



**COLLABORATION IN ACTION**  
**LUPC & SUPC CONFERENCE 2021**

20 May 2021

## **LUPC & SUPC CONFERENCE**

Session 4 - Mental Health: Supporting  
Ourselves & Our Communities



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## Where are we now?

- Coronavirus has fuelled feelings of loneliness, anxiety and fears for the future for many people.
- Mental health problems have worsened across all age groups.
- Around 1 in 5 (21%) adults experienced some form of depression in early 2021 (27 January to 7 March); this is an increase since November 2020 (19%) and more than double that observed before the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic (10%).

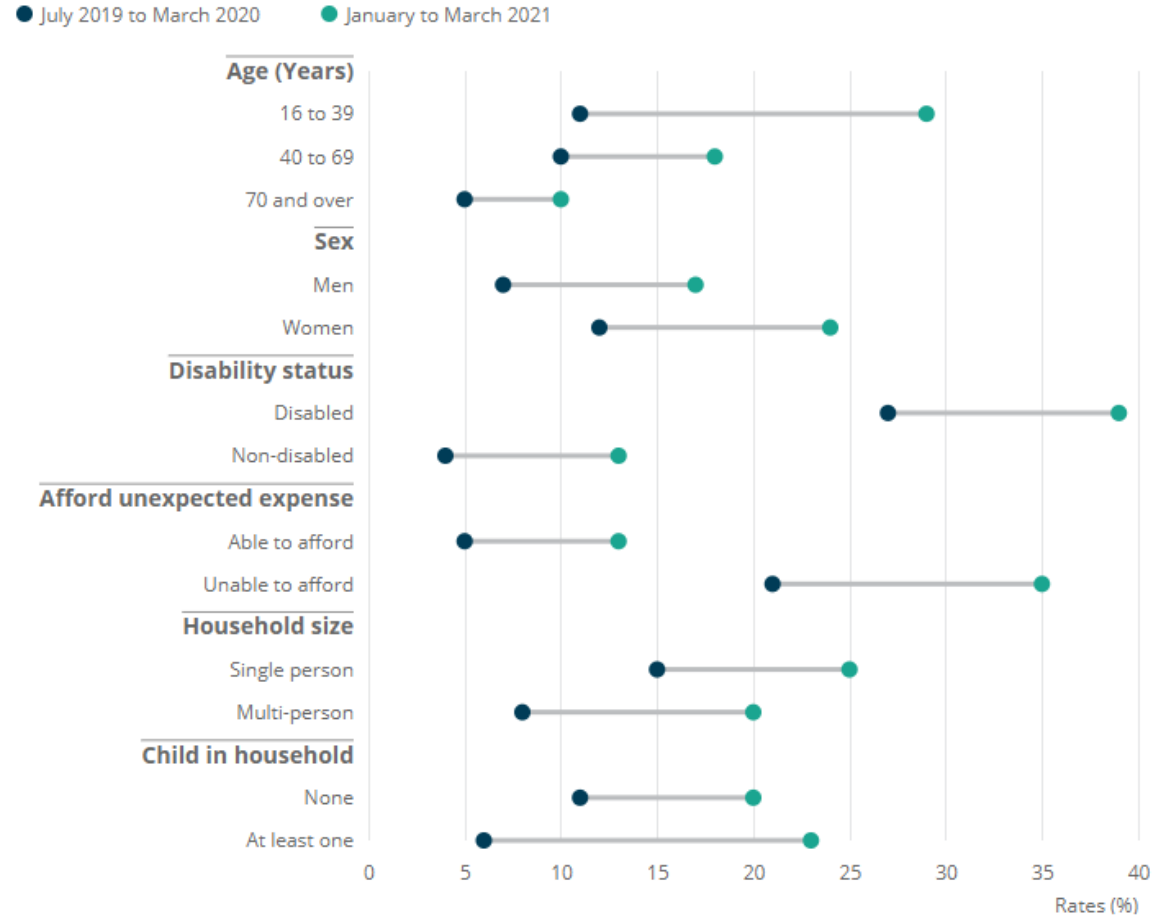
Source: Office for National Statistics:

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/wellbeing/articles/coronavirusanddepressioninadultsgreatbritain/januarytomarch2021>



