I talked about similar experiences that I had gone through. I helped him to see that what he was feeling was valid

I manage a team of people. When I started, I did not have any handover about any of the team members I manage. Not long after I took over the management of my team, it became apparent that one of my team members was struggling with his mental health. The breakdown of his relationship and other personal circumstances meant that he was beginning to experience feelings of anxiety and depression. He was finding work difficult, and trying to mask it by working from home. Although I did not know at the time, he'd had a previous absence for mental health issues. Initially the employee involved had just a few days off, but following his personal circumstances deteriorating, he was unable to return to work, and he was off with depression for nearly 6 months. The employee was able to return to work after working with a psychologist for a number of sessions, who he is still seeing.

When speaking to the employee involved, it was very important not to judge or give advice. Rather it was about listening, understanding and showing empathy. I talked about similar experiences that I had gone through. I helped him to see that what he was feeling was valid, and not unusual; that there was nothing fundamentally wrong with him, it was a normal thing to be going through. We talked through the fact that a physical illness can be easier to accept as there is a visible manifestation of that illness – but that he should not feel any guilt about leaving the house and going about his life. He was in danger of becoming socially isolated because of this guilt about being seen out and about while off sick, but this social isolation would have made his mental health even worse. I encouraged him through his time off to seek to address his personal circumstances and make decisions on areas of his life which would have a long term positive impact on his wellbeing. It was important to reinforce that he was off work for a valid reason, but that doesn't mean that life stops.

We decided to be open and transparent with the rest of the team members

With permission from the employee involved, we decided to be open and transparent with the rest of the team members. Initially, there was scepticism within the team as to how unwell the person was, and a lack of understanding. This kind of situation can lead to bad feeling in a team. They may feel resentment towards a person having time off, feel angered and lack empathy. It was explained that the person involved was going through a difficult time, and found it hard to deal with people. This led the team to feel softer and more understanding. Particularly with mental health issues, colleagues can think 'Are they at it?' By being open and explaining that he was waiting on support from Psychological Services, it made the rest of the team realise how serious the situation was and deepened their understanding. I encouraged the team to stay in touch with him, to text him regularly or invite him to any social events, to keep the communication with the team going.

We also had honest discussions within the team about how to manage the extra workload generated by the person's absence so that people were clear on how this would be dealt with – and what, realistically, could not get done.

A lot of working with people effectively is about listening to them and understanding their point of view

I made a decision to meet the employee on a weekly basis. This was not necessarily to discuss work. Rather, it was an opportunity to discuss his situation and feelings. While he was still at work, we booked a room to give us privacy, and once he was off work, we would go out for coffee.   I thought it was important that he had an outlet to discuss how he was feeling, as he did not have many other places to discuss those issues, as his referral to Psychological Services ended up being delayed by nearly 6 months. I made suggestions as to services he could follow up, such as Andy's Man Club or the Chaplaincy Service. Although he did not want to use these (as meeting new people made him feel anxious) he did read some of the books I suggested and follow some of the mental health media campaigns, and websites such as Moodjuice. I encouraged him to do his own research as this can help a person to realise that they are not alone. We did some reading together – such as the Lost Connections book – and discussed it together.

Now he is back at work back, the meetings are as and when he needs them. Sometimes it is just to give him a different perspective on a situation – for example, instead of taking a comment made by someone to heart, understanding that perhaps that person is just having a bad day.

My work experience is based on psychological approaches. A lot of working with people effectively is about is about listening to them and understanding their point of view. Often, you don't need to tell a person what to do – but encourage them to reach a decision to take a course of action, and allow them to come to their own conclusions. I have also accessed services to deal with work and family issues. My own experience of this has helped, as I have gone through a similar process. Through my own personal interest, I have read a lot about psychological therapies, such as Acceptance Commitment Therapy, Cognitive Behavioural Therapy, and Neuro-Linguistic Programming. I have applied this knowledge in a work context – such as recognising the importance of trust and transparency within a team. You can bring about team cohesion if you can talk openly about differences.