Positive mental health and wellbeing leads to positive life outcomes for staff and better results for your workplace. Staff who are mentally healthy have higher job satisfaction and self-esteem. They are more likely to be engaged with work tasks and the workplace, be more creative, make better decisions, problem-solve more efficiently and effectively, experience less stress and take fewer days off work.

The workplace can have a big influence on the mental health and wellbeing of staff while they are both present and away from work. One way of influencing the mental health and wellbeing of staff is by contributing to the following mental wellbeing component:

Positive Relationships and Social Support

This is measured in the WorkWell Staff Survey through the statement:

"I receive help and support from my co-workers, when I need it"

How positive relationships and social support contribute to mental health and wellbeing

Relationships provide a sense of belonging, purpose, and meaning. The quality of our relationships affects our feelings as well as how safe and secure we feel, at home, at work and in the community. Compromised relationships affect our ability to achieve our goals. Positive relationships are associated with healthier cardiovascular, immunological and neuro-endocrine responses.

Three aspects of relationships are:

Positive Relationships	Social Functioning	Social Supports
•Feeling close to others, feeling loved and cared for •Experiencing trust or empathy •Feeling respected or valued	•Actively being able to take part in society and contribute •Feeling accepted and part of a group	•Receiving help and support from others •Getting feedback •Having diverse social networks

How positive relationships and social support affects the workplace

Quality relationships in the workplace produce:

- Functional and productive teams
- Social support, including emotional and practical assistance when required

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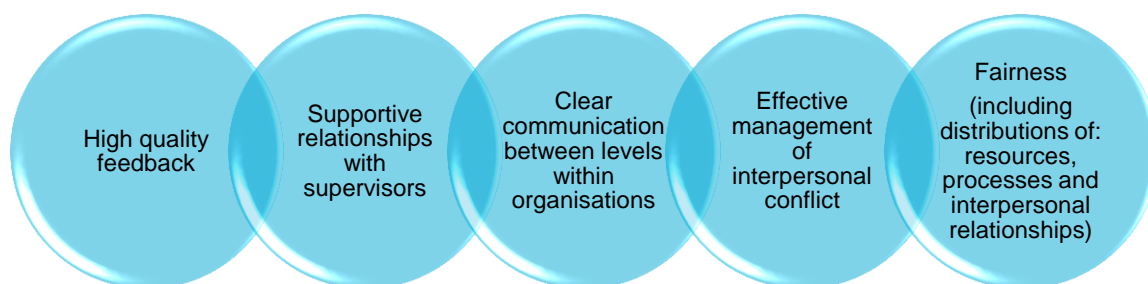
- Perceived support from the wider organisation
- Individual and group resilience
- A significant protective factor against mental health difficulties.

Poor emotional support and conflicted relationships contribute to:
- Job strain and stress
- Low social support
- Increased likelihood of mental health problems and prolonged sickness absence.

Things that affect social support and relationships, as well as provide a protective factor for mental health and wellbeing include:

High quality feedback	Supportive relationships with supervisors	Clear communication between levels within organisations	Effective management of interpersonal conflict	Fairness (including distributions of: resources, processes and interpersonal relationships)

Managers have a significant role in ensuring these processes are implemented. The support offered by managers is vital for all staff, but especially for those at risk of mental health problems.

The most frequently reported source of workplace problems and stress is interpersonal conflict. Conflict can indicate workplace bullying. Workplace bullying is associated with mental and physical health problems. Bullied staff can have lower levels of job satisfaction, experience higher levels of anxiety and depression. Bullying can affect not just the victim, but everyone else in the workplace.

Take action: ways to build positive relationships and social support in your workplace

Organisational
- There are systems in place for effective management of interpersonal conflict.
- There are support systems in place for staff, such as supervision, mentoring or a buddy system.
- Supervisors and managers form supportive relationships with their staff
- Managers actively seek to reduce stigma and discrimination around mental illness, encourage staff who struggle to seek help and support them through this.
- Managers are well supported and receive effective training so they are well equipped to provide feedback, form supportive relationships, manage interpersonal conflict and communicate effectively.
- There is a culture of treating all staff fairly.

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- The workplace makes staff feel valued, both formally and informally.
- Success and life milestones are celebrated in the workplace.
- There is an environment of respect amongst co-workers.
- There are clear policies and procedures to prevent and eliminate bullying, harassment and discrimination.

Environmental

- There is space for private conversations.
- The workplace environment encourages appropriate levels of fun and laughter.

Individual

- Staff get help, support and respect from co-workers.
- Staff can make good friends at work.
- Everyone contributes to the happiness and wellbeing of others.

Find out more

Open Minds
The Open Minds videos and electronic resources provide managers with practical tips to help with conversations about mental health in the workplace: www.mentalhealth.org.nz/open-minds

Working Well: A workplace guide to mental health
The guide is designed as a resource for human resources professionals, health and safety managers, occupational health and wellbeing professionals and business managers:
www.mentalhealth.org.nz/assets/Our-Work/Open-Minds/Working-Well-guide.pdf

Wellplace: How to build a healthy workplace
A healthy workplace has work practices and a health and safety culture that supports its people to stay well, both physically and mentally: www.wellplace.nz/ideas-and-advice/how-to-build-a-healthy-organisation/

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