

Introduction

We have created this handbook as a reference tool for Pursers to promote the safety and welfare of seafarers, to create awareness, and help recognise behaviours and signs of crew struggling with mental health and to signpost them to professional assistance.

Fostering a company culture conducive to improving the mental health onboard, we have provided tools to assist the Purser to be able to incorporate policies and procedures assisting crew while they are in employment. To provide support for those who may be suffering from depression, mental or emotional abuse, harassment or struggling with life on board, or, life in general.

Away from home, possibly for the first time, across the ocean hundreds of miles out, crew may be feeling isolated vulnerable and alone. Wishing to fit in, but feeling like a complete outsider, there may be past issues and are seeking a new life away from all that ‘baggage’. And now, faced with crew who have solidified their ‘family relationship’ may lead to feelings of loneliness.

Wanting to be accepted may incorporate behaviours in which they are not comfortable participating in, but not wanting to feel left out, they join in; possibly leading to drug or alcohol intoxication. The euphoria they experience may be one of family acceptance, one they may not have felt before. Actions facilitating this acceptance could lead to a path of disorder, guilt, ambivalence, anger and many other feelings which may manifest into depression, suicidal thoughts, and behaviours of destruction.

The role of the Purser takes on many aspects of the administration hub on board and may include being the nominated Safeguarding Officer, ensuring the welfare of the crew. This booklet aims to provide tools to assist in this role.

How can we help?

Mental Health and Signposting

Mental health and emotional wellbeing have been pushed forward in society recently; however, it still retains a stigma which can make people feel afraid and ashamed to admit they are struggling. Mental illness costs businesses billions in lost production, recruitment and absence. National statistics in the UK have reported one in four people experience mental health issues at some point in their lives; therefore, it stands to reason that within the yachting industry, statistically crew may be affected too.

With crew living and working on board, sometimes in remote destinations, with onboard stressors such as chronic motion sickness, vibration, adverse weather, homesickness, poor communication and lack of internet connectivity, feelings of isolation, depression and anxiety can manifest. Coupled with perhaps peer pressure, toxic and or poor leadership, bullying, or harassment, it can make the working environment intolerable, potentially leading to an array of mental health conditions and at the extreme suicide.

As part of the MLC2006 amendments of 2019, care and attention included the possibility of harassment and bullying in the workplace. Investigations into any accidents or incidents resulting in injury or loss of life take into consideration physiological and, or, psychological problems created by the shipboard environment, problems arising from stress as well as other factors.

The UK Chamber of Shipping, Nautilus International and the National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers (RMT) has developed guidance for ships and shipowners to follow which has been recognised by MLC2006. These include:

- Promotion of the safety and welfare of seafarers
- To foster a company culture that is conducive to improving the mental health of seafarers.
- To ensure the importance of good mental health among company managers.
- To provide support for staff identified as having mental health problems.
- To increase awareness of potential signs of mental problems.
- To provide training for staff in having conversations with others about mental health.

There should be a policy on board for these procedures, including a designated person who will take responsibility for the system and ensure commitment from the management company. This person may very well be the Purser.

The UK Equality Act 2010 protects people against discrimination, which includes sexual harassment. Sexual harassment is defined as any unwanted sexual conduct which has the purpose of violating dignity, and creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating and, or offensive environment. To note, victims of this behavior may bring an employment tribunal claim against their employer, and or a court claim against their harasser.

The Equality Act 2010 has been amended late 2023, which will take effect from 26th October 2024. Not only must an employer provide a safe working environment for their workers, they are now under a positive duty to take reasonable steps to prevent sexual harassment. The prevention of sexual harassment doesn't just look at employees, but it also looks to outside sources, for us, on yachts, this means our guests onboard. Please note, this act applies to British crew, whose base is Great Britain, their contract invariably governed under British Employment Law, and expatriate crew who live and work abroad but have a strong connection with Great Britain (just holding a passport is not enough), i.e., holding a UK bank account where salary is paid into and tax is accounted for to HMRC. It could also apply to crew who is a citizen of GB, or of an EEA state and the legal relationship of the crew member's employment is located within GB. [The Equality & Human Rights Commission has produced a seven-step guidance](#), in summary and referenced:

1. *Develop an effective anti-harassment policy*
2. *Engage staff with regular one-to-ones and have an open door policy*
3. *Assess and mitigate risks in the workplace*
4. *Consider using a reporting system that allows workers to raise an issue anonymously or in name*
5. *Train staff on what sexual harassment in the workplace looks like, what to do if workers experience it and how to handle complaints*
6. *Act immediately when a harassment complaint is made*
7. *Treat harassment by a third-party just as seriously as that by a colleague*

As a Purser, you should make your crew aware of their rights and complaints procedures. It is vital that any crew member experiencing any bullying, harassment, sexual harassment or abuse, must have documented evidence, that can be in the form of a diary, witness statements, pictures, emails and messages.

