ABTC-DEI Mental Health & Wellbeing Toolkit



Image shows a cartoon grey cat relaxing, listening to calming music playing on a radio.



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Check out the DEI Working Group's other checklists and resources online under the <u>'News'</u> section of the ABTC website.

01 Introduction - ABTC Mental Health & Wellbeing Toolkit

The ABTC Mental Health and Wellbeing Toolkit is for informational purposes only and not a substitute for medical advice. If you are undergoing treatment or have any health concerns, please consult your GP or healthcare provider before following any guidance in this toolkit.

The ABTC Mental Health and Wellbeing Toolkit is a resource developed in response to recent findings from the ABTC DEI survey, which highlighted that more could be done to support practitioner well-being.

A significant number of respondents reported having a disability, with physical, long-term, and mental health conditions being the most commonly reported. This indicates the need for better support and accommodations, including reviewing support around mental health and promoting wellbeing across the sector.



Professionals in the animal behaviour and training sector face unique and complex challenges, with many individuals in this field vulnerable to high levels of burnout, often due to the demands of working on emotive animal cases. Practitioners frequently encounter cases involving difficult decisions and must balance the expectations of clients with the wellbeing of the animals they support. These emotionally charged situations can understandably be overwhelming and lead to feelings of stress.

This toolkit has been carefully put together to address these challenges, offering a variety of practical strategies and recommended resources for managing stress, enhancing resilience, and prioritising self-care. With dedicated sections on physical health, sleep, nutrition, mindfulness, peer networks and work and productivity, we aim to support practitioners' mental health and wellbeing and help promote a healthier, more inclusive environment for everyone in the sector.

We hope you find this guide helpful and welcome your feedback.

ABTC-DE1 Working Group

O2 Self-Care Practices



Self-care practices offer a proactive approach to managing stress, enhancing emotional resilience, and promoting overall mental health. Prioritising self-care can help you navigate life's challenges more effectively, reduce the risk of burnout, and help gain more balance. These practices, ranging from mindfulness and physical exercise to quality sleep and a healthy diet, can be tailored to individual needs, supporting mental clarity and emotional stability.

Here are some tips we have put together to help support your mental health and enhance your wellbeing.

02.1 Physical Health & Activity

Physical health and activity are valuable for mental health and wellbeing and can look very different depending on a person's abilities, preferences, and circumstances. Regular physical activity, adaptable movements, sensory-based activities, or even just being mindful of breath and rest can all:

- Improve mood
- Reduce stress
- Increase self-esteem
- Improve sleep quality
- Increase energy levels



The charity, <u>Rethink Mental Illness</u> have created their free guide, <u>the Physical Activity Pack</u>. Pooling together resources to help you to consider building activity into your daily routine. Scan the QR code to access rethink's website.



We have also outlined some tailored suggestions for alternative activities to enhance physical health:

- 1. Gentle Movements and Stretches. Such as seated exercises, stretching, or guided movement classes.
- 2. Breathing Exercises and Meditation. Mindful breathing exercises and meditation can help reduce stress, manage anxiety, and improve focus.
- 3.Sensory Stimulation and Environmental Engagement. Engaging with your surroundings in a way that's comfortable – through sensory stimulation, listening to music, enjoying fresh air, or feeling sunlight – can have a positive impact on mood and wellbeing.
- 4. Mindful Rest and Body Awareness. Learning to rest mindfully can be incredibly beneficial. Instead of focusing on any limitations, focus on what your body can do, building self-esteem and resilience.

O2.2 Nutrition



Taking care of your nutritional needs is not just about the food you eat, it is about supporting your overall wellbeing and developing a positive relationship with your body. Even small, sustainable changes can lead to meaningful improvements in how you feel physically and mentally. A balanced approach to nutrition is about creating a lifestyle that works for you, one that is sustainable, inclusive, and supportive of your individual needs and preferences.

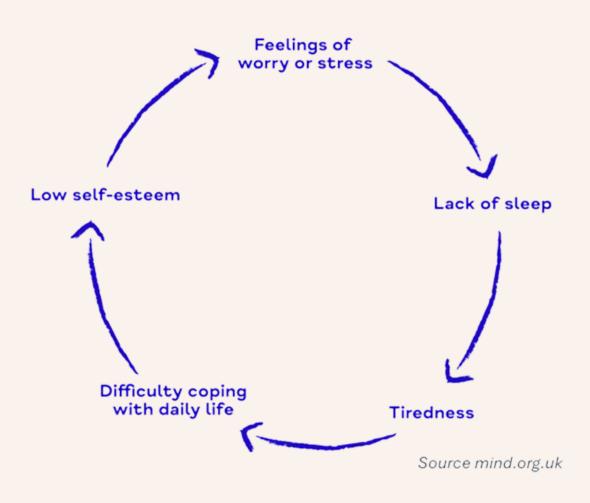
Trusting yourself to make food choices that feel good, without judgment, is essential. Tuning into your natural cues for hunger and fullness helps you respect your body's needs while fostering a sense of harmony with food.