**Figure 2: In early 2021, rates of depressive symptoms for adults aged 16 to 39 years were more than double when compared with before the pandemic**

Great Britain, July 2019 to March 2021



Source: Office for National Statistics:  
<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/wellbeing/articles/coronavirusanddepressioninadultsgreatbritain/januarytomarch2021>



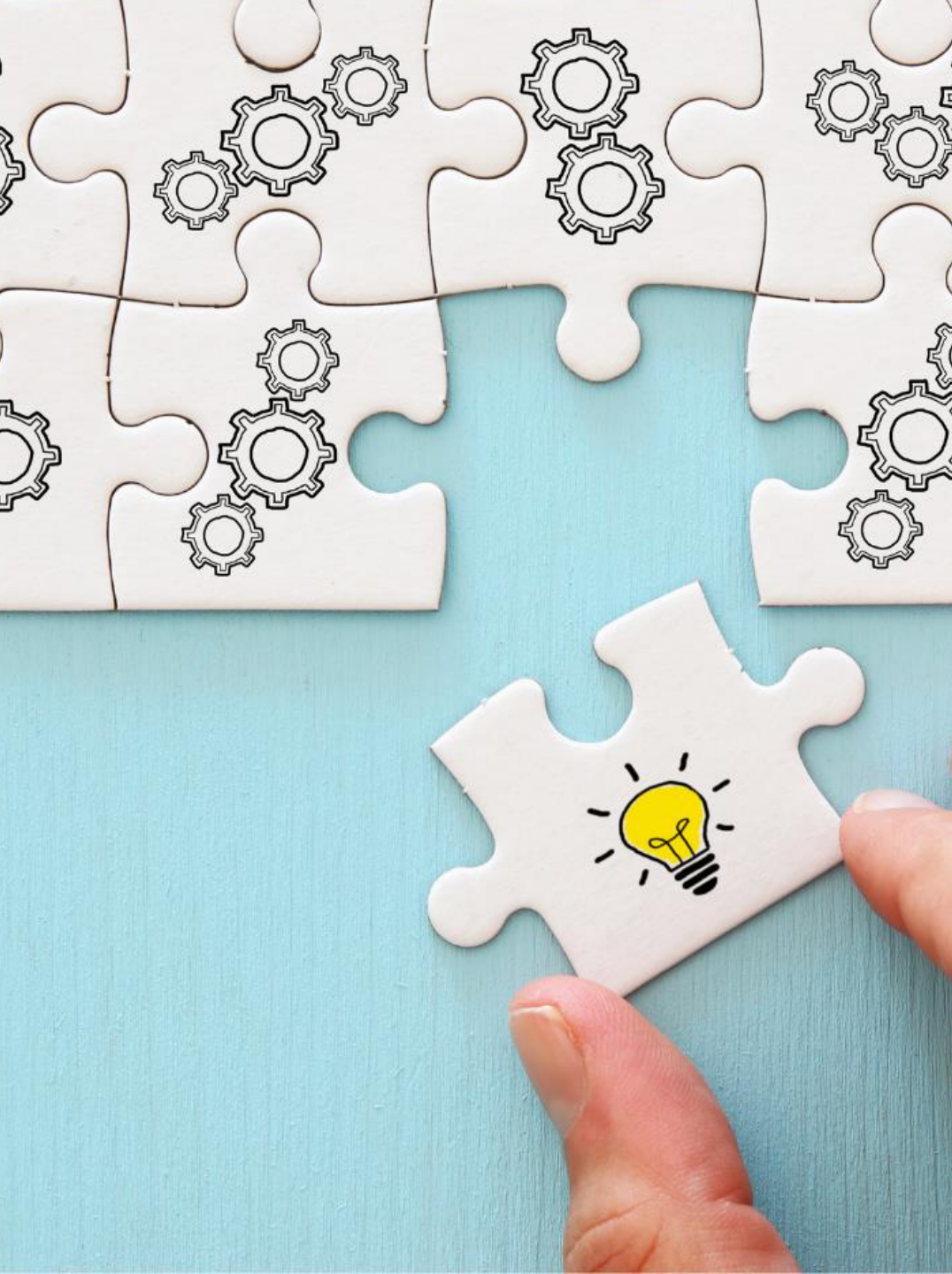
# Signals of the growing importance of mental health

- UUK Stepchange: Mentally Healthy Universities Framework (<https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/policy-and-analysis/reports/Pages/stepchange-mhu.aspx>)
- £500 million investment to support Mental Health Recovery Action Plan (March 2021) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/mental-health-recovery-plan-backed-by-500-million>)
- Mental Health First Aid Training



## Attendee poll:

How would you rate the way your university/organisation has supported staff mental health over the last year?



