



**Virtual peek into
the future of
mental health
support.**

Virtual peek into the future of mental health support.

We're at the forefront of the drive to help people who are experiencing mental health issues, so we're constantly seeking new ways of offering crucial support. Now, using state-of-the-art virtual reality (VR) technology, we're training our managers how to spot signs of depression and anxiety, and how best to approach people to offer support.

Background.

VR training has been introduced as part of our mental health awareness programme and has been developed by the company's technology experts.

Our course is designed to equip specialists in teams with the skills to spot when people are having episodes of depression or stress at work, have supportive conversations with them, and point them in the right direction for help and support.

Research has shown that 16 million people – a quarter of the population – experience a mental health problem each year, according to the Mental Health Foundation. Poor mental health costs employers between £33 billion and £42 billion a year, with an annual cost to the UK economy of between £74 billion and £99 billion.

Our VR course.

As part of the course, the trainee wears virtual reality goggles and becomes a fictional character called 'Dennis' - a father of two with a stressful and demanding job, who's also experiencing a difficult time at home. The character finds it difficult to function at work, get out of the car and go into the building, but none of this is obvious to his manager or team-mates.

Trainees are shown clips through the eyes of Dennis, of him being offered support in the workplace, and how best to sensitively talk to people who may be experiencing difficulties.

Virtual reality is a very useful tool as sometimes issues aren't fully understood when explained. Our VR training enables people to experience and understand what others may be going through first-hand and become more empathetic, whilst also making learning more fun.



Mental health awareness.

Providing a mental health awareness campaign for our people doesn't just help to support mental health at work but can also benefit family and friends at home. Identifying and tackling mental health problems early can stop issues escalating and improve the chances of recovery. Workplaces should have a part to play in supporting this movement.

We've showcased our mental health virtual reality educational programme to many of the country's major safety-critical employers, including the British Army, other water companies and at the National Health and Safety Executives conference. We've offered our footage, in which the viewer becomes the person suffering the ill-effects of negative mental health, to all companies for free.

- **Our virtual reality training course has helped us reduce work-related illness absence by more than 75 per cent in the last five years.**
- **We have more than 200 mental health first aiders across the business, and we offer free annual personal and confidential medical assessments for all our people.**