

How to Support Employees with Mental Health Conditions **at Work**

Press Conference

29 July 2025



Contents

01 Promoting Mental Health at Work

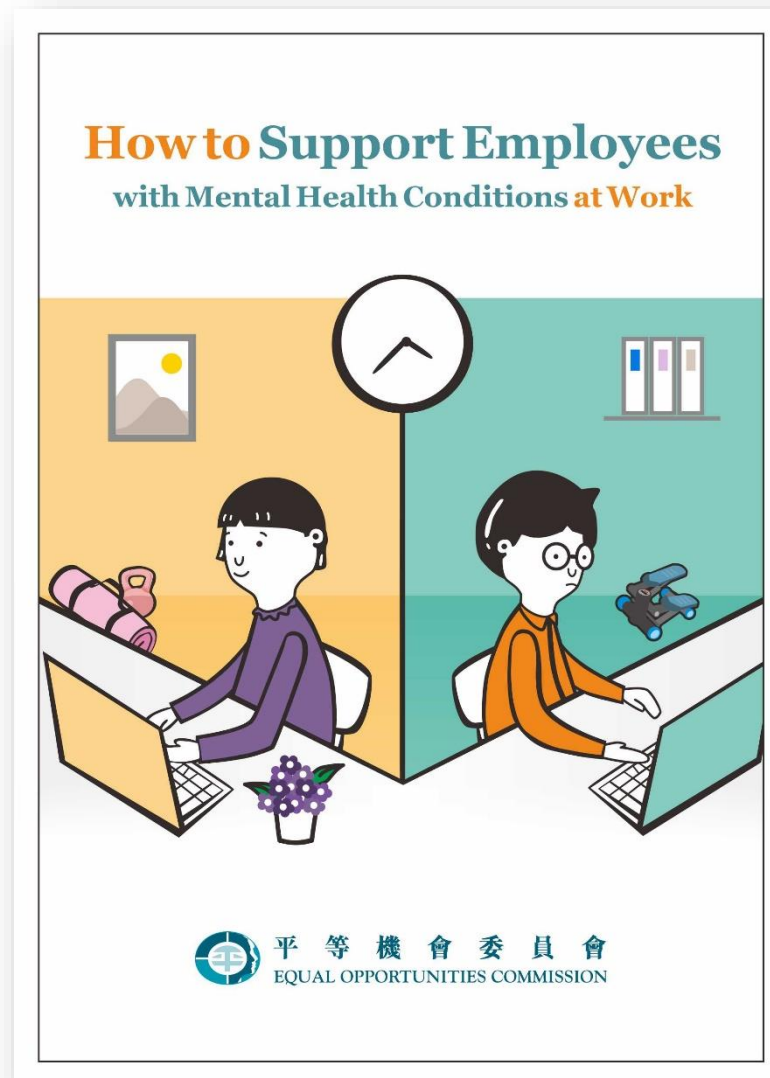
Why Support Mental Health at Work?
Mental Health Stigma & Discrimination

02 Understanding Mental Health Symptoms

Lived Experience of PMHCs
Signs that an Employee may Need Support

03 Addressing Mental Health Challenges at Work

Effective Communication Skills
Inherent Job Requirements & Reasonable Accommodation



Why Workplace Mental Health Matters?

- ✓ Help employees **build resilience** to cope with work-related stress, handle challenges, become **more productive** and **enhance work performance**
- ✓ It will **increase staff motivation**, develop **positive work relationships**, and also **retain valuable talents**

Mental health is a state of mental well-being that enables us to cope with the stressors in life, realise our abilities, learn and work well, and contribute to our community





Disability Discrimination



Disability Discrimination Ordinance

The definition of disability is broad and includes a disorder, illness or disease that **affects a person's thought processes, perception of reality, emotions or judgment or that results in disturbed behaviour**

It also covers a disability that presently exists; previously existed but no longer exists; may exist in the future; or is imputed to a person

A person with mental illness or ex-mental illness is protected under the DDO

Workplace disability discrimination

Direct disability discrimination

In comparable circumstances, you're **treated less favourably** at work **because of your disability**