# Resources

## Samaritans

<https://www.samaritans.org/>

## NHS Counselling Services

<https://www.nhs.uk/mental-health/talking-therapies-medicine-treatments/talking-therapies-and-counselling/counselling/>

## Mental Health First Aid

<https://mhfaengland.org/individuals/>

<https://mhfaengland.org/individuals/higher-education/>

## Find a Therapist (British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy)

<https://www.nhs.uk/mental-health/talking-therapies-medicine-treatments/talking-therapies-and-counselling/counselling/>

# Health and Wellbeing Healthy Home Working: an overview for managers



The Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 sets out that it is an employer's duty to protect the health, safety and welfare of their employees and other people who might be affected by their business. Employers must do whatever is reasonably practicable to achieve this.

As a manager you have a duty of care to those who report to you. Part of that duty is to:

- Maintain your understanding of health and wellbeing and how that affects performance.
- Provide an open, safe and supportive working environment.

*Managing a remote team requires a unique way of working and poses different challenges for those who are usually office-based. Here are some top tips to help you manage a dispersed team.*

Your role as Line Manager is key.

The Health and Safety (Display Screen Equipment) Regulations 1992 apply to home workers as well as those who are office-based and state that home workstation assessments are required for long-term home workers, but not for those working at home temporarily. There are some ways to support your temporary workers:

## Things to consider

- ❖ Have your home workers do, or repeat, a simple self assessment checklist. Use your organisation's standard form or the template available from the Health & Safety Executive.
- ❖ As a home working set-up may not be quite as ergonomic as the office, employees are encouraged to take frequent micro breaks, more often than normal.
- ❖ Stretch and mobilise around the home as often as possible.
- ❖ Consider each request for equipment on its own merit to make a business decision on provision.
- ❖ Talk to your HR or refer to Occupational Health for guidance if required.



## Communication

Remote workers lose the benefits of the volume and speed of information transfer that occur in a close working environment.

- ❖ Keep in contact more frequently than you normally would.
- ❖ Use all technology available to you and choose video over telephone where possible.
- ❖ Ensure they are kept up-to-date with current business changes and policies.
- ❖ Help them to understand the value they are providing to the business.
- ❖ Agree ways of working - blend task clarity with work autonomy.

## Resilience

It is important to ensure that working remotely doesn't lead to isolation. It would be beneficial to understand the individual circumstances of your direct reports so that you can adapt to any changing needs.

Ensure wellbeing promotions are passed on and discussed in team meetings and don't forget to look after your own wellbeing - leading by example is key.

Contact your HR team/advisor or consider a referral to your Occupational Health provider if you have concerns about a particular employee.

### Some sources of further help and information:

Cordell Health's Coronavirus Employer Support Resource Bundle: <https://cordellhealth.co.uk/covid-19-support-bundle/>

Display Screen Equipment: <https://www.hse.gov.uk/toolbox/workers/home.htm>

ACAS: <https://www.acas.org.uk/working-from-home>

Mind's Guide to workplace mental health: [www.mind.org.uk/workplace/mental-health-at-work](http://www.mind.org.uk/workplace/mental-health-at-work)

CIPD: [www.cipd.co.uk/knowledge/fundamentals/relations/flexible-working/remote-working-top-tips](http://www.cipd.co.uk/knowledge/fundamentals/relations/flexible-working/remote-working-top-tips)

Mindtools 'Working from Home': <https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/working-from-home.htm>



# **Toolkit for Managers**

## **Managing Stress and Improving Employee Resilience**



# Toolkit for Managers

## Managing Stress and Improving Employee Resilience



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## Why is understanding stress important for line managers?