Place focus on how foods make you feel rather than strict dietary rules. Allowing yourself to enjoy a variety of foods without guilt can be one of the most empowering changes you make. Flexibility and freedom around food encourage a sense of joy and connection, which are essential aspects of wellbeing.

02.3 Sleep



Sleep and mental health are closely connected, and as practitioners, we know the importance of quality rest and sleep for animals, and it is the same for humans. Mental health issues can disrupt your sleep quality, while insufficient sleep can negatively affect your mental wellbeing.



02.3 Sleep



Difficulties with sleep can vary from finding it hard to fall asleep, disturbed sleep, trouble waking up, or too much sleep, which could include sleeping at times when you want, or need, to be awake.

There are some great resources available, including support from the charity Mind and Wellbeing Glasgow, providing tips and suggestions for improving your sleep. Scan the QR codes to find out more.









02.4 Mindfulness & Meditation Techniques



Mindfulness is a skill you can develop that involves paying attention to the present moment without judgement. It encourages you to be aware of your thoughts, body, or surroundings. The goal of mindfulness is to help you:

- Increase self-awareness
- Feel calmer and reduce stress
- Gain better control over how you respond to your thoughts and emotions
- Manage difficult or negative thoughts
- Treat yourself with greater kindness

A few simple exercises to practice mindfulness could include visualisation, which involves picturing a safe, calming place in detail. Imagine yourself there, feeling relaxed and at peace, with sound awareness, drawing focus to your surrounding sounds without labelling them. Notice distant sounds, then shift to closer sounds as they come and go, bring your awareness to each one and let it drift away; and body scans, gradually bring attention to each body part, increasing physical awareness and releasing tension.

Why not try the 5-4-3-2-1 grounding technique. This is one of the easiest and most effective mindfulness strategies which can be done almost anywhere and at any time. Scan the QR code overleaf to view the video from Calm on the 5-4-3-2-1 technique.



02.4 Mindfulness & Meditation Techniques

- Name 5 things you can see
- Name 4 things you can hear
- Name 3 things you can feel
- Name 2 things you can smell
- Name 1 thing you can taste

To explore some of these in more detail along with different exercises such as meditation, mindful eating, or mindful movement, visit <u>Mindfulness exercises and tips</u>.





O3 Connection & Support Systems



Connection and support systems play a vital role in mental health, especially for practitioners who are working on their own. Having a support system can provide a sense of belonging and offer numerous benefits that promote emotional wellbeing, resilience, and recovery.

In this section are some ideas you might like to think about to strengthen your supportive network.

We would also encourage you to liaise with your practitioner organisation to learn more about their wellbeing services that are available to members.

O3.1 Support Network List



Create a dedicated space to list trusted individuals, such as friends, family members, or co-workers, who you can reach out to for emotional support, advice, or simply someone to talk to. Be sure to include their preferred contact methods, whether by phone, email, or other means, as well as the best times to connect with them.

To make the list more useful, consider organising it by relationship type, such as close family, friends, or colleagues, so you can easily identify who to approach depending on the situation. For your assurance it can be helpful to speak to each person to make sure they are comfortable to be included on your support network list.



03.2 ABTC Peer Support Options

There are lots of peer support groups and communities that meet online and in person. These offer a range of emotional, psychological, and social benefits, helping individuals who share similar experiences or challenges. There are also a number of ABTC member organisations that offer wellbeing services and peer support. For example, <u>APBC</u> members in the UK and Republic of Ireland can access their wellbeing service via https://wisdom.healthassured.org/login

