

Sanctus.

WRITING A MENTAL HEALTH
SICK DAY POLICY

HEY THERE!

Hey there!

In this short 'lil guide, we're going to try and break down one of the most challenging policy pieces currently facing businesses and their wellbeing strategy; the mental health sick day.

On the next page, you'll see the Sanctus "Mental Health Days" policy, and also our "Sickness" policy.

Our dream is that one day these two sections don't need to be separated out and businesses simply have one, unifying "Sickness" policy.

But, we're not there yet as a society.

So, we've clearly defined what we believe about mental health and mental health days first, and then written our sickness policy which accounts for both that and physical sickness.

It's important to say that this is what works for us right now, and that may change as we grow.

This also won't work for every business, as everyone is at different stages with their company size and culture.

On the last page, we've given some guidance on how to frame your mental health policy. Given everyone's policy may be slightly different, this isn't a "here's an A* policy", and more of a "here's how best to frame it."

Without further ado...

OUR MENTAL HEALTH SICK DAY POLICY

Mental Health Days

This isn't so much of a benefit (it should be the norm) but more of a naming.

We believe we treat mental health like physical health. "We all have mental health" is one of our rallying cries, and this means we understand that some days your mental health impacts your ability to work as much as your physical health can.

It doesn't matter what the cause is, if you feel like you can't show up to work as a result of your mental health, we invite you to take a mental health day the same way you would a physical sick day.

No judgements. No questions. Apart from "How can we best support you?", if you decide that's a mental health day(s) then we trust you. Contact your manager and let them know and make arrangements to switch that out of office on.

Like physical health, mental ill health can persist - sometimes a little longer than we'd like it to. We trust you to tell us when it's right to return to work. There's no expectations to return sooner rather than later. We'd rather you made a full recovery and come back when you feel resourced enough. Sometimes the best self-care for you long term doesn't feel good in the moment. It may feel tricky to ask for another day but if that's what's best for you, we trust it's the right thing.

Sickness

We all get sick in both our mental health and our physical health. For us, sickness means that you are incapable of working and you literally could not work adequately if you tried or working would not be good for your health, physical or mental.

For any sickness less than a week, just let your manager know what's going on and how long you believe you need off to recover, and you will be paid in full.

For anything over a week, we operate under the Statutory Sick Pay guidelines, which states that if you are too ill to work and have been off for over a week then you are eligible for SSP for up to 28 weeks.

For us, sick days include both mental and physical health. Physical health sick days are more obvious and could be anything from the common cold, a physical injury or a major illness.

Mental health sick days must directly relate to your mental health or a mental health issue that is debilitating you from working. For example, if you are feeling so anxious that you feel incapable of working, that is a mental health sick day or if you are grieving and incapable of working that is a mental health sick day.

However, if you've been working hard, you're tired and have been feeling stressed, but need a day off to recuperate - that's a holiday.

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Naming the company's stance on mental health

The first thing you'll want to do is name the company's stance on mental health. Mental health isn't at a point yet where a policy can just be dropped in - it's still a scary, sensitive subject and employees will want a little context as to why a certain thing is being brought in.

How does your company view mental health? How is it communicated and talked about internally? How do you want it to be viewed?

We see mental health the same as physical health, and so led with that in our framing as you'll see from the first three paragraphs of the "Mental Health Days" section.

Explaining what a mental health day means

It's important to be clear on what a mental health day actually means, when it's appropriate and when it's not. This gives employees a guideline on how best to use the day, and also allows them to make the decision for themselves on where they're at.

We've covered this in the last two paragraphs of the "Sickness" section.

What you expect from an individual

As a business, what do you expect from an individual when requesting or taking a mental health day?

Here, we require individuals to let their managers know, and then there are no questions or judgements beyond that. We trust that an individual is taking the day because they really need it. For anything that's a bit longer, this will generally involve a conversation between the individual and their manager.

The manager isn't there to "fix", diagnose or coach the individual, but to mutually figure out what the best avenue or route for support is for that individual.

How to stop employees from abusing the policy

In theory, this policy should operate the same as for physical sickness. It's no easier to abuse a mental health policy as it is a physical one. By law, employees require a sick note if they've been off for more than seven days - we don't enforce that here, but that's one way you can stop any long-term fiddling of the system.

Anything not covered?
Got a question?

Reach out at george.bell@sanctus.io

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