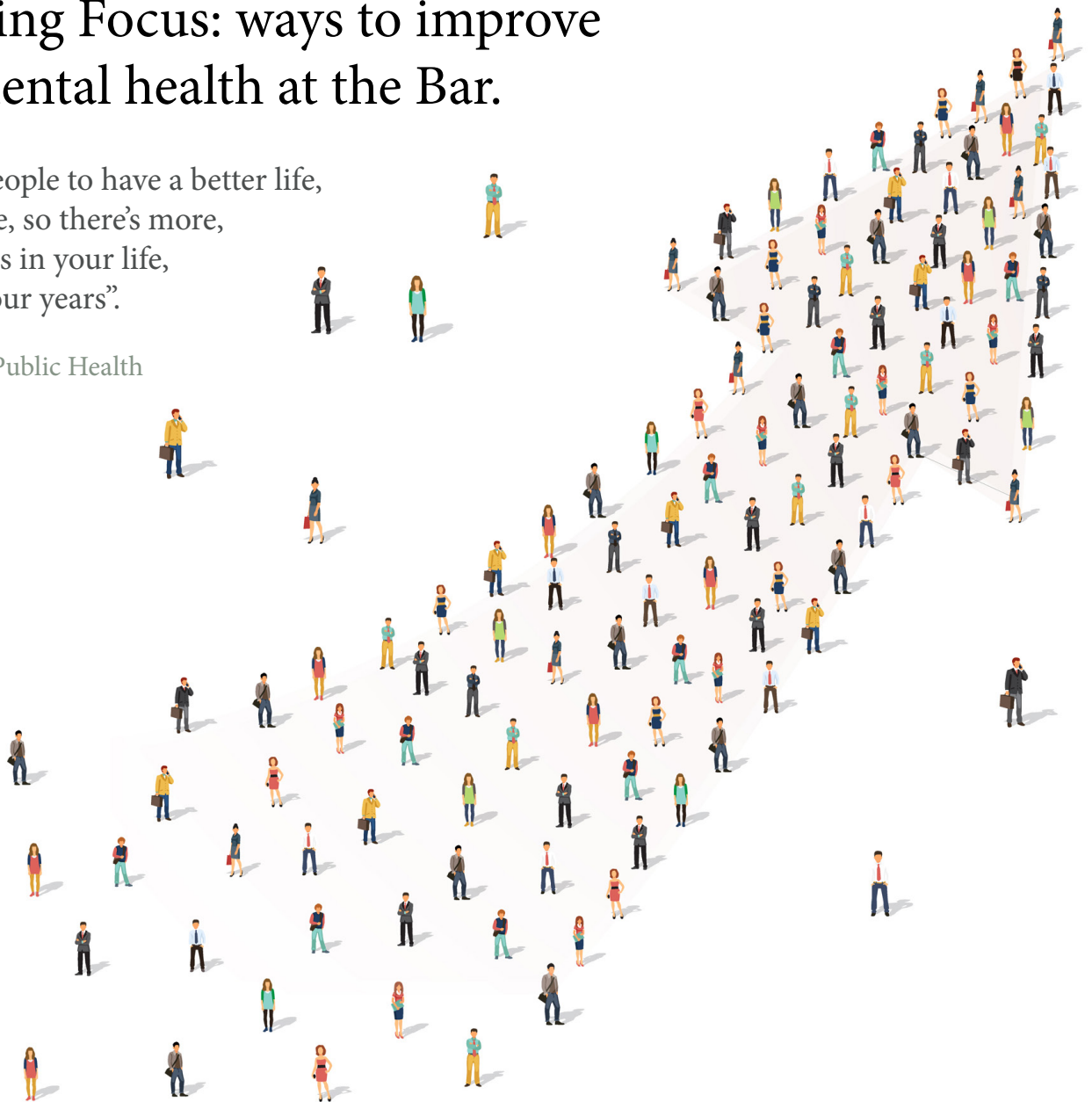


# Wellbeing Focus: ways to improve your mental health at the Bar.

“We want people to have a better life, a happier life, so there’s more, not just years in your life, but life in your years”.