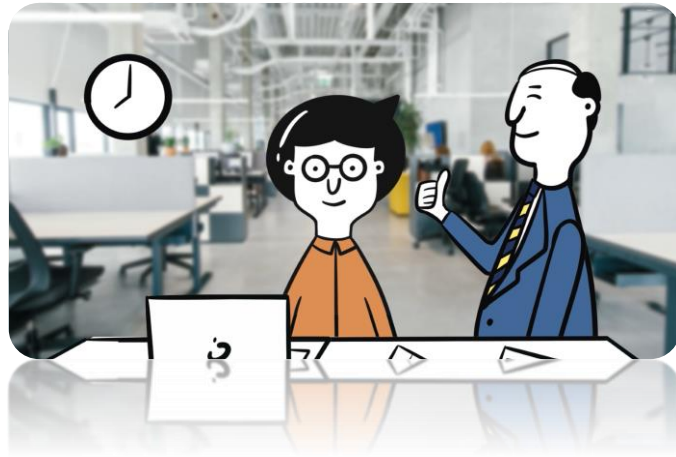
Indirect disability discrimination

When a condition or requirement is **applied to everyone**, but in practice **affects PWDs more adversely**, is to their detriment, and the condition or requirement **cannot be justified**

Disability harassment

It means any **unwelcome conduct** (whether verbal or in writing) towards a person on account of his/ her disability, where a reasonable person, having regard to all circumstances, would have anticipated that the person **would be offended, humiliated or intimidated**

Mental Health Stigma & Discrimination



"I actually never disclosed my medical history in the workplace, but later that male manager said, 'You're not honest! Why didn't you tell me about your mental illness?' I'm not sure where he got that information from..."

Initially, he praised my performance, but as soon as he made that statement, he publicly announced to all my colleagues that I had a mental illness... He immediately changed his attitude and said I couldn't handle the job. Originally, I had signed a full-time contract, but then he told me, 'Now I want you to sign a part-time contract.' I felt... it was very disrespectful, so I quit my job shortly after that day."

*"I may have a medical appointment every three to four months, but I didn't mention detailed information to him (prospective employer). So I just told him that I might go for a medical appointment once every three months... And he responded, '**Oh, sorry, we're not a charity!**'"*

(Female, approx. 50-59 years old, diagnosed with schizophrenia since she was in secondary school)



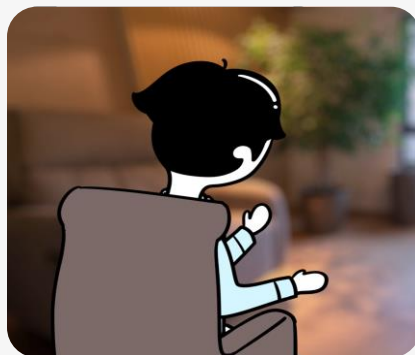
Unnecessary Tags



#Stigma
#Discrimination

Lived experience

Experience with depression



"I have **no motivation at all**. I don't feel like doing anything... my mental state is deteriorating. It's like **my attention span has worsened**."

Because of **poor sleep** at night, after a few months, I **feel scattered and disoriented**."

(Male, approx. 40-49 years old, diagnosed with depression more than 10 years ago)

Experience with bipolar disorder

Manic phase: "When I am irritated, it's really intense, and **my thoughts tend to race quickly**. I can think of things rapidly...there are **so many thoughts jumping around in my mind**."

Depressive phase: "Productivity tends to be lower...It's like you lack the motivation and **can't concentrate properly on tasks**... You **don't feel like socializing or going out**. It's not a good time for taking care of personal hygiene."



(Female, approx. 30-39 years old, diagnosed with bipolar disorder in 2017-18)

Experience with schizophrenia

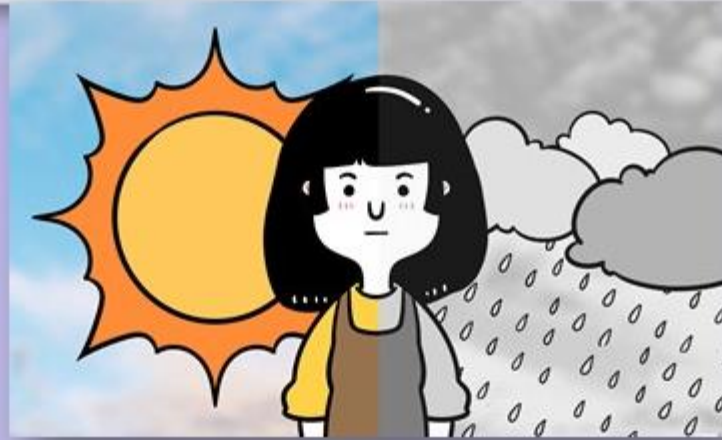
"When my illness first manifested, **I felt like people around me were monitoring me**. I heard many voices, and my main symptom was auditory hallucinations. **I would hear voices talking about my secrets**, such as the amount of money in my bank account or where I lived..."

