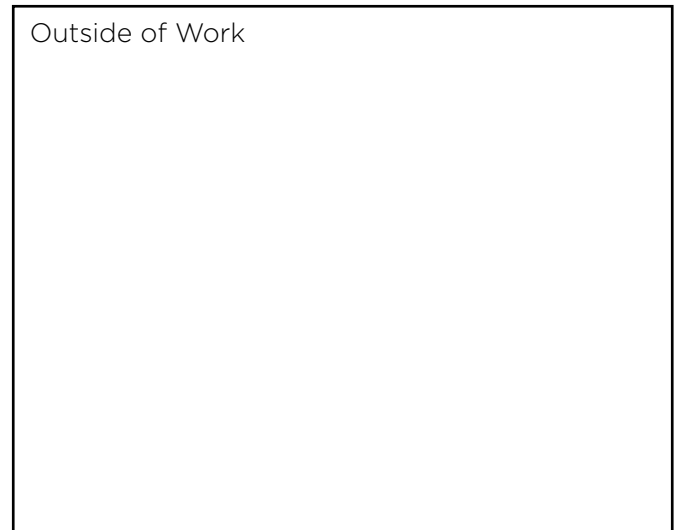
In Work	Outside of Work

WHAT CAUSES ME STRESS / POOR MENTAL HEALTH?

What sorts of events/situations cause you stress? Are certain emotions particularly unpleasant to you? Is there anything you can do to prevent stressors and/or limit their impact?
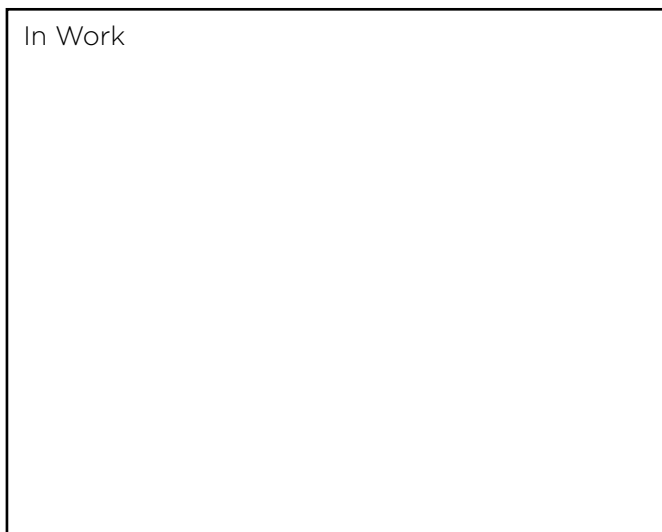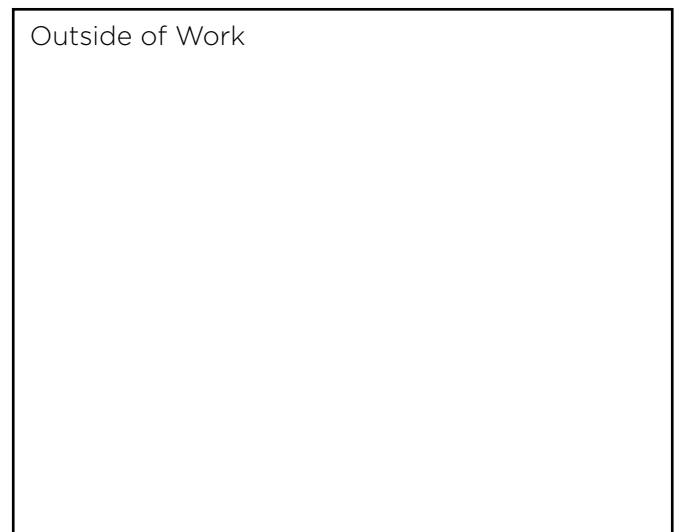
In Work	Outside of Work

WHAT ARE MY EARLY WARNING SIGNS?

