

Press release

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Employers risk losing young talent unless mental health support starts from day one, MHFA England warns

New research reveals high stress, poor mental health, and quitting risk among 18 -24-year-olds as early-career pressures mount

- Nearly 43% of younger employees report high stress from feeling unable to speak up at work - almost double the rate of older colleagues
- One in three younger people has considered quitting because they do not feel safe at work
- 78% of young workers say poor psychological safety damages their motivation

More than one in four young employees say their mental health has been affected because they do not feel safe enough to speak up or ask for help at work. New MHFA England research, released ahead of Mental Health Awareness Week, reveals that too many 18-24-year-olds are not just struggling to get into work - they are struggling once they arrive.

18-24-year-olds are nearly eight times more likely than older colleagues to report poor mental health because of work. And almost one in three young workers (31%) has considered leaving their job due to a lack of psychological safety.

This comes at a time when many young people are struggling to get into the labour market. Youth unemployment among 16-24-year-olds is at [15.8%](#), up from 14.6% a year ago. [The British Chambers of Commerce](#) forecasts it could reach 17% this year, as factors such as rising labour costs and AI's impact on entry-level roles squeeze the graduate job market.

The consequences for employers extend beyond wellbeing alone. They create a retention, engagement, and management risk that falls disproportionately at the start

of working life. Almost a third of young people (29%) have avoided giving honest feedback to their manager - more than twice the rate of older colleagues. And 78% of young workers say a lack of psychological safety reduces their motivation, compared with 50% of older colleagues, the widest gap of any question in the survey.

The business case for acting is clear. Employers who build psychological safety from the start see stronger retention, better working relationships, and more honest, productive teams. With the Employment Rights Act currently being implemented, increasing employer accountability for workplace wellbeing, and the Keep Britain Working review highlighting the role of mental health in employment participation, there has never been a stronger policy case for getting this right from day one.

To tackle the issue, MHFA England is calling on employers to embed mental health support across the full employee lifecycle - from recruitment and onboarding, through day to day support and inclusion, to retention and return from leave.

Sarah McIntosh, Chief Executive, MHFA England and the Association of Mental Health First Aiders said:

“Young people don’t just need a route into work, they need workplaces that feel safe once they get there. When people cannot ask for help, speak honestly, or manage stress openly, employers lose the fresh-thinking that early-career talent brings. We simply cannot afford to lose more young people from the workplace. This Mental Health Awareness Week is about action, and that action should start from a young employee’s very first day.”

Francesca Coleman, Head of Programmes and Development at Student Minds said:

“This research serves as a vital prompt to have a more honest conversation about young people’s mental health as they enter the workplace. This further reinforces our own findings that success for a young person isn’t just about landing a job offer, but being emotionally and practically equipped to thrive once they are there. We know that too many graduates start employment feeling they must hide their true selves, often burdened by a ‘perceived need for perfection’ and a fear that being honest about their mental health will jeopardise their future.

We must move away from the narrative that high levels of pressure are an inevitable rite of passage and instead recognise our collective responsibility to create inclusive cultures where every young professional can thrive. We need to move beyond seeing success as just a job offer and start seeing it as a young person who feels equipped, emotionally and practically, to step into their next chapter.

The time for action is now - we need a joined-up approach between universities and employers to ensure that no student's mental health is the price of their professional transition."

Mental Health Awareness Week's 2026 theme is 'Action', a recognition that awareness alone is not enough. MHFA England is inviting organisations to [read its new Mental Health Awareness Week blog: Workplace mental health takes everyone - here's where to start](#). It sets out what action looks like across the full employee lifecycle, and includes free action tip sheets for employers, people managers, and employees.

ENDS

Notes to editors

For media enquiries, interviews, or images, contact media@mhfaengland.org.

About the research

- Unreleased research undertaken by OnePoll for MHFA England, December 2025–January 2026 – with a nationally representative sample of 2,000 working UK adults

About MHFA England

- MHFA England is a social enterprise and the national authority on mental health first aid in England – more information is available at mhfaengland.org
- Its purpose is to create mentally healthy workplaces where people, communities, and business thrive
- For nearly 20 years, it has delivered evidence-based mental health training and consultancy to more than 20,000 organisations across the UK
- To date, it has trained over one million people in mental health knowledge, awareness, and skills
- As a social enterprise, it reinvests its profits into providing quality mental health training to those who need it most, including the NHS and community groups supporting young people