But after taking medication, it helped counterbalance those experiences, and things got better."



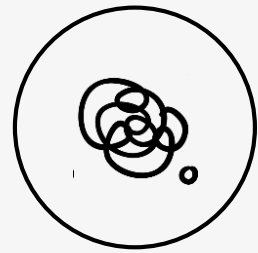
(Female, approx. 50-59 years old, diagnosed with schizophrenia in 1996)

Lived Experience



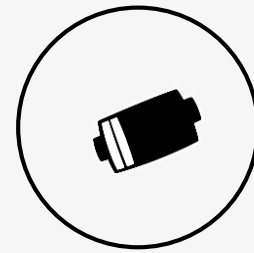
#Bipolar Disorder

Signs that an Employee may Need Support



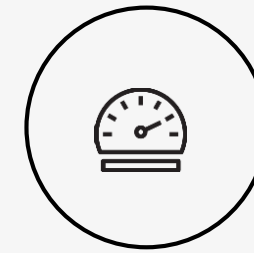
Emotional Signs

- ☐ Excessive worry or nervousness
- ☐ Getting overwhelmed or easily upset
- ☐ Lose interest or motivation for normal activities
- ☐ Suicidal thinking



Physical Signs

- ☐ Get sick more often such as headaches, stomach upset
- ☐ Hard to fall asleep, waking up frequently
- ☐ Looking tired and stressed
- ☐ Skip meals or binge eating
- ☐ Unexplained aches and pains



Work Performance

- ☐ Frequently late for work
- ☐ Increased absenteeism
- ☐ Struggle with basic and easy tasks
- ☐ Hard to concentrate, make decisions and manage multiple tasks
- ☐ Avoid certain workplace activities



Effective Communication Skills (I)

- ✓ Employers and direct supervisors may **communicate with the employees in advance to understand their conditions or needs**, such as noting the **types of support** that can be provided when symptoms occur
- ✓ **Treat employees with mental health conditions respectfully** in daily interactions, just as you would with any other colleagues
- ✓ **Assign a patient mentor** or colleague to provide guidance and encouragement

When employers are aware of a job applicant's mental health condition BEFORE HIRING



- ✓ If performance feedback is needed, avoid discussing it when the employee is feeling emotionally unstable. It is advisable to **assess the situation first before offering guidance**
- ✓ **Avoid using sensitive or stigmatising terms** related to mental health (e.g., “insane,” “abnormal”)
- ✓ If the employee experiences relapse and requires treatment for a period, employers may **consider offering unpaid leave with the aim of facilitating support for recovery and eventual return to work**



Effective Communication Skills (II)

When employers learn about an employee's mental health condition
AFTER HIRING



*If your employees who are struggling with mental health issues **approach you for assistance***

1. Think in advance

- *When and where suit you both to talk privately*
- *What boundaries they might need*
- *What they need in that particular phase*

2. Show empathy and understanding

- *“Thank you for sharing that with me. How do you feel?”*
- *“What do you find most challenging right now?”*
- *“What support do you think would be helpful for you?”*

3. Ensure confidentiality

- *Always respect and protect privacy*
- *Do not tell or discuss their disability with other colleagues*
- *Their disability information is restricted on a “need-to-know” basis*

Effective Communication Skills (III)

When employers learn about an employee's mental health condition
AFTER HIRING

*If your employees **are not able to cope with their mental health issues** or show unusual behavioural patterns that causes disruption at work, you should take the initiative to check with the employees*

- Discuss **what you have observed** from the employees and/or issues raised by other colleagues
- Work out **options** together to resolve the issues
- Provide **tools, resources** or temporary arrangements to address workload concerns
- With the employee's consent, you may **contact their social worker or family directly** to offer timely support

*If your employees **do not mind disclosing their disability**, you can explain to other colleagues*

- The nature of the colleague's mental health condition, without getting into further personal details
- Mental illness is treatable
- The workplace adjustments for the colleague concerned
- Encourage other employees to be supportive and create a mentally healthy workplace together



