

## Professional Support Unit

Health Education and Improvement Wales (HEIW), Tŷ Dysgu

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## Team Support (4)

### How to support staff with acute anxiety or panic

As managers, from time to time, you may notice increased anxiety in staff members, and you may be concerned about how to support staff around work based distress, loss and broader coping.

This document is part of a series of resources for managers, put together by the PSU, offering tips and tools to support you to support your colleagues. Some of these may also be useful for you to think about yourself too – **your wellbeing is paramount as you care for others.**



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*We've got this – we're making a difference*

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Adapted from resources developed by the Staff Wellbeing Psychology Team

North Bristol NHS Trust - [staffwellbeingpsychology@nbt.nhs.uk](mailto:staffwellbeingpsychology@nbt.nhs.uk)

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## How to support staff with acute anxiety or panic (a brief grounding exercise A-BB-CC)

For colleagues that are **very distressed**, it may be useful to follow this **ABBCCC technique** to help them slow down, come into the here and now, so they are better able to have a conversation about next steps. If you notice a member of your team is in a state of panic a simple practical grounding technique is useful. Ideally have someone sit in a room away from others where you are unlikely to be disturbed. The below script is based on the Dropping an anchor in a storm: **ABBCCC approach**

Things you can say:

**"I can see there's a lot of different feelings showing up for you now, like there is a storm passing.**

**These are really understandable, and yet I can see that they are distressing and making it hard to focus on responding effectively.**

**Would you be willing to go through a brief exercise, called Dropping Anchor: ABBCC, that can help slow things down, take care of your self, and take effective action?**

**You can close your eyes if that's useful but you can also keep your eyes open and just lower your gaze to reduce any distractions."**

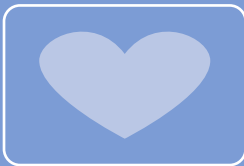
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## Tips for Managers



it's useful if you can practice with them



let them know that you sometimes need to use this and have found it helpful



if staff are distressed, it's ok and it can be helpful for them to keep their eyes open

### The ABBCCC Approach

## Acknowledge...

Your inner experience - the "weather pattern" inside your body and mind right now

- The aim is to help someone to notice and acknowledge whatever thoughts, feeling, emotions sensations of urges are present, without judgment or self-criticism. This isn't a conversation but an invitation to bring awareness to what inner experiences are here.

Things you can say:

**"Firstly, let's take a moment to notice any thoughts, feelings, and body sensations that are here right now. See if you can just bring awareness to them, label them (e.g. here's worry, I feel frustrated') and allowing them to be here without any self-criticism or struggle for things to be different. These experiences are normal and natural."**

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## Body

The aim of this is to bring the staff member into the here and now – shifting their focus from the worries in their mind to their broader experience

Things you can say:

“Uncross your legs if you’re sitting, and push your feet into the floor, feeling the connection with the ground. This is like dropping an anchor when a storm is around. (Do this with your staff member)... Feel the ground beneath you. Now sit forward in your chair and straighten your back... Feel the chair beneath your back supporting you. Stretch your arms out in front of you, feel your arms moving all the way from your fingers to your shoulder blades. We’re bringing some awareness and care to our body right now.”

## Compassion

Things you can say:

“See if you can say something kind to yourself right now. If you find this hard, think of what a good friend might say to you right now – or what you would say to them. This isn’t about ‘being positive’ – it’s natural to feel emotions - but is about being helpful.”

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## Connect with your values & Choose your response

Things you can say:

**"It's natural for our minds to want to fix things, including things out of our control right now.**

- **Let's take a moment to notice what's important to you right now?**
- **How you would like to respond in the face of this situation?**
  - **What's within your control right now?**
- **What's one small (really small) thing you can do, either now, in a moment, or later today that is about something meaningful that is within your control."**

This might take a few minutes or longer depending on what time you have and their level of distress. Briefly check in how they find that, and review the ABBCC steps (they might even want to jot these on their phone to practice again at home).

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## Your own wellbeing as a manager

It is really important to remember that '**it is ok not to be ok**'.

It's common to focus on the wellbeing of others first but as managers we must look after ourselves and each other as best we can, so that you can be well resourced to support others. As the saying goes 'We need to put our own oxygen masks on before helping others'.

## Support and resources available to all (including you as a manager):

**A selection of open access, supportive, resources and tools, including playlists, resources and tools available for download here:**

<https://psu.walesdeanery.org/support-services/resource-locator>

**Wellbeing Resources from Health Boards and Trusts across NHS Wales:**

<https://leadershipportal.heiw.wales/go/cp92la> -

**Health for Healthcare Professionals:** <https://www.hhpwales.co.uk/> or call **0800 058 2738**  
or email - Monday to Friday 9am to 5pm

**BMA Doctors-for-Doctors:** <http://bma.org.uk/practical-support-at-work/doctors-well-being/about-doctors-for-doctors> or call **08459 200 169 (landline: 01455 254 189)** - 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

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The resources in this series:

1: Supporting staff: 5 levels of care

2: Psychological safety: How managers can help foster this key area

3: Psychological first aid: How to respond to distress in your colleagues

4: How to support staff with acute anxiety or panic – a brief grounding exercise

5: 3 Step team procedure (including STOP for 15)

6: Team / peer to peer psychological debriefing

7: Other tips for supporting your team

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