Evidence shows clearly that a working culture where everyone feels valued and their wellbeing is of importance, has increased engagement and performance. Stress can have a significant impact on employee wellbeing and if not addressed will start to make employees feel less valued.



Your role as line manager is key in addressing potential stressors in the workplace, ensuring employees feel valued and are therefore engaged and productive in work.

The Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 sets out that it is an employer's duty to protect the health, safety and welfare of their employees and other people who might be affected by their business. Employers must do whatever is reasonably practicable to achieve this.

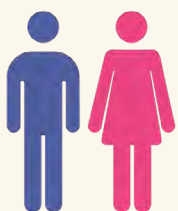
As a manager you have a duty of care to those who report to you. Part of that duty is to:

- ❖ Maintain your understanding of health and wellbeing and how that affects performance.
- ❖ Provide an open, safe and supportive working environment.

Promoting a culture to encourage emotional resilience as a part of routine business and addressing potential stressors in the organisation early will contribute to organisational resilience. A carefully designed wellbeing strategy with effective policies which includes emotional resilience, and is advocated by key decision makers in the workplace, is vital in fostering a thriving organisation.

This toolkit has been designed to help you identify and manage issues of work-related stress positively and effectively in your areas of responsibility. It contains a variety of tools designed to provide practical and sufficient support for you in your role as a line manager. It will help you spot signs of stress in your team members, provides tips on undertaking initial and subsequent conversations with those employees, plus a detailed guide on the stress risk assessment process.

## What is the size of the problem?



**1.4 Million**

Working people suffer from a work-related illness.

**602,000**

Of those were due to work-related stress, depression or anxiety (new or longstanding) according to the 2018/19 Labour Force Survey.



**28.2 Million**  
Working Days

28.2 million working days lost due to work-related illness and workplace injury

**12.8 Million**

Of those were due to work-related stress, depression or anxiety - an increase of 1 million days in 2 years.

## What is *stress*?

The Health & Safety Executive describe stress as:

*The adverse reaction people have to excessive pressure or other types of demand placed on them*

The World Health Organisation describe stress as:

*The response people may have when presented with demands and pressures that are not matched to their knowledge and abilities and which challenge their ability to cope.*



*A stress reaction is complex.* It is described as a unique response depending upon the individual; their natural resilience, their personal circumstances at the time and even what has happened in their day to lead to this point.

The Health & Safety Executive (HSE) are the government body responsible for the regulation and enforcement of workplace health and safety legislation. Following extensive research, they devised the Management Standards approach to stress management at work.

These Management Standards cover six key areas of work design that, if not properly managed, are associated with poor health, lower productivity and increased accident and sickness absence rates. These are:

- ❖ The *demands* of the employee's role.
- ❖ The *control* the employee has over their work.
- ❖ The *support* the employee receives from the line manager and work colleagues.
- ❖ The employee's *relationships* at work.
- ❖ The employee's *role* in the organisation.
- ❖ *Change* and how it is managed.

These six areas should be explored as part of a comprehensive risk assessment when work-related stress is identified. Identifying possible root causes for stress and identifying how these can be reduced is key in the management of stress for both individual employees and the team.

More information on undertaking a risk assessment can be found on [page 9](#).





## How does the stress response cause ill health?

At the most basic level, stress is our body's response to excessive pressures from a situation or life event. Initially it is the 'fight or flight' response experienced when faced with a threat. This of course is useful when faced with a life-threatening situation - the adrenaline and cortisol help us become alert and responsive in order to make quick decisions and take action.

The stress response is then sustained until the threat has passed, allowing us time to deal with the threat. When the threat is no longer evident, our 'brakes', the parasympathetic nervous system, shuts the stress response down to allow us to relax and return to normal.