Duty of Care

*Referenced: <https://www.acas.org.uk/employment-contracts-and-the-law/employer-and-employee-duties>

Employers have a duty of care to their employees, which means that they should take all steps reasonably possible to ensure their health, safety and wellbeing. *Your employer is the one stated on your SEA/Crew Contract.

Legally, employers must abide by relevant health & safety and employment law, as well as the common law of duty of care. They also have a moral and ethical obligation not to cause, or fail to prevent physical or psychological injury, and must fulfil their responsibilities concerning personal injury and negligence claims.

Requirements under an employer's duty of care are wide-ranging and may manifest themselves in many different ways, such as:

- Clearly defining jobs and undertaking risk assessments.
- Ensuring a safe work environment.
- Providing adequate training and feedback on performance.
- Ensuring that staff do not work excessive hours.
- Protecting staff from bullying or harassment, either from colleagues or third parties
- Protecting staff from discrimination
- Providing communication channels for employees to raise concerns
- Consulting employees on issues which concern them.

Safeguarding

A safeguarding policy onboard should set out procedures and protocols to follow and respond to any concerns regarding any safeguarding issues, such as harassment, bullying, physical abuse, self-harm, forced labour and human trafficking.

There are six principles of safeguarding which should form the context of the policy:

1. Empowerment – ensuring support, choice and control
2. Prevention – raising awareness, easily accessible information, encourage people to ask for help
3. Proportionality – respect of the individual to the level of involvement
4. Protection - providing a safe environment to work in
5. Partnership – forming partnerships with organisations
6. Accountability – everyone is accountable for their actions, establishing clear guidelines for reporting.

As Purser, you are in the prime position to become the designated safeguarding officer. Obtaining training in this is useful as well as instigating onboard training for all crew to understand what constitutes as harassment and, as a whole, create a standardised awareness that any form of abuse is not tolerated.

As part of the joining process for all new crew, the Purser should issue an onboard complaints procedure, and a copy must also be posted on the crew notice board for ease of reference. This procedure clearly outlines the protocol for the crew to make a complaint by first raising the issue with the HoD, then Captain, DPA and onto Flag State if needed. This procedure is sufficient for regular complaints, but what if the crew member has been sexually assaulted and feels ashamed, embarrassed or cannot talk to their HoD or Captain? It may even be that the HoD or Captain is the perpetrator. Knowing there is a designated person on board who is available to help and assist where possible is vital. As the Purser, having protocols and strategies to safeguard the participant's wellbeing setting clear guidelines to follow enables the crew member to have confidence in divulging personal and sensitive information. Have to hand a list of referral agencies, helplines and other sources of advice along with contact numbers, email addresses and relevant websites. (list below). If a crew member has been physically assaulted or raped, the person must be taken to a medical facility/hospital for an examination and a report issued, this can then be taken to the Police.

Yachts offering private health insurance may also include within their policy the availability of obtaining counselling, 24/7 assistance and the ability to provide emergency referrals, including evacuation, if this isn't included, then enquire as to the feasibility of adding it. The yacht may also be able to offer onboard Mental Health Awareness training for all crew, and crew should also be made aware of 24/7 support at Yachtcrewhelp.org provided by ISWAN, one of the significant Maritime charities.

Sexual assault, physical abuse, forced labour and human trafficking are criminal acts and may be taken directly to the local police/port authority. Human trafficking is different from prostitution, as these victims have not chosen that path. They may be underage or taken from their home. A prostitute is usually engaged on a one-to-one basis and is generally older. Someone who is trafficked is generally under the influence of drugs and or alcohol, frequently underage, and uncomfortable in their surroundings. If you suspect your owner or guests onboard are trafficking, inform your Captain immediately.

Contacts:

[Interpol](#) [Homeland security](#)

It may be difficult for a crew member to admit or report instances of abuse for many reasons, not least of which fear of losing their job. Part of crew training and awareness, the injured party, should be encouraged to make a journal of when and where any incident takes place. This journal may then form part of the chain of evidence, and if any witnesses are party to the assault, names should be included, and, if possible, a signature or agreement to testify if required obtained.

Harassment and assaults also occur from owners and guests; in these cases, it is vital to inform the Captain and make a written record of the event. As Purser, you may also encounter such situations, and the same should apply, inform your Captain and make a record of the event.

Building a cohesive, safe, honourable and trusted team takes work, dedication, communication and realisation of every persons' skills, strengths and personalities. Bullies, sexual predators, narcissists and sociopaths have no place within such a closed environment such as a yacht.