Respect & Understanding



"First thing is *understanding*. Secondly, the supervisor can appropriately assign and adjust their expectations regarding workload...*I communicate my needs, they share their expectations, and then we can discuss how to address them together.*"

(Female, approx. 30-39 years old, diagnosed with bipolar disorder around 10 years ago)

Confidentiality & Trust

"Because I know for sure that I didn't mention it (my mental illness), and then I don't know where they (the supervisor) found out about it, *I was accused of being dishonest, lacking integrity, and so on... But it seems like they don't really value confidentiality.* "

(Female, approx. 50-59 years old, diagnosed with schizophrenia since secondary school)

Inherent Job Requirements

01

Identify the inherent requirements (IRs) of the job &
Assess the abilities of the employee concerned

Meaning of IRs

The core functions that **are intrinsic to the performance** of a particular job, which are the essential activities **that must be carried out in order to fulfill the primary purpose of the role**

- ✓ not all of the requirements of a job
- ✓ about achieving results rather than the means used to achieve them

Example of IRs

Excellent communication skills for interacting effectively with clients
(whereas polite phone etiquette is not the IRs)



Reasonable Accommodation

02

Understand the meaning & purpose of Reasonable Accommodation (RA) for employees concerned

Meaning of RA

- ✓ RA is any **necessary and appropriate modification or adjustment** to a job, an employment practice, or the work environment
- ✓ The provision of RA should take into account **all relevant facts and circumstances** and **assess individually**, in order to assist the PWD to perform the IRs of the job

Why Matters?

- Some PWDs are excluded from jobs in which they are capable of doing simply because of **unnecessary barriers** in the hiring process and in the workplace
- *For example, due to a particular disability, an employee may need a quieter area to handle tasks as crowded environments can disrupt focus, or some may need short breaks at work to recharge during their recovery or treatment*
- Providing RA helps PWDs **perform their core job duties** and enables them to enjoy **equal employment opportunities**



Inherent Job Requirements & Reasonable Accommodation

03

Who are eligible for RA &
how reasonable do work adjustments have to be?

Who are eligible?

- ✓ Job applicants, candidates and employees with disabilities can ask for RA
- ✓ RA can be provided at the **recruitment and employment stages**
- ✓ Do not assume everyone with a disability requires RA

Reasonableness

The extent of reasonableness depends on the following factors

1. The employee's disability condition
2. The key job requirements of that employee
3. Whether the employer has considered RA, whether it is too costly or practicable to provide RA
4. Professional or medical recommendations on the necessity, the type and the timeframe of RA
5. Required expenditure or the company's resource allocation and scale
6. Whether it will impose unjustifiable hardship (UH)



Inherent Job Requirements & Reasonable Accommodation

04

Review whether the employee concerned is able to carry out their IRs with the support of RA

- ✓ It is good practice to have **a regular review or communication** to ensure that the adjustments or modifications **remain necessary and relevant** for the employee concerned

Examples

- *Employees experiencing schizophrenia may have disorganised thinking and difficulty in expressing thoughts coherently*

You can accommodate the employee by **breaking down tasks into smaller and manageable steps**, with **clear instructions and deadlines**. Instead of assigning a full project, consider asking the staff to **complete certain tasks by a specific date and review progress together**

At times, a brief RA may be sufficient that can support effectively the employee's needs

- *An event coordinator has a diagnosis of bipolar disorder and she is unable to concentrate to work in the open area during peak periods. The employer could allow her to **work from a closed office environment or wear headphones** to help her concentrate in that periods*



Inclusion & Acceptance

*"I also make mistakes. So, **treat me like an ordinary person. If I make a mistake, just tell me and let me know what I did wrong...**"*

(Female, approx. 50-59 years old, diagnosed with schizophrenia since she was in secondary school)