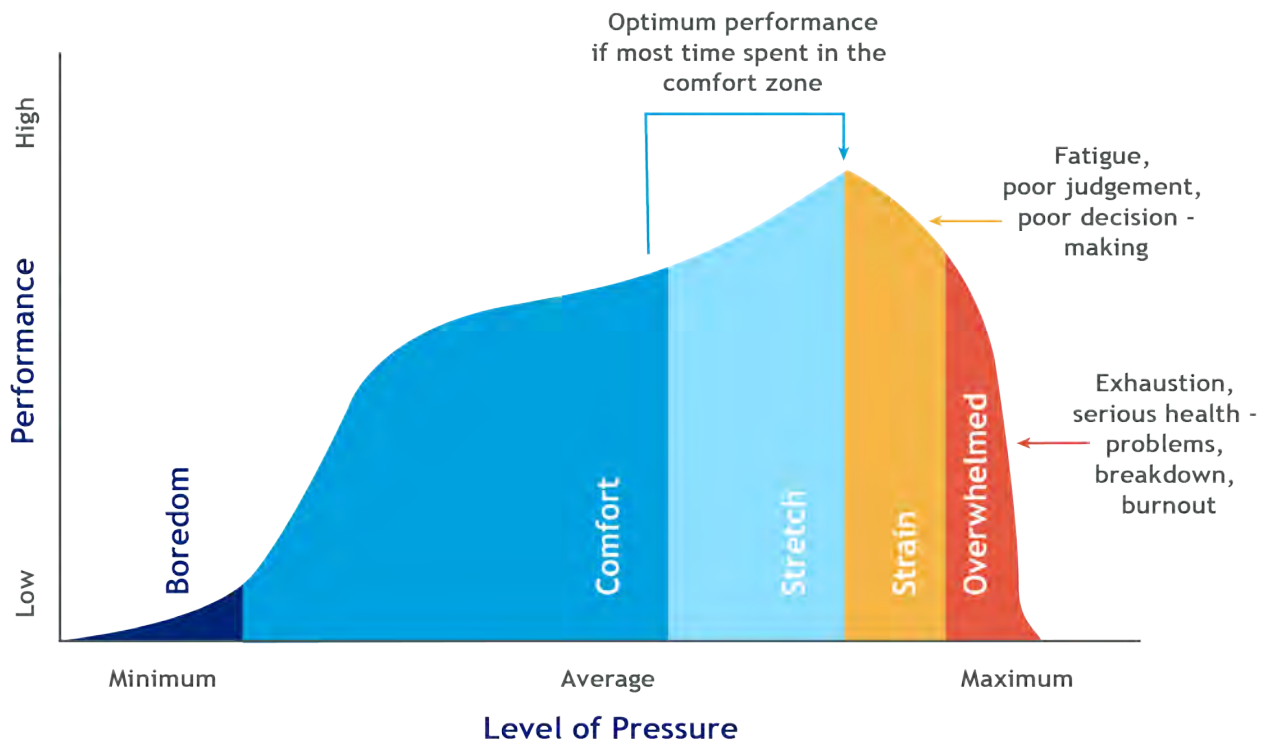
In terms of the stress experienced as a result of excessive pressures at home and/or at work, we react in a similar way to that of a significant threat, albeit at a much lower level. What makes that pressure excessive is very individual, making it difficult to predict.

A sustained stress response involves a full 360° feedback mechanism resulting in ongoing hormone release. It is these persistent hormonal surges which cause damage to blood vessels and arteries, resulting in physiological changes.

The symptoms and signs resulting from these physiological responses can be insidious, slowly building up over time and therefore often not recognised by us until we are significantly affected. It is the long-term impact of stress as a result of sustained excessive pressure that causes problems. Many years of robust scientific enquiry has demonstrated firm links between long-term stress and mental ill health in addition to cardiovascular and other physical health conditions.



## Pressure versus stress



We all need a certain amount of pressure in our lives in order to perform and function in society, and we all need to find our own balance between performance and ill-health.

What contributes to pressure and how we deal with it can vary hugely from person to person and differs according to our social and economic circumstances, the environment we live in, our genetic make-up or personality type.

There are inherently stressful life events such as childbirth, moving home and financial difficulty. Some common features of things that can make us feel stressed include experiencing something new or unexpected, something that threatens your feeling of self, or feeling you have little control over a situation.

