

**GUIDANCE FOR MANAGERS: MANAGING STRESS**

**WHAT IS STRESS?**

People often get confused about the difference between pressure and stress. We all experience pressure regularly – it creates a ‘buzz’ that can motivate us to perform at our best. ‘Stress’ itself is not a medical condition; it is clearly distinct from pressure and is defined as 'the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressure or other types of demand placed on them*’*. It is when we experience too much pressure and feel unable to cope that stress can result.

The pressures of working life can lead to stress if they are excessive or long term. Causes of stress at work include excessive workload, inadequate training, a lack of control or autonomy and poor working relationships.

Stress is a very individual thing. A situation or set of demands which stresses one person may not stress another person and vice versa. Also, a set of demands or pressures which cause a person stress at one point in their life may not cause stress at another point – often because they will have developed the resources to handle the future pressures effectively.

**RECOGNISING THE SIGNS**

**Here are some of the potential symptoms that you may experience if you’re beginning to suffer with stress:**

• Mood swings

• Headaches or migraines

• Outburst of temper

• Sleeplessness

• Difficulty concentrating

• Anxiety

• Low energy levels

Persistent debilitating stress may also lead to high blood pressure, a lowered immune system, heart disease, exhaustion, depression and other mental health problems. The key is to try to turn stressful thoughts that make us feel overwhelmed and disempowered into positive action.

**Common workplace factors that can contribute to stress at work:**

• Excessive workload

• Responsibility without authority

• Insufficient opportunities for participation

• Lack of managerial support

• Poor work relationships with colleagues or manager

• Personality conflicts

• Bullying, harassment or discrimination

• Poor communications

• Continual or rapid change

• Insufficient training

• Lack of job security

• Frustrated career development

**YOUR PERSONALITY AND STRESS**

Two people can be faced with an identical situation and one person will experience stress whilst another may not. It is all down to how the person will perceive the situation, which may be due to their personality and how they approach problems. Research has shown that the people who are more likely to experience stress are those who can identify with some or all of the following:

• Have perfectionist tendencies

• Are highly impatient

• Always have to be right

• Blame themselves or others for everything that goes wrong

• Seek constant recognition for what they do

• Feel they have to do everything themselves

• Get upset over important tasks

• Worry about possible misfortune

**PREVENTING AND COPING WITH STRESS**

Try and turn stressful thoughts that make us feel overwhelmed and disempowered into positive action. By embracing stress, and using it to motivate us to succeed, it can help us achieve great things and move forward in life. Turning negative stress into positive action by:

**Managing your day -** Make a list of the things you have to do and do the more urgent ones first. Vary dull jobs with interesting ones. Don’t try to do too many things at once – this can lead to mistakes.

**Relaxing -** Take time to pause and relax. Eat healthily and drink plenty of water. Go for a walk.

**Thinking about your achievements -** Reflect on your day and what you did well. Stop worrying about what still needs to be done, focus on what you have done.

**Accepting what you can’t change** - You can’t always change things, so focus on activities that allow you the option to influence things. Avoid getting frustrated – and taking this out on others.

Stress can actually play a positive role in our lives. Having challenging goals that make us stretch outside of our normal comfort zone can assist in motivating us and allowing us to achieve good delivery. We will all suffer some degree of stress, but we have to make sure it does not take over or start to control our life. Don’t keep your feelings to yourself. You should talk to your line manager or Human Resources for advice and support. Your line manager can only help to improve the situation if they know about it.

**ABSENCE**

Line managers should maintain reasonable contact with staff during the course of their absence. It may be appropriate for a line manager to arrange a home visit to discuss how we can help an individual get better; this is often with HR present to offer additional assistance.

An immediate referral to our occupational health provider will be made where stress is given as the reason for absence. It is therefore important that line managers contact HR as soon as possible where they become aware of such sickness absences. The employee may need to attend an appointment with occupational health. Occupational Health may ask the employee for permission to obtain a report from their doctor. A report will then be provided to HR with the objective of providing both HR and the line manager with sufficient medical information to enable a decision to be made as to how to proceed (what amounts to sufficient medical information will depend on the circumstances of each case).

The University may conduct a stress risk assessment to help identify what the stressors are where these relate to work. The University can then work with you where practicable to minimise these effects and make any reasonable adjustments.