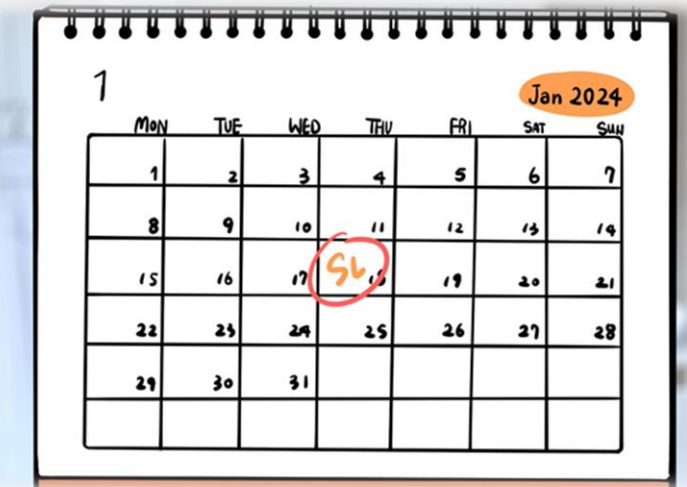
*"So now I have to go for follow-up appointments, but I won't apply for sick leave. Employees are allowed to take time-off for follow-up visits or seeing a doctor, but I won't take it. **I'd rather use my annual leave to see the doctor. Earlier there were subtle criticisms about me taking leaves so frequently.**"*

(Female, approx. 30-39 years old, diagnosed with bipolar disorder around 10 years ago)

More examples on RA (I)

Other RA adopted by some companies

- ✓ *Allowing medical appointments*
- ✓ *Granting regular short breaks*
- ✓ *Allowing temporary work-from-home when the employee concerned is feeling mentally drained at times*
- ✓ *Providing options for flexi-time or flexible start and finish times*



Hotline & Support service

"I have a job, and on the day I signed the contract with HR, **they gave me a support hotline.** They said if I have any emotional difficulties, I can call this number. It's a counselor provided through the company's resources, and **they assured me that all conversations are confidential.**

So, I have this backup option. I've been working for a while now, but I haven't made that call yet. But the way HR explained it to me on the day of the contract signing, **it made me feel very reassured."**

(Female, approx. 40-49 years old, diagnosed with schizophrenia in 2008-09)

More examples on RA (II)

***When your employee
faces challenges in
staying organised***

- ☐ Explain tasks clearly and confirm the employee's understanding
- ☐ Email/write work instructions to help minimise confusion
- ☐ Break down large assignments into manageable goals and tasks
- ☐ Encourage the employee to note down important discussions, use to-do-lists & reminders
- ☐ Allow extra time to prepare and complete tasks
- ☐ Set up check-in meetings to support the employee reminding them of key tasks and important deadlines



***When your employee
faces challenges in
tackling stress,
anxiety or emotions***

- ☐ Provide positive encouragement as appropriate
- ☐ Offer a quiet space to help employee manage their emotions and relax
- ☐ Allow the employee to seek support from their doctor or other professionals during working hours
- ☐ Provide advance notice to employee prior to meeting about items to be discussed and his or her role in the meeting
- ☐ Provide workplace support programmes to help employees seek professional assistance



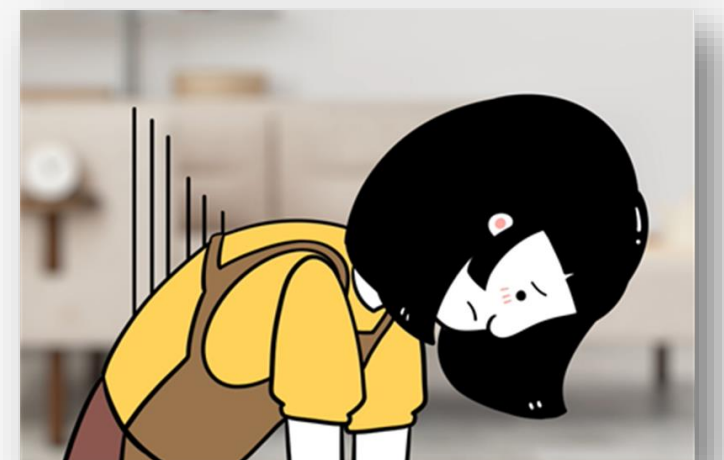
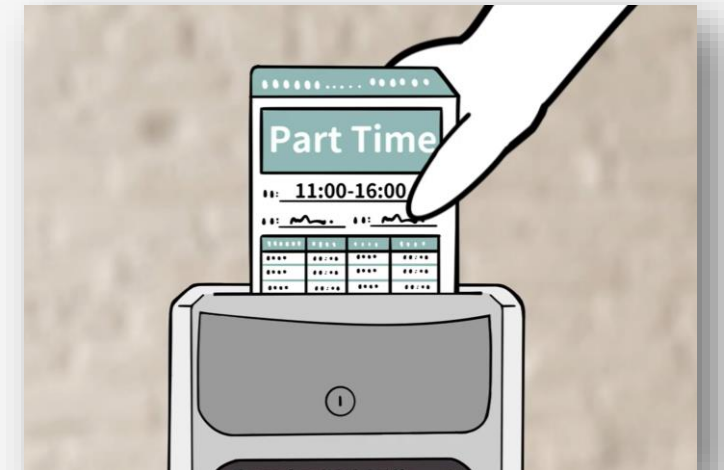
More examples on RA (III)

