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**To: All Branches**

Dear Colleagues,

## **Mental Health Awareness Week – 9-15 May 2022**

The Mental Health Foundation announced that the 2022 Mental Health Awareness Week will run from Monday 9 May until Sunday 15 May 2022. The week will explore the experience of loneliness, its effect on our mental health and how we can all play a part in reducing loneliness in our communities and workplaces. A new study commissioned by Mental Health UK which took place last month has been published and the details are covered below.

Loneliness affects millions of people in the UK every year and is a key driver of poor mental health.

Research has found that loneliness has been exacerbated by the Covid pandemic. MHF has been tracking loneliness levels in the UK during the pandemic and found the experience has been much higher with devastating impact. Loneliness has been an important factor contributing to higher levels of distress, resulting from people's sense of isolation and reduced ability to connect with others. Further findings were that loneliness was one of the leading issues that the public felt needed to be addressed.

The aim of Mental Health Awareness Week is to raise awareness of the impact of loneliness on people's mental health and wellbeing and the practical steps that can be taken to address it. Reducing loneliness is a major step towards a mentally healthy society.

Loneliness is affecting more and more of us in the UK and has had a huge impact on physical and mental health during the pandemic. That's why the loneliness theme was chosen for Mental Health Awareness Week 2022. Making the connection with other people and the community and in the workplace is fundamental to protecting people's mental health and finding ways of tackling the epidemic of loneliness. Everyone can play a part in this. The week provides a valuable opportunity for people to talk about all aspects of mental health, with a focus on providing help and advice and we want CWU Reps to play an active part in that.

### **Loneliness and our mental health**

Loneliness affects many of us at one time or another. We know that **loneliness can be both the driver for and a product of poor mental health.**

**Our society is changing fast.** The pandemic has given rise to a sense of loneliness and isolation undermining confidence in daily routines. In recent times, many of us have had far less access to loved ones.

Technology is enabling healthcare professionals to see more patients without the need to travel, but on the flip side of the coin, convenience and cost efficiencies are driving more and more activities online.

**Our workplaces are also changing.** With many adapting to home and hybrid working, we need to embrace this change while building and maintaining meaningful connections with our work colleagues.

### **Let's Connect!**

The message is - **Let's connect during Mental Health Awareness Week**, and together;

- Raise awareness of the links between poor mental health and loneliness
- Let's talk – start the conversation and support each other
- Keep in touch with friends, family, colleagues
- Become a volunteer to support lonely people
- Every little bit counts in tackling loneliness, isolation, depression and distress and the barriers to making the connection.

### **We need you to:**

#### **1. Raise awareness**

Help people to understand links between loneliness and poor mental health, and actively check in on those around you at work and in your communities.

#### **2. Start the conversation**

Foster conversations about mental health – see attached conversation guide 'talking to someone about mental health.'

#### **3. Volunteer your time**

Every little bit counts.

#### **4. Offer assistance and support**

To those in need of advice, representation or sign-posting to professional help or counselling etc.

### **Mental Health UK New Research into loneliness at work - Loneliness and our mental health at work (Mental Health UK/YouGov Study) - 1 in 5 workers feel lonely at work**

Mental Health UK teamed up with 'YouGov' to learn more about how loneliness is affecting workers in Great Britain right now by getting a snapshot into British workers' experiences of loneliness at work right now. The study which was conducted last month (April 2022) involved a sample size of 2,023 adults about their experiences of loneliness in the workplace, and how it could affect their mental health. The figures have been weighted and are representative of all GB adults (aged 18+). The report includes some practical guidance on how to tackle loneliness in your workplace.

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 report contains information about loneliness at work, how loneliness can affect our mental health, and practical advice for supporting work colleagues who may be experiencing loneliness.

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

### **What is loneliness?**

According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), '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 people at one time or another. The research found that **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. Mental Health UK state that they know it can often feel tricky to know how to approach a chat about mental health at work, or to find the 'right' words once you do. MHUK have produced a "**Conversation Guide**" designed to help in this respect (copy attached).

### How do you start a mental health conversation?

**Find a quiet place with an informal atmosphere where possible.** A conversation about mental health shouldn't feel like a formal interview. Actively listen to the person by giving them your undivided attention. Leave any questions or comments until the person has finished, so you don't interrupt them. Follow the attached MHUK guide.

### Home and hybrid working

During the pandemic, some workers were encouraged to work from home unless they could not do so like the majority of CWU members. **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 workers

**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 the researchers 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.

#### **Attachments:**

- Mental Health UK – Mental Health Awareness Week Poster 1
- Mental Health UK – Mental Health Awareness Week/CWU Poster 2
- Mental Health UK – Mental Health Awareness Week – Lets Connect Flyer
- Mental Health UK – Conversation Guide: Talking to someone about mental health can be tricky. This Guide helps in how to have that first chat about mental health, or to find the 'right' words once you do.

#### **Samaritans**

For people in distress and urgently needing someone to talk to, Samaritans will listen, won't judge or tell a person what to do, will offer help, support and guidance 24/7. Members can call them any time, day or night - whatever they're going through, they can call Samaritans any time, from any phone for FREE. **CALL 116 123.**

Our thanks to the Mental Health Foundation, MIND, Samaritans and Mental Health UK.

Yours sincerely



**Dave Joyce**  
**National Health, Safety & Environment Officer**

[22LTB219 Mental Health Awareness Week – 9-15 May 2022](#)

[MH awareness week campaign poster \(MIND\)](#)

[MH Week poster\(2\)](#)

[MHAW-2022-Lets-Connect-flyer](#)

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