What are the signs you may be starting to experience stress/poor mental health? Think about how it impacts you physically/emotionally/behaviourally and cognitively. What might others notice?
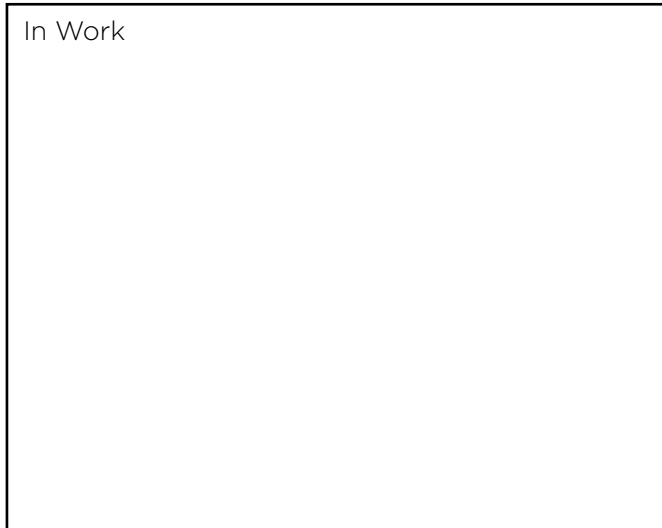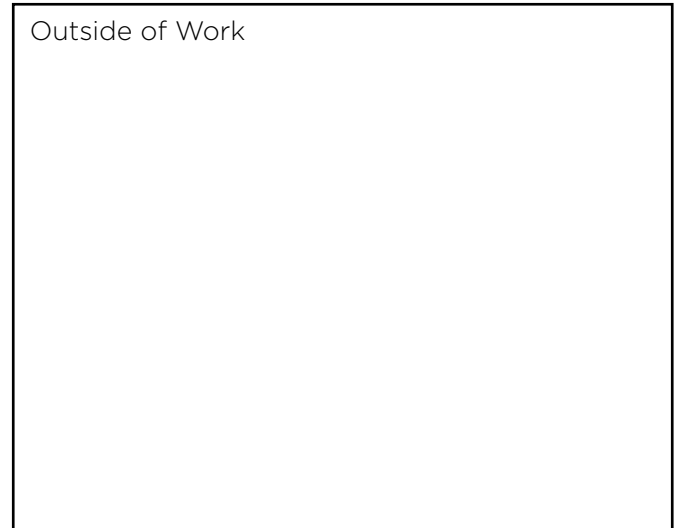
In Work	Outside of Work

WHEN IT ALL GETS TOO MUCH?

What are the signs that you have become overwhelmed and are now experiencing stress/poor mental health? What might others notice?
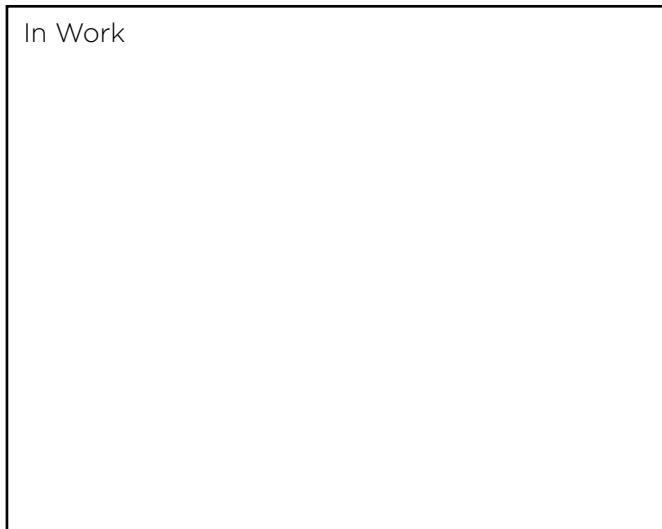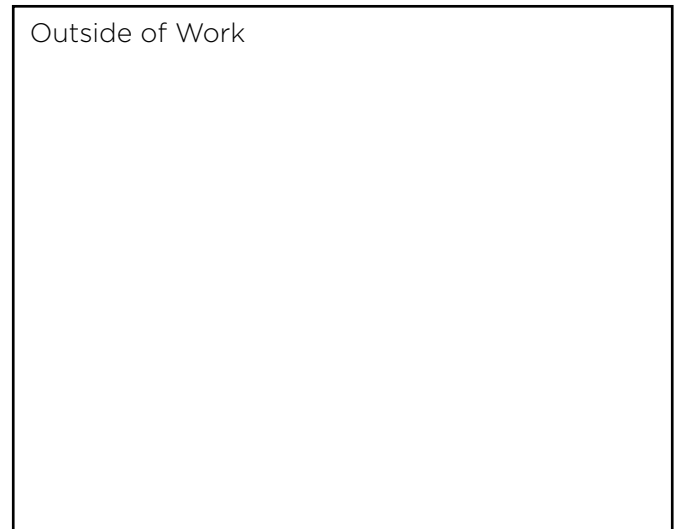
In Work	Outside of Work

IF I START TO EXPERIENCE STRESS / POOR MENTAL HEALTH, I CAN...