Purser's Role in Mental Health Onboard

Responsibilities of the Purser as Designated Person

- * Create a safeguarding policy, including investigations, grievance and disciplinary proceedings.
- * To create an induction process introducing new crew to the company culture of good mental health. As part of the onboarding procedure, a discussion around mental health will help to normalise these types of conversations should the need arise. The Yacht Crew Help contact details should also be included within the joining documents and a copy posted on the crew notice board.
- * Help to increase awareness of mental health to the crew by delivering or sourcing training.
- * Promote wellbeing and positivity onboard, encourage goal setting and personal challenges, organise and participate in onboard social activities, encourage new interests and skills to learn/follow at sea such as learning a language, music, book clubs, distance learning!

Purser's role in supporting another Designated Person

- * Assist in creating a safeguarding policy
- * Observe crew for signs or concerns
- * Source training and support
- * Arrange referrals (medical)
- * Keep records: absence, incidents, history
- * Support the designated person in ensuring their wellbeing when dealing with mental illness
- * Please refer to the SIGNPOSTING and template section for a comprehensive list of resources available to support you in all of these responsibilities.

Just to note it is a requirement to notify an Approved Doctor when the medical status of a seafarer has changed. Therefore, the seafarer should be encouraged to make an appointment with their General Practitioner, and or, Approved Doctor to determine this. It could be that there will be a restriction to duties, or the crew member may be declared temporarily unfit for duty, if this is the case, it should be made clear that their job is not in jeopardy.

Signs and Symptoms

*referenced: [Beyond Blue](#)

To help someone, it is crucial to recognise the signs and symptoms of someone struggling, and these can include:

- Any changes in mood or behaviour – aggressiveness, withdrawal, tearful, uncharacteristic risk-taking or recklessness, emotional outbursts.
- Inability to focus or make decisions - excessive tiredness, listlessness, mind blanks, worry
- Changes in their effectiveness at work
- Changes in eating habits – weight gain/loss
- Signs of excessive alcohol or drug use – drug use is not limited to illegal drugs.

If you notice possible signs or symptoms that someone may be struggling, it is helpful to understand some reasoning behind them, is it depression? Anxiety? Suicidal thoughts?

Here is a brief outline of some possible behaviours, and is by no means the full extent.

	Depression	Anxiety	Suicidal thoughts
Behaviours	Chronic fatigue Sleeping too much/too little Headaches Decreased sex drive Changes in bowel movement Irregular menstrual cycle Weight loss/gain	Increased alcohol/drugs Avoidance behaviours Provoking situations	Alcohol/drug misuse Withdrawal Stopping normal activities that were important previously Putting affairs in order Suicide notes Self-harming Emotional outbursts Mood swings
Feelings	Sadness Anxiety Guilt Anger Mood swings Hopelessness Worry Low self-esteem Isolated, unable to relate to others What is the point of life?	I can't do this Panic	Hopelessness Helplessness Worthlessness Shame Rejection Sadness Isolation Anger Disconnection Loneliness Trapped
Physical		Rapid heartbeat Breathlessness Sweating Dry mouth Nausea Stomach pains/cramp Diarrhoea Insomnia	
Psychological	Self-criticism Self-blame Pessimism Memory loss Impaired judgement Agitation Lack of personal hygiene Slow thoughts and movement	Feeling on edge Worry Indecisiveness Mind blanks Impatience Anger Confusion Poor concentration	

The most important thing when dealing with any sensitive issue is to create an environment of safety, allowing someone to open up, giving them the freedom to confide without any judgement or fear of repercussions. As Purser, you do not need to be a counsellor; your job is to assist someone in obtaining the right help, support and ensuring a safe working environment. If there is something that can be done onboard to eliminate or reduce the cause of the issue, then it should be actioned. However, if the situation is out of the remit that you and or the vessel can support, then professional assistance will be required.

Knowing where to point someone for professional help or information is essential.

Signposting

It may be that some one-to-one counselling will help, and thus avoid the need to take time off work. Counsellors can work remotely (see list below for other areas of support) so even while on a guest cruise or charter, the crew may access assistance via WhatsApp, Skype, phone or email.

There are some fantastic counsellors out there, do make sure that you conduct due diligence in choosing one. Firstly, they must be certified and qualified, check to see how long they have studied for, a good counsellor will have undergone years of training. Secondly, a professional counsellor should belong to a professional association and have a registration number or license. This will ensure accountability, held to professional standards of conduct. Registered counsellors often have to participate in ongoing education and professional development activities to maintain their credentials; this ensures they stay current with any advances in their field, which, in turn enhances their skills and knowledge.

Note* Some insurance companies will reimburse for counselling sessions, but, only if the counsellor is licensed.