| About your Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) Sometimes it can be difficult to balance the pressures of work and home life. Health Assured provide caring support to both you and your immediate family so you can give your best in life.* | | | | | |
|--|----------------------------------|--------------|-----------------------------------|------------|---------------------------------|
| What can I use this service for? | | | | | |
| | Family issues | £ | Financial information | Ē | Legal information |
| | Medical information | \heartsuit | Relationship advice | \bigcirc | Housing concerns |
| н | Alcohol or drug issues | 8 | Childcare support | P | Stress & anxiety |
| () | Low mood | (993) | Domestic abuse | ଝ୍ | Retirement |
| | Consumer issues | \square | Tax information | Ŷ | Bereavement |
| 24/7 confidential support Your call will be handled by an experienced therapist or advisor, who will offer support in a friendly, non-judgemental manner. | | | | | |
| - | Online health Webinars | por | tal: healthas: My Healthy | <u> </u> | Four-week |
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| | Financial wellbeing | Î | Medical factsheets | | Budgeting |
| Employee Assistance h a Stress & anxiety Debt Work Lifestyle addictions Relationships Legal FREE 24-hour confidential helpline 0800 028 0199 healthassuredeap.com Download My Healthy Advantage now Eventorial My Healthy Advantage now | | | | | |

or scan the QR code. Ensure you include the organisational code when using this service, available under your login for APBC members.



O3.2 ABTC Peer Support Options



Another example is ABTC member organisation, <u>PACT</u>. They provide <u>support for their members</u> with a range of resources and initiatives designed to foster connection, encourage self-care, and promote a healthy work-life balance.

Each month, a one hour group session is held. These are not recorded so the group feels confident to engage and share. Alongside this session Corrin and Tash from PACT record a discussion between themselves on themes that come up during these sessions.



Tash Maffioletti Ambassador for Wellbeing

> Tash is a Psychodynamic Therapist and will be joining the PACT Team as our ambassador for wellbeing to work along side our full members and students.

Tash will be using her knowledge and experience to guide confidential monthly support groups, where we hope that those attending can share experiences and feelings that may help to relieve stress and concerns, as well as members sharing moments of strength and techniques they have used to support others.

> Register your interest wellbeing@pact-dogs.com

Group Wellbeing Sessions DECC Contractor

The aim of the recordings is for those unable to attend or uncomfortable with the idea of sharing in a group environment will also have resources available to them. These are sometimes accompanied with blogs. Scan the QR code to learn more.



O3.2 ABTC Peer Support Options

For <u>Puppy School</u> practitioners, each member – whether tutor, associate tutor, or trainee – is carefully supported by a Regional Manager (RM), usually a 4–6:1 ratio. The RM's role is to build strong connections, monitor progress, and provide support as needed. For example this includes maintaining regular visits to classes to stay ahead of any changes or concerns, which may include mental health and wellbeing.

Puppy School has a close-knit team of 120 members, with 13 RMs to ensure ongoing support and guidance. Furthermore, one of their Regional Manager Team Leaders, has an HR background in the NHS, and they are available to provide additional professional advice when necessary.





O3.2 ABTC Peer Support Options



ABTC member organisation <u>TCBTS</u> also offers a friendly community for members to connect with their peers, including a private membersonly Facebook group. TCBTS holds regular Zoom chats for members to network, discuss cases and offer support to one another.

Another of our member organisations is BIAZA. They have put together a helpful collection of resources signposting to a range of support groups including but not limited to those focused on bereavement, baby loss, eating disorders, menopause, male-focused, and post-natal depression. Access **BIAZA's Mental** Health Signposting here or scan the QR code.







O3.2 ABTC Peer Support Options



ABTC member organisation APDT also provides support for their practitioners via a closed non-judgemental Facebook group. Here APDT members can post in confidence about anything that comes to mind. The struggles with mental health is among the topics often posted – peer support and knowing that you are not alone in feeling the way you do is very important.



APDT also run non-recorded, confidential support sessions for members online once per fortnight, alternating between a lunchtime or evening slot to try and capture people who work in different ways. To learn more about APDT and their support <u>click here</u> or scan the QR code.



03.3 Online Peer Support:



<u>Side by Side</u> run by the charity Mind, is an online peer support community where you can connect with others and talk about your mental health.



<u>TalkLife</u> connects you to people dealing with similar experiences as you.



The NHS service <u>'Support Hope and</u> <u>Recovery/Resources</u> Online Network (<u>SHaRON)'</u> provides safe, online peer support, 24 hours a day, anywhere.

In-Person Support:



The charity Chasing the Stigma have created their 'Hub of Hope' which lists services local to you. If you're looking for a peer support group in your area, check out what is listed on <u>Hub of Hope</u>.



03.4 Therapists



Looking for therapy can be daunting, yet it can be the best option in various situations and offer huge benefits to your well-being.