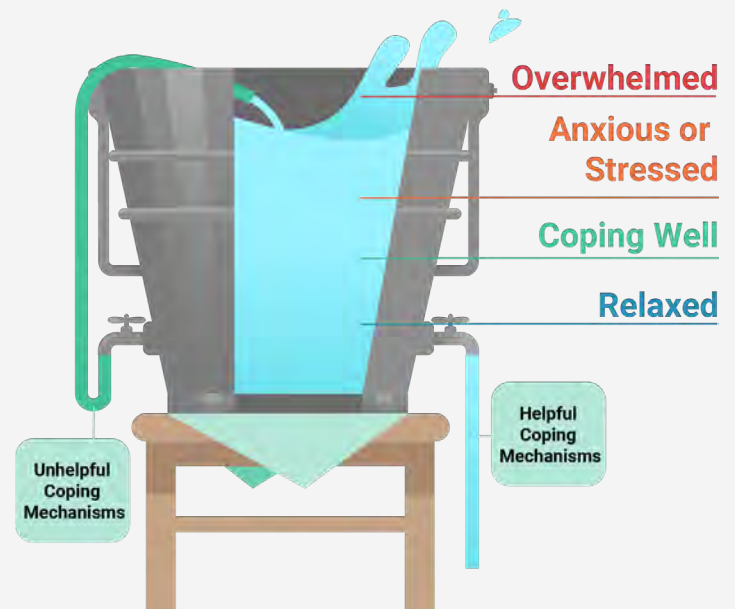
Pressure becomes a problem when it is sustained and overwhelms a person's ability to cope and this leads to symptoms of stress. It is not a sign of weakness and many highly productive and effective employees can be affected. It is simply at any given moment in time, the inability to manage with our excessive pressure any longer. Or to put it simply, living a life you are not designed to live.

Some stressful events can be predicted and therefore control measures can be put in place as mitigation, for example taking leave when moving home or arranging a long weekend after an anticipated busy period at work.



## Stress Bucket

Some people refer to a stress 'bucket' or 'container'. Pressure flows in daily and we need to ensure we have two mechanisms to stay well. Controlling the flow from the top e.g. by not taking on too much, learning to say no and addressing any stress head on; and having a valve at the bottom to de-stress. More about these 'protective factors' on [page 6](#).



### Those who do better at work tend to have:

- ❖ A job suited to their personality and personal situation
- ❖ A manageable workload
- ❖ A supportive manager and colleagues
- ❖ Good protective factors embedded into their daily routine
- ❖ Good insight into what they can cope with and using measures proactively to manage stress

Undertaking work that is meaningful and where contributions are recognised and valued, is a powerful way of increasing engagement and performance. Combining this with good lifestyle factors, overall happiness is increased.

It is well-evidenced that happier employees are more productive and therefore supporting your employees through any stressful period makes good business sense. By the same token, even if the excessive pressure they are experiencing is from their personal lives, making some temporary and reasonable adjustments will benefit both your employee and the organisation.





## What is emotional resilience and how is it helpful?

Emotional resilience refers to one's ability to adapt to stressful situations or crises. More resilient people are able to 'roll with the punches' and adapt to adversity without lasting difficulties; less resilient people have a harder time with stress and life changes, both major and minor.

It's been found that those who deal with minor stresses more easily can also manage a major crisis with greater ease, so resilience has its benefits for daily life as well as for the rare major catastrophe.

Our levels of emotional resilience vary from individual to individual and are largely innate however they also stem from a number of key factors such as personality type, social situation and the life experiences that have brought us to this point.

Nevertheless, there are still ways to improve resilience and these are known as 'protective factors'.



More information can be found [here](#) and displayed in your workplace.

Self-care is an essential element to managing stress and it is likely your conversations will cover this. Having your employee understand how they can manage their own stress, and what further support is available to them, will assist in the overall management of the situation.

You are not expected to be a counsellor or life coach, but having resources available will help to point your employee in the right direction as a good starting point.

Further information for your employee regarding stress, self-care and resources can be found [here](#).

## When should I take action?

As a line manager, you will need to address the issue of stress as soon as you notice any areas of concern.

The signs and symptoms of stress related ill health are multi-faceted and like the response itself, often varies from individual to individual. However, there are certain things you may pick up on either at an individual level, or within the team as a whole.