Useful contacts

Yacht Crew Help

Providing free multilingual & confidential helpline for professional yacht crew 24/7 throughout the year.
Operated by ISWAN

<https://www.yachtcrewhelp.org/>
+44 203 713 7273

Maritime Wellbeing

An online programme for seafarers and ship managers to undertake some short, easy to deliver activities, which can be completed onboard. These are designed to promote the need for good physical and mental health, as well as providing practical tips, tools and strategies to boost individual wellbeing, as well as how to create a culture of care.

<http://www.maritimewellbeing.com>

Professional Yachting Association (PYA)

The voice of international yacht crew since 1991. The PYA is a non-profit association and exists primarily to represent the interests of professional yacht crew. Crew can stop by their office to discuss their issues in person.

PYA head office:
23, Rue de General d'Andresossy
06600 Antibes, France
Email: info@pya.org / advice@pya.org
welfare@pya.org
Phone: +33 (0) 493 349 116

Check the yacht insurance for coverage.

Nautilus International

Nautilus is an international independent trade union committed to 'protecting and respecting' its' members.

Email: enquiries@nautilusint.org
Phone: +44 (0) 20 8989 6677 (Head office)

Nautilus Fair Treatment App.

The Nautilus Fair Treatment App report function allows members to type notes on the incident, save images and even voice recording using the phone's microphone. All data can be stored offline on the phone for personal use.

<https://www.nautilusint.org/en/news-insight/news/nautilus-new-fair-treatment-app-is-a-friend-in-your-pocket-wherever-you-are-in-the-world/>

Useful contacts

Mission to Seafarers

Throughout a long and distinguished history, the Mission to Seafarers has grown to become one of the largest, global port-based welfare operators in the world, providing a service in and around 200 ports, 356 days a year and across 50 countries. The Mission offers social, emotional and spiritual support to seafarers on a one-to-one basis.

Head office: Seafarers Centre, Limassol
 Phone to the office: +357 256 600 08
 Phone to Chaplain: +357 995 391 44

Note that an office is looking to open in Palma, Mallorca

Mind

Providing advice and support to empower anyone experiencing a mental health problem

www.mind.org.uk

The Big White Wall

Big White Wall is currently the foremost provider of online mental health services and is regulated and approved by the Care Quality Commission. Now known as Togetherall

Togetherall

The Crew Mess

Offering a safe space for those experiencing and suffering from drug or alcohol issues. Manned and supported by a small team of ex/serving yacht crew along with industry professionals offer a free service to those in the industry who are at their lowest ebb.

The crew mess

If you are interested in learning more about suicide signs and prevention, the QPR Institute offer an online training course ‘to reduce suicidal behaviours and save lives by providing innovative, practical and proven suicide prevention training. The signs of crisis are all around us. We believe that quality education empowers all people, regardless of their background, to make a positive difference in the life of someone they know.’

<https://qprinstitute.com/>

[Seas the Mind](#), offers in classroom, or, online training in Mental Health First Aid, this is a fantastic course, taught by a yacht crew, therefore, completely understanding the struggles and challenges yacht crew face.

SELF CARE

If in your role as Purser, you find that you do have to take on some responsibility for the mental health of others, you must prioritise your mental health. You may be unused to having such conversations or feel uncomfortable in how to approach those. You may find dealing with reports or incidents triggering, and you may feel isolated in such a responsible role.

You, yourself may also find help within the resources listed and remember, it is ok not to be ok, so practice what you preach and reach out.

POLICY TEMPLATES AND BEST PRACTICE PROCEDURES

SEAFARERS' HEALTH RESOURCES:

Good mental health

[Yachtcrewhelp](#)

<https://www.seafarerhelp.org/en/health-well-being/seafarers-health-resources/good-mental-health>

[Psychological Wellbeing at Sea](#)

[Poster - Psychological First Aid](#)

<https://www.imeq-center.com/>

UK P&I have partnered with IMEQ for creation of an enhanced mental health support service. IMEQ provide a psychometrical online screening service for mental health assessments of seafarers in addition to immediate crisis response and counselling

Bullying and harassment

<https://www.seafarerhelp.org/en/help/bullying-and-harassment>

[Guidance On Eliminating Shipboard Harassment And Bullying](#)

[Best Practices Guide On Prevention Of Sexual Assault, And Harassment](#) Includes examples of company policies, complaint and investigation procedures

[Safeguarding Network](#)

[UK P&I Eliminating shipboard bullying & harassment](#)

Beyond Blue - [Bullying in the workplace](#)

ACAS (UK)

[Dealing with a problem raised by an employee](#)

[Challenging conversations and how to manage them](#)

Mental Health at Work

<https://www.mentalhealthatwork.org.uk/>

Support /Resources /Toolkits

[UK P&I Dealing with stress onboard](#)

Beyond Blue - [Suicide prevention](#)

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This document provides general information about mental health and related subjects. The information and other content provided, or any linked materials are not intended and should not be construed as medical advice, nor is the information a substitute for professional medical expertise or treatment.

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