The charity Mind have put together a great resource to help in your search of therapy and discovering the route that might be best for you, including:

1.How to get free therapy on the NHS2.Free therapy from charities3.What happens at an assessment?4.Low-cost online counselling

5. Paying to see a private therapist

To learn more visit: <u>How to find therapy or</u> <u>counselling - Min</u>d or scan the QR code.







03.5 Domestic Abuse



As animal behaviourists or trainers, you may encounter situations where the welfare of both humans and animals is intertwined.

<u>Safeguarding Animal & Human Survivors of Sexual and</u> <u>Domestic Abuse (SAHSDA)</u> works to raise awareness and emphasise the importance of acknowledging these connections and acts to protect all survivors, regardless of species.

<u>SAHSDA</u> offers multiple paid courses and free resources which can help you learn how to effectively recognise and respond to disclosed or suspected abuse of humans or animals within your roles as pet professionals. Scan the QR code to access.





03.5 Domestic Abuse

Training for pet professionals

If you or someone you know is experiencing or escaping domestic abuse, numerous trauma-informed organisations provide specialised services to support both humans and animals:



Against domestic violence.



<u>National</u> <u>Domestic</u> <u>Abuse Helpline</u>

<u>Womens Aid</u> <u>Northern Ireland</u>

♀ ; Cymorth i Ferched Cymru Welsh Women's Aid <u>Welsh Women's</u> <u>Aid & Live Fear</u> <u>Free Helpline</u>















03.5 Domestic Abuse

Respect Men's advice line

0808 8010327

Our helpline for male victims of domestic abuse.

Phone: Mon-Fri 10am-8pm Email: Mon-Fri 9am-8pm Chat: Wednesday 10-11:30am and 2:30-4pm

<u>Respect</u> Men's <u>Advice Line</u>







<u>Galop_LGBT+</u> <u>anti-abuse</u> <u>charity</u>



<u>Scottish Women's</u> <u>Aid & Scotland's</u> <u>Domestic Abuse &</u> <u>Forced Marriage</u> <u>Helpline</u>





03.5 Domestic Abuse



RSPCA







SCOTTISH SPCA Scotland's Animal Welfare Charity Scottish SPCA







Northern Ireland Direct



O4 Work & Productivity Support



04.1 Work-Life Balance

Balancing work and personal life can be particularly challenging when working with animals and their owners, guardians, and keepers. You may often find yourself working evenings and weekends to accommodate your clients' schedules, which can be demanding. When you factor in the needs of your loved ones and your own animals, managing both professional and personal responsibilities can quickly become overwhelming.

Achieving a healthy work-life balance is essential for mental well-being, and implementing strategies to set clear boundaries plays a key role in this. Establishing designated work hours, having separate phone lines/emails, utilising virtual assistance services, or avoiding after-hours communication can help protect personal time.

Meanwhile, ensuring you take regular breaks throughout the day, where possible, can boost focus and reduce feelings of overwhelm.



Incorporating small moments for relaxation, such as a short walk or mindfulness exercise, prevents burnout by giving the brain a chance to reset.

Additionally, scheduling time for hobbies, exercise, and social connections ensures that personal priorities aren't neglected. By creating and maintaining professional boundaries, taking breaks, and making time for self-care, you can help strike a better work/life balance.

O4.2 Personal Safety & Lone Working

As part of your daily practices, you will already be assessing and managing risks, such as the likelihood of the dog being a bite risk. It is also important to consider external factors and ensure that when working alone, there is also some way you can be located.

Lone working can be defined as any situation, or location, in which someone works without close or direct supervision; without a colleague nearby or is out of sight or earshot of another person.



04.2 Personal Safety & Lone Working

Within your roles, it is likely that you wholly, or partly, participate in lone working practices, for example working in remote fields or barns or in community settings such as the clients' home. Lone workers can be vulnerable, and at increased risk of physical, or verbal, abuse, harassment or stalking, from animal or human clients and/or members of the public, simply because they don't have the immediate support of colleagues or security staff nearby.

There are many practical steps you can take to help improve your personal safety while working out and about. Please find some key examples below:

Conduct a robust risk assessment of the human, animal clients/others and the geographical working environment: This assessment should evaluate both the human and animal clients, as well as the geographical working environment. It should identify potential risks, who might be harmed, and practical measures to prevent injury. For example, dog bite risk is a danger you may face at work, which you may mitigate by being adequately trained to respond to, such as defensive handling, wearing protective clothing, carrying a first aid kit, and so on.

