

Stress Support

A Guide For Employees And Employers



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What can cause stress at work?

Various factors can affect stress levels at work, but HSE (Health and Safety Executive) suggest six main areas that can cause stress levels to increase at work. These are relationships, work demands, support, control, change and role.

Employees may feel:

- Relationships with work colleagues or managers are not positive ones and are causing them distress.
- The demands of their job are too much for them to cope with or keep up with.
- They are not being adequately supported with their job role to enable them to fulfil their duties.
- They are not able to carry out their role effectively due to being unable to control how they do this.
- Change happens too often or not enough within their workplace, changes are not communicated well or they are not consulted before change happens/ about changes needed.
- Their role is difficult to understand or not made clear to them.



What external factors can increase stress levels?

There are many factors outside of the workplace that can affect stress levels.

Currently we are facing worries or anxieties that we may have never experienced in our lifetimes before, such as the Covid pandemic, the crisis in Ukraine and the cost of living rising dramatically.

If you feel you need some 'time out' from hearing about these issues then consider limiting the news and be careful what you take in.

Only consider information on reputable news sites and ignore posts on social media that are simply people's opinion or from sites that are less well known.

Perhaps choose a specific time to check the news rather than viewing it several times per day and if you are finding having too much information overwhelming, limit social media use and 'mute' trigger words.

You could also write down your worries and anxious thoughts in a notebook.

This will allow yourself time to get these thoughts out of your head and you can even set a timer to allow you to focus on these for a set amount of time, before closing your book and trying to focus on something else.

How can stress affect us?

"Stress affects everyone in different ways and we all have different tolerance levels; Some of us may be more susceptible to feeling stressed due to certain factors which may include age, mental health, skills and experience and disabilities." HSE outlines the below:

"Signs of stress in teams"

There may be signs of stress in a team, like:

- Arguments
- Higher staff turnover
- More reports of stress
- More sickness absence
- Decreased performance
- More complaints and grievances

"Signs of stress in a worker"

A change in the way someone acts can be a sign of stress, for example they may:

- Withdrawing – they might not be as talkative or communicative in meetings, appearing distant or short over message/ emails/ phone calls
- Take more time off
- Arrive for work later
- Be more twitchy or nervous

A change in the way someone thinks or feels can also be a sign of stress, for example:

- Mood swings
 - Being withdrawn
 - Loss of motivation, commitment and confidence
 - Increased emotional reactions – being more tearful, sensitive or aggressive"
- [1]

As an employee, what can I do if I feel stressed?

The first thing to do is to acknowledge how you are feeling. You may find you are having negative thoughts, find it harder to make decisions, you may feel isolated, nervous or anxious and feel unable to concentrate on your work role. Remind yourself that there are steps you can take to try and reduce your stress levels:

- Talk to someone – Talking to your manager is really important if you are feeling stressed and the sooner you do this, the better, so that you can work together to stop the situation from escalating. If you feel your manager could be a contributing factor to your stress levels, then access your workplace policies and procedures to see who else you can discuss this with. It might be that you can talk to someone else within your workplace such as a HR department, a pastoral lead or another manager, or you may wish to talk to a union representative or ACAS (see resource list for more information on ACAS).
- Discuss with your tutor – we can facilitate a discussion during a formal review with us, you and your manager if you would like us to.
- If you feel you need to talk to a healthcare professional, then make an appointment with your GP. They will listen to your concerns and offer you help and advice.
- You could also access your workplace's occupational health or employee assistance programme if there is one available.
- Complete a 'Wellness Action Plan' and share this with your manager. This helps you to map out what causes you stress and what helps keep you mentally well. See our resource section for a link to the template.

Stress buster and self-help

There are steps you can take to try and relieve stress levels, and there are also actions to avoid.

Avoid unhealthy coping mechanisms such as smoking more, drinking more alcohol or turning to other substances. Instead, try to increase the amount of exercise you are doing each day as this can help relieve stress, along with healthy eating, connecting with others and having some 'me' time. See the NHS resource at the end of this guide for 10 stress busters and helpful audio guides.

