

## A Managers Guide to Mental Health Awareness Week

Make a difference. Start the conversation.



### Our latest research reveals a stark disconnect in Dutch workplaces:

81%

of employees don't feel comfortable discussing mental well-being at work.

87%

say managers fail to prioritise mental health conversations.

95%

of managers themselves say they would benefit from more training.



Let's use this Mental Health Awareness Week to close the gap, together.

### This Guide Includes:



Practical tips for recognising early signs of mental health challenges in your team



A clear framework for having supportive, non-judgemental conversations



Simple, actionable steps you can take during Mental Health Awareness Week

## Take the First Step & Recognise the Signs.

Mental well-being issues often go unnoticed, not because they're invisible, but because we're not trained to spot the signs. As a manager, you don't need to be a psychologist. But knowing what to look out for can make a real difference.



Here's how to become more aware and take action early:

### What to look out for in your team:

#### 1. Behavioural shifts

Is someone more withdrawn, irritable, or less communicative than usual? These can be signs of emotional distress, especially if the change happens suddenly.

#### 2. Changes in performance

Look out for missed deadlines, lack of focus, or a drop in quality of work. These are often subtle red flags, especially when they come from normally reliable team members.

#### 3. Physical indicators

Frequent headaches, fatigue, or unexplained absences can point to chronic stress, burnout, or anxiety. Trust your instincts — if someone “doesn't seem like themselves,” check in.

#### 4. Emotional reactivity

If someone becomes unusually reactive — snapping, crying easily, or withdrawing completely, it may be a sign they're reaching their emotional limits.

#### 5. Team dynamics

Has someone stepped back socially or become more isolated? Changes in how they interact with colleagues can indicate that they're struggling beneath the surface

## What You Can do During Mental Health Awareness Week:



- ✓ Check in – even if nothing seems “wrong”  
Mental health isn’t always visible. A simple “How are you really doing?” can open the door
- ✓ Start team conversations about mental well-being.  
Use this week to normalise the topic. A short discussion in a team meeting can set the tone.
- ✓ Lead by example.  
Share your own story, whether it's a stressful period or how you take care of your mental well-being. Vulnerability builds trust.
- ✓ Invite your team to explore OpenUp resources whether it's a group session, a 1:1 with a psychologist, or a self-guided course, highlight what's available and how to access it.

**Pro tip: People may not remember what you say, but they'll remember how you made them feel. Your openness and presence can be the start of real change.**

### Have the Conversation – With Confidence



We know from research that almost half of employees (46%) have avoided telling their manager the truth about their mental health. Why? Because opening up can feel risky, especially if it's about something as personal as mental well-being.

That's why it's so important for managers to know how to create a safe space and lead with empathy during difficult conversations.

## A Practical Framework for Starting Mental Health Conversations



At OpenUp we recommend a simple but powerful structure you can follow when talking to someone you're concerned about:

### 1. Create a moment of calm

Find a quiet setting where you both feel safe and undistracted. This can be a walking meeting or a short check-in outside of the usual work context. Show that you're fully present and not rushing the conversation.

"I've noticed you've been a bit quieter lately, and I just wanted to check in. How are things going for you at the moment?"

### 2. Listen with openness

Let them speak. Avoid the urge to jump in, give advice, or fill the silence. Give them time to collect their thoughts and acknowledge that opening up can be difficult.

Use phrases like:

"Thanks for sharing that with me."

"That sounds really tough."

"You don't have to go into detail, but I'm here if you want to."

### 3. Validate and normalise

Many people feel ashamed or weak for struggling. Let them know that it's okay not to be okay - "Mental health challenges are really common, and I appreciate you trusting me with this."

### 4. Support, don't solve

Your role isn't to fix things. It's to help them find the right support. This might mean encouraging them to speak to a professional, or simply reminding them of what's available.

### 5. Follow up

Don't let this be a one-off. Check in again next week. Ask how they're doing. Show that your support is consistent, not conditional.

"Just wanted to follow up on our chat last week, how have things been since then?"