04.2 Personal Safety & Lone Working

You also need to think about how safe you feel with some of your human clients/others, as well as potential accidents that may occur at work (e.g.) holes dug in training field present a trip hazard so you would fill them in.

Where significant risk is identified, you may wish to consider operating in pairs where possible. You can find a free template risk register by <u>clicking here</u> or scan the QR code.

Lone Worker Policy: All organisations should have a lone worker policy, and you should have one if you employ staff who work alone, as you have a duty of care under the Health and Safety Act 1974 and the Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999. The policy should clarify roles and responsibilities, including the identification of those responsible for the effective implementation of identified control measures. Additionally, covering preventative measures, the policy should also state the actions that will be taken following incidents. The policy should be communicated to all lone working staff and anyone else who has a part to play, for example at inductions or team meetings.





04.2 Personal Safety & Lone Working

It is important to check that the policy is understood. Your policy may include systems like a buddy check-in/checkout procedure, encourage staff to use safety apps (e.g.) Hollie Guard, suggest carrying a personal safety alarm, and remind workers to keep their devices charged. All incidents or near-misses should be recorded and reported where necessary. Check out the Suzy Lamplugh Trust for a list of lone worker apps to support you. Or scan the QR codes to access both Hollie Guard and the Suzy Lamplugh Trust.







• Training: Comprehensive training is essential to ensure and safety of lone workers. the health Training should cover risk identification, conflict programmes resolution, emergency response, and maintaining personal wellbeing. Again, if you employ staff, this type of training is also essential for compliance with your Health and Safety Act responsibilities.



04.2 Personal Safety & Lone Working

Remember, it is essential to PLAN:

- Prepare
- Look confident
- Avoid risk
- Never assume it won't happen to you

Recommendation for Practitioner Terms & Conditions

We would also recommend that you include in your Terms & Conditions a section on client disclosure of information to reduce risk to yourself and others. See example wording overleaf...



By engaging the services of [Practitioner's Name], the Client agrees that all information provided regarding their animal's behaviour, history, and any relevant circumstances is truthful, accurate, and complete to the best of their knowledge. The Client acknowledges that withholding, misrepresenting, or failing to disclose pertinent details, such as previous aggression, medical conditions, or behavioural concerns, may pose a significant risk to the safety of the practitioner, the Client, the animal, and others.

Under the Animal Welfare Act 2006, all animal owners and keepers have a legal duty of care to ensure the welfare of their animals and to prevent harm to others. In the case of dogs, the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991 and related legislation impose additional responsibilities to prevent a dog from being dangerously out of control.

Failure to provide full and honest disclosure may result in the immediate termination of services without refund, and [Practitioner's Name] shall not be held liable for any consequences arising from such omissions.

The Client accepts full responsibility for any legal repercussions that may arise from undisclosed behavioural issues or other relevant factors.





04.3 Time Management & Organisation

Simple strategies like creating 'to-do' lists help you keep track of tasks and break them into manageable steps.

Prioritisation techniques, such as ranking tasks based on their value or impact allow you to prioritise work effectively and focus on what is important and urgent, ensuring essential tasks stay on-track.

Time-blocking is another powerful tool, helping you dedicate specific chunks of your day to focused work, reducing distractions and multitasking.

By structuring your time and tasks, you can stay organised, maintain focus, and achieve more with less stress. Another way to boost self-esteem is to set aside a few minutes at the end of the day or week to 'bank' any achievements.

Recording any 'wins' means you can then reflect on these when you want, which can help maintain motivation. These wins are whatever are meaningful to you, such as writing and publishing a blog post, gaining a new client, getting a positive review, finishing a chapter of a book, or having a longawaited cuppa with a friend.



04.4 Anxiety Management

Managing anxiety at work involves a combination of proactive strategies and self-care practices to maintain balance and productivity.

Start by identifying triggers that cause stress, so you can then develop practical ways to address them. Triggers will differ for all; for some it might be tight deadlines, interpersonal conflicts, or daily hassles such as running late or overwhelming workloads.

The organisation <u>EveryMind at Work</u> has created a free resource full of strategies you can use to effectively manage anxiety. Scan the QR code to access.

everymind (C) at work



04.5 Imposter Syndrome

Continuously enhancing skills by staying informed about the latest research, techniques, and treatments means you can provide exceptional care to your clients and their animals. However, despite these efforts, many people can face a crisis of confidence and this can lead to feelings of imposter syndrome.