Mindfulness and meditation can also help you to feel calm and focus on the here and now, rather than worrying about things that may not happen. It can help you feel more prepared to deal with stressful situations. There are many different forms of mindfulness, but one example is mindful meditation:

"This involves sitting quietly to focus on your breathing, thoughts, sensations in your body or things you can sense around you. Try to bring your attention back to the present if your mind starts to wander. Many people also find that yoga helps them to concentrate on their breathing and focus on the present moment." – Mind Mental Health Charity [2]. You can find videos for guided meditations in our resource section.

As a manager, what can I do to help an employee who is stressed?

Employers are required to assess the risks to employees from stress and share this with all employees. HSE provide a template stress risk assessment if this is required and we have provided a link to this in the resource section of this guide.

Another proactive step is to introduce 'Wellness Action plans' for all team members who wish to have one.

These are not just for people who are feeling stressed, we should promote that all team members have one in place, so that their managers are able to identify what to do should they become stressed or have a change in their mental wellbeing.

Mind, the mental health charity, have created a template to use and this is available in the resource section of this booklet.

There are steps you can take if you start to notice changes or become concerned about a member of your team:

- Talk openly and honestly with your team member – ensure you choose the right environment for this discussion; Find a quiet, confidential and relaxed space for this discussion and hold the chat in an informal and relaxed way. Let your employee know why you are concerned and ask them open ended questions as to how they are, how they are finding things at work and ask them if there is anything in particular causing their stress levels to rise in the workplace? Demonstrate active listening and try not to interrupt until the team member has finished talking.

As a manager, what can I do to help an employee who is stressed? Continued.

- Have regular discussions during 1-1s about their wellbeing to keep an eye on the situation, so that you are able to step in when needed to support. You may wish to increase the frequency of 1-1s if you are concerned about a team member.
- Provide mediation where needed, if your team member is having difficulties with another colleague. You can plan in regular team building activities for the whole team once the situation is resolved to try and maintain positive working relationships.
- Be open to your team member's feedback about your management and communication style and consider any reasonable changes you may be able to make to resolve the situation.
- Access HSE's 'Stress Talking Toolkits' – See our resource section for the link to these. There are a range of toolkits which can be used by line managers or team leaders, senior managers, HR and occupational health providers.

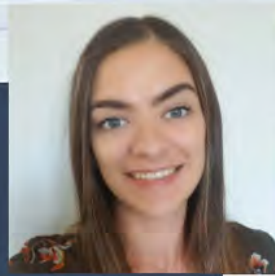
Safeguarding and Welfare within MBKB

MBKB have a dedicated safeguarding and welfare team to support our apprentices and employers. You can contact us on the phone numbers below or email us at welfare@mbkbgroup.com.

Safeguarding Team



**Designated
Safeguarding Lead**
Katie Biggs
Tel: 07940353947



**Deputy Designated
Safeguarding Lead**
Danni Northall
Tel: 07957220374



**Deputy Designated
Safeguarding Lead**
Julie Fellows
Tel: 07432315672

For further support, you can also access MBKB's wellbeing handbook which can be found on all of our apprentice's Smart Assessor portfolios.

You can access this by going to your dashboard and clicking on the blue wellbeing tile.

Resources and References

- [Health and Safety Executive \(HSE\)](#) – information on stress and mental health at work
- [ACAS](#) - an independent public body who offer free and impartial advice to employees and employers with the aim of improving workplace relationships.
- [NHS](#) - This link gives you 10 tips for busting stress, plus audio guides on how to replace negative thoughts with positive thinking and how to get a better night's sleep.
- [Template Stress Risk Assessment](#).
- Mind - [Wellness Action Plan Template](#) - a proactive tool for all team members.
- Guided Meditation Videos - <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UChSpME3QaSFAWK8Hpmg-Dyw>

References

[1] - <https://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/>

[2] - <https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/drugs-and-treatments/mindfulness/mindfulness-exercises-tips/>