When your employee struggles with maintaining stamina (e.g. concentration or fatigue)

- ❑ Allow the employee to make up for lost time if he or she arrives late to work due to medication changes or sleeping problems
- ❑ Individuals in recovery who receive injectable medication treatment may generally feel more fatigued. Allowing flexible rest days after injections gives employees adequate time to recover and rest
- ❑ Adjust work hours or allow the employee to work part-time for some time
- ❑ Allow short-notice annual leave at your discretion if the employee needs rest due to mental health condition

When your employee faces challenges with social interactions

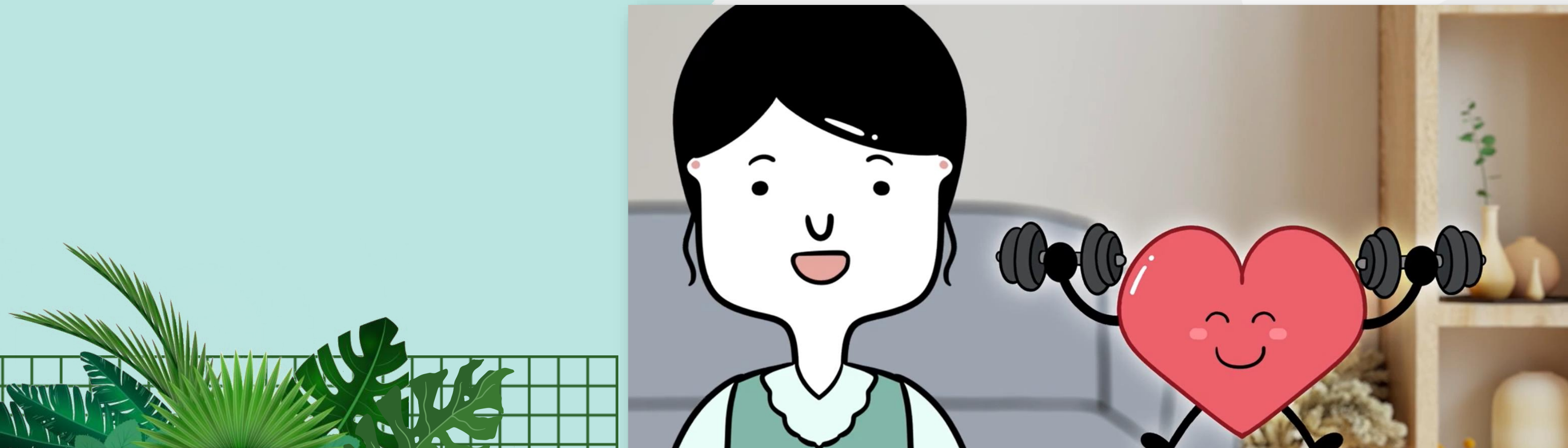
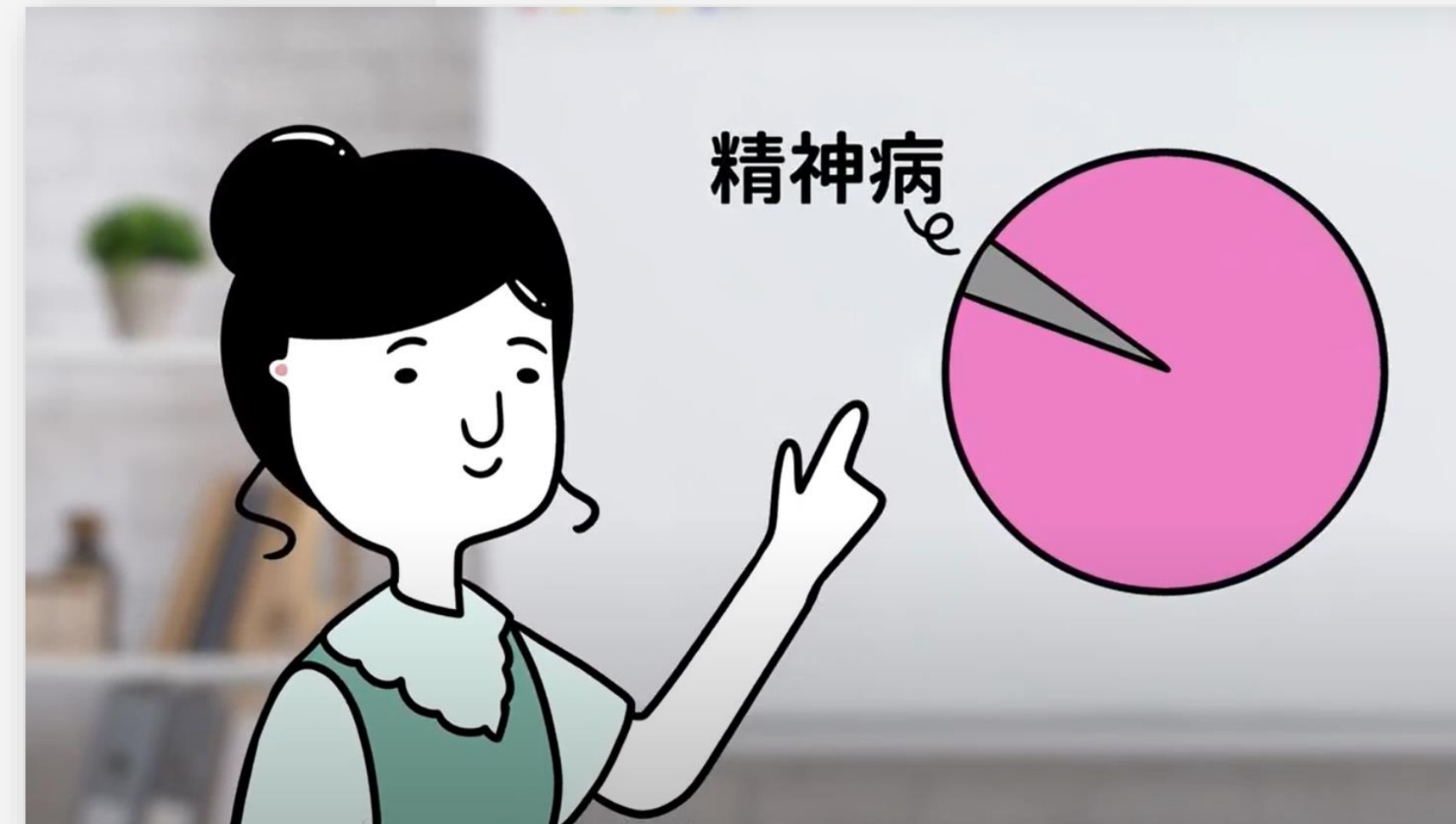
- ❑ Not making social activities mandatory for all employees
- ❑ If the employee is required to regularly meet with colleagues, business representatives or the general public, swapping these tasks with less 'social' activities if practicable; provide tasks that could highlight their strengths



Work accommodation (II)



#Flexible
#Personalised plan



Understand Disability Series: Employees with Mental Health Conditions



[MH-EP1] Unnecessary Tags #Stigma #Discrimination

Watch the video >



[MH-EP2] Lived Experience #Bipolar Disorder

Watch the video >



[MH-EP3] Lived Experience #Depression

Watch the video >



[MH-EP4] Lived Experience #Schizophrenia

Watch the video >



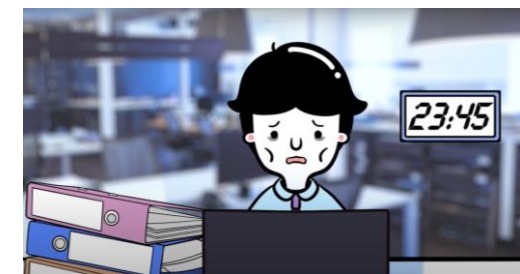
[MH-EP5] Work accommodation (I) #Reasonable #Supportive

Watch the video >



[MH-EP6] Work accommodation (II) #Flexible #Personalised plan

Watch the video >



Thank You!