Imposter syndrome affects approximately 70% of the global population and can manifest as anxiety, depression, and burnout. Although research is limited relating specifically to animal trainers and behaviourists, data relating to veterinary professionals shows that 86% of respondents reported experiencing imposter syndrome at some point in their careers.

This prevalence is thought to be due to the demanding and high-stress nature of the job and the high standards set for themselves. Given the fact that working within the animal training and behaviour sector requires high levels of empathy, key decisions must be made with little room for failure, and practitioners often face challenging situations (such as the animal has caused harm/been harmed, etc.), it stands to reason that animal professionals are a probable high-risk group for developing feelings of imposterism.

04.5 Imposter Syndrome

Even though imposter syndrome is not a recognised mental health disorder, it severely affects people's wellbeing. It can cause high achievers to mistrust their skills, experience persistent feelings of inadequacy, and limit their potential for growth and success. Self-doubt can lead people to shy away from new challenges, avoid sharing expertise, or even decline opportunities for progression due to fear of ridicule or failure. If you have ever doubted yourself, feel you lack

self confidence or you would simply like learn more about this psychological phenomenon then see the free resource from the <u>University of Edinburgh</u> - scan the QR code to access.

Also, check out the Imposter Syndrome for Animal Professionals course. This aims to help you understand different strategies for recognising and managing imposter syndrome, as well as practical ways to handle and reduce feelings of imposterism. ABTC registered practitioners receive 20% off with the code ABTC20.

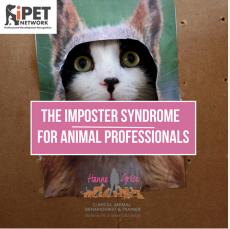
Scan the QR code to learn more.







THE UNIVERSITY of EDINBURGH



05 Mental Health Education



Greater mental health awareness improves your ability to identify stressors and gives you greater control over your own wellbeing.

Mental health education can equip you with strategies to cope with workplace stress, strengthen resilience, and enhance performance. Understanding the range and complexities of mental health issues, can help in readily identifying when we and others need support, and develop greater confidence to guide others towards the appropriate resources or organisations. To access free resources, see below and scan the QR codes.





EveryMind at Work: Offers a host of free wellbeing resources, webinars and live sessions to support you. They also run a free <u>Mental Health</u> <u>Champion course</u> which equips you with the tools to support yourself and others.





<u>MHFA England:</u> MHFA England offers a selection of free mental health resources including toolkits, guidance, posters, podcasts and more. They also provide mental health tips and resources for those working remotely, check out their <u>Remote Working resources</u> <u>here.</u>

<u>Supporting your mental</u> <u>health while working</u> <u>from home.</u>







St Johns Ambulance: The organisation has created resources to provide information on how to create and maintain a supportive workplace, providing top tips on feeling physically and mentally well.

06 Further Advice & Support

St John Ambulance has compiled a comprehensive directory of organisations that offer mental wellbeing support. Whether you are looking for general advice or need more tailored guidance, this free resource is an excellent starting point.

Managing wellbeing for remote workers

Find all organisations which offer mental health advice and support along with their contact details here or scan the QR code. <u>Click here</u> to find all organisations which offer mental health advice and support.









The ABTC-DEI Working Group developed this Mental Health and Wellbeing Toolkit as part of our ongoing commitment to supporting practitioner well-being, following feedback from the recent ABTC DEI survey.

A significant number of respondents reported having a disability, with physical, long-term, and mental health conditions being the most commonly noted. This indicates the need for better support and accommodations, including reviewing support around mental health and promoting well-being across the sector.

Recently, the ABTC launched a <u>British Sign Language service</u> in conjunction with Interpreters Live to better support deaf practitioners and clients, reflecting our commitment to inclusivity.

We would encourage all ABTC practitioners to learn more about this service, and consider including the BSL logo on their website/socials if they would like to promote this service to their clients and potential clients. Scan the QR code to learn more about this service.







We hope this toolkit serves as a valuable resource for providing some tips and pointers for where to gain further support for your mental health and wellbeing.

Your feedback and recommendations are welcome as we continue to explore ways to support you better. You can contact us via email at <u>info@abtc.org.uk</u>.

Together, we can create a more inclusive and supportive environment, making wellbeing a priority for all.

ABTC-DE1 Working Group





ANIMAL BEHAVIOUR & TRAINING COUNCIL

Promoting Excellence in Animal Behaviour and Training

www.abtc.org.uk