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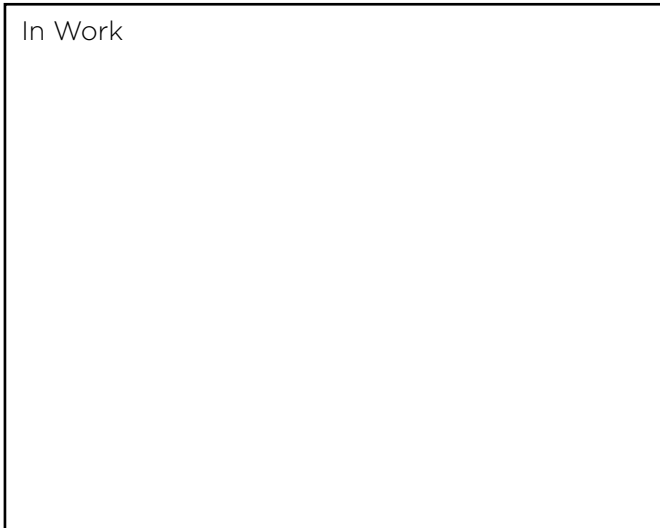
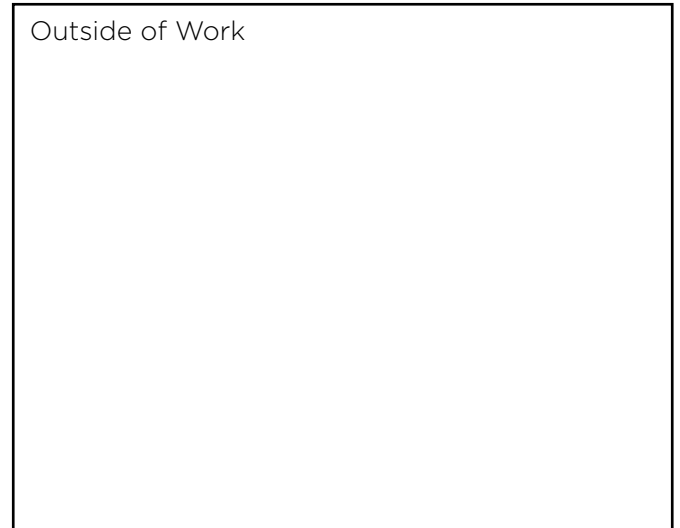| In Work	Outside of Work

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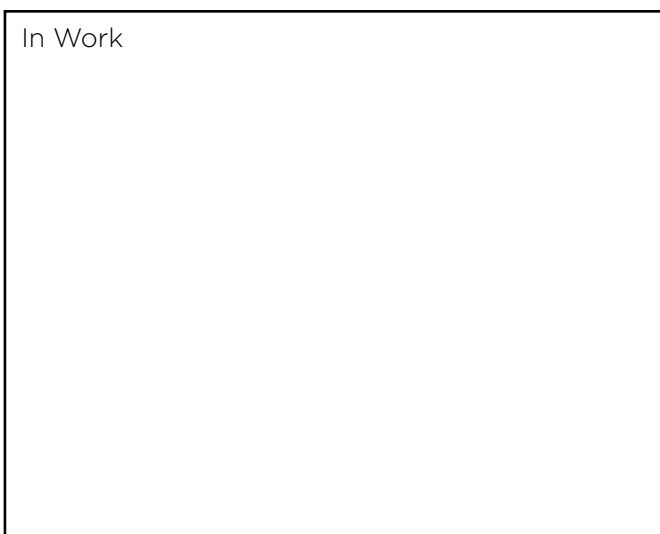
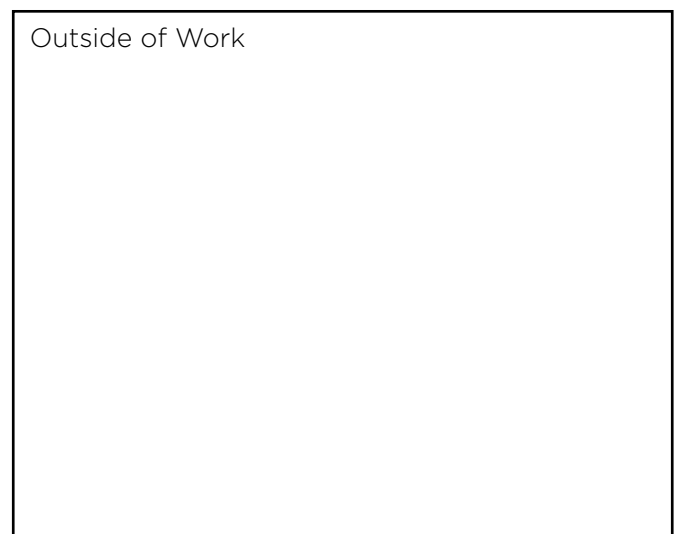| In Work	Outside of Work

IF OTHERS START TO NOTICE I AM EXPERIENCING STRESS / POOR MENTAL HEALTH THEY CAN...

What are the signs you may be starting to experience stress/poor mental health? Think about how it impacts you physically/emotionally/behaviourally and cognitively. What might others notice?

In Work	Outside of Work

I CAN GET SUPPORT FROM...

List all of the different places you can get support – this might be people's names/numbers, organisations, charities etc.

In Work	Outside of Work