– Director of Public Health



Mental health problems are the largest global cause of years lived with disability. One in four adults will experience a mental health problem in any year, yet the shame and silence surrounding mental health is still present. As self-employed barristers with no HR department, we are each other’s biggest support, expanding the depth of our knowledge on mental health is a positive way of not only helping our potential future selves, but those around us.

Mental health is a combination of many things, the focus is often a combination of social, psychological and emotional wellbeing. The question is what can we do to improve it? As mental health awareness week draws to a close, we’ve compiled some top tips gleaned from conversations we’ve had with members of chambers.





**1. Remove the stigma surrounding mental health**

Combining awareness raising and education will reduce the stigma attached to mental health. This will provide a more open forum for the topic to be discussed amongst colleagues and friends at the Bar, in turn assisting those who suffer mental health difficulties.

**2. Ask for support**

If you are concerned about your mental health, one of the best ways to get help is to seek support. This can mean turning to a friend for support who may be able to direct you or ease your anxieties. Alternatively, you can discuss it with your GP or locate your nearest IAPT service:

[https://www.nhs.uk/Service-Search/Psychological%20therapies%20\(IAPT\)/LocationSearch/10008](https://www.nhs.uk/Service-Search/Psychological%20therapies%20(IAPT)/LocationSearch/10008)

**3. Ask twice**

Eminent research in this field tells us to ‘Ask Twice’. When you ask someone how they are, who you feel may not be doing well, often the answer is “I’m ok”, “I’m fine”. Research shows that asking someone twice allows them more opportunity to open up. And if they do, there are a few simple ways you can help:

- Listen and reflect, you may not have all the answers but just listening to someone can make all the difference.
- Ask questions, we often worry about interfering but asking someone how you can help, and what thoughts they are having shows that you care.
- Don’t try and fix it, it is instinctive to want to fix things, but that is not your job.
- Build your knowledge. As with any topic, having more knowledge on mental health will make you feel more comfortable discussing it, and this will make someone else more comfortable discussing it with you.

**4. Meditate**

Sam Harris is a neuroscientist, philosopher and best-selling author. For all those meditation sceptics out there, he has created an app called Waking Up and as he states “the purpose of meditation isn’t merely to reduce stress or to make you feel better in the moment, it is to make fundamental discoveries in the laboratory of your own mind”. It is scientifically proven to help your mental health, so give it a go!

**5. Exercise**

A simple but effective way to improve your mental health. It relieves stress, improves memory, helps you sleep better, and boosts your overall mood. Going for a run, or taking the dog out for a walk after a hard day at court often puts things in perspective.





**6. Start and end your own working day**

Life at the bar involves plenty of homework, it always has and probably always will! The 24/7 nature of email communication often results in over working. Perhaps operate a 'triage' system; if an email can be answered easily in a couple of minutes, respond straight away, otherwise flag it for later and concentrate on the task at hand, be it work or something else! Consider taking your work emails off your mobile phone. Have you ever found yourself checking your phone as you get into bed, noticing you've had an email and opening it to find a skeleton argument from an opponent in the trial you're doing or perhaps even draft directions from the judge? It's too late to draft a reply, but you can't resist a quick skim through it, ensuring of course that your mind is now racing, when you should be switching off. Taking your email off your mobile phone allows you to decide when to start and end your working day.

**7. Know when to say no**

Most barristers are expert at working to tight deadlines, often assimilating huge amounts of material under considerable pressure of time. It is important however to know when a task you are asked to complete is simply unrealistic. There is nothing professional about agreeing to work in circumstances where you cannot properly meet your obligations with the time and resources allowed.

**8. Connect with Wellbeing at the Bar**

Barristers inherently face very specific challenges on a daily basis and psychological wellbeing within our profession is rarely spoken about. [Wellbeingatthebar.org.uk](http://Wellbeingatthebar.org.uk) is there to support members of the bar, as well as clerks, staff and pupils, through difficulties that affect their professional life.