- ❖ Tearfulness
- ❖ Frequent short-term absences
- ❖ Tiredness, frequent complaints of muscle aches & pains or headaches
- ❖ Frequent colds whether they take sickness absence or not
- ❖ A general loss of good control of a pre-existing medical condition e.g. asthma, eczema or IBS (Irritable Bowel Syndrome)
- ❖ Mood swings and irritability, and perhaps are particularly negative in meetings which is out of character
- ❖ An inability to concentrate, delegate effectively or prioritise their workload
- ❖ Working long hours could either be a sign that they are needing to work longer to compensate for the issues described above, or it could be that they are avoiding issues at home.

Once you have noticed these issues then you will need to take action at the earliest opportunity.

## What action should I take?

- ❖ Start by having a conversation with the employee. Our [guide](#) will provide guidance on a suitable approach.
- ❖ Complete a stress risk assessment (see [page 9](#) for more information) if they report any concerns relating to work.
- ❖ Consider any other temporary adjustments you can reasonably make to support them, even if the stress stems from their personal lives.
- ❖ Review the adjustments regularly to see when they are no longer needed.
- ❖ Obtain further help and support if needed, e.g. from HR or Occupational Health.
- ❖ Confirm any agreements in writing, with a copy in their employee record.

## How do I have a supportive conversation?

If you have any concerns about a direct report then ideally address them early to avoid any absence. The aim of having a supportive conversation is to create an honest and open dialogue to develop mutual understanding of the issues between the employers and employees.



It is better to have the conversation face-to-face, with video as a secondary option and telephone otherwise. This is to avoid the loss of communication that body language and facial expressions can convey. Whichever option is chosen, the employee will require assurance that the conversation is private and confidential.

Prior to the meeting it would be beneficial to prepare yourself by reading any relevant company policies, and by understanding what support options are available to you and your employees. Examples include a flexible working or parental leave policy, or the organisation Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) and Occupational Health service.

Leading the conversation will assist to keep it on track and to time. A good way to start is with the things you've noticed, and what's brought you to this point. At some point during the conversation your employee may get upset and using time out can be helpful.

Employ active listening techniques such as these advocated by Mindtools:

- ❖ Pay attention
- ❖ Show you are listening
- ❖ Provide feedback
- ❖ Defer judgement
- ❖ Respond appropriately

During the conversation, there may be workplace issues that come up which need further consideration and it's acceptable to take a step back from the interview to give yourself time to think and plan ahead. A follow-up email will be needed if any adjustments are made as a temporary support measure, to be filed in the employee's personal record. You will also need to complete a stress risk assessment.





## Stress risk assessment

If there are any work related factors reported, you should complete a stress risk assessment with your employee.

The approach to risk assessment is the same for stress as for other health risks. It should focus on the causes and the likelihood of harm as well as the impact. It should be undertaken as a collaborative task between you and your direct report to improve engagement and success.

The assessment should be done together and will require dedicated time from both parties. It is a confidential conversation and document that will provide the framework for any decisions and further conversations.

CORDELL HEALTH			
Stress Risk Assessment - Individuals			
Employee Name:		Date of Assessment:	
Line Manager Name:			
Demands:	Existing control measures:	Agreed actions (if applicable):	Review Dates:
Control:	Existing control measures:	Agreed actions (if applicable):	Review Dates:
Support:	Existing control measures:	Agreed actions (if applicable):	Review Dates:

Use your organisation's own stress risk assessment template if one is in existence, otherwise an editable pdf template can be found [here](#). Each section is accompanied by guidance notes with example questions to help guide your conversations, and examples of possible adjustments you might consider as a support measure. An editable pdf template without guidance notes can be found [here](#). (Word versions of these documents can be found in the *Attachments Panel* of your pdf reader.)

This may be a challenge to complete, especially if line management is reported as a cause of stress for your employee. Try to listen to what is being said objectively and consider the possibility of mediation if the discussion is difficult or becomes emotional.

Not all of the factors identified in the template will be relevant for your employee and as such there is no need to explore them further. However it will be beneficial to document that you have explored this area, and no concerns are noted. Action points and adjustments should be reviewed together regularly whilst the stressors continue to have a potential impact and HR & Occupational Health are a source of support and guidance if required.



## How to manage an employee who is absent due to stress-related ill-health?

**Keeping in touch with an employee who is off work helps them to feel engaged with their employer and valued for their contribution to the workplace, facilitating an earlier and easier return to work. Occasionally however it can be difficult to find the right balance between keeping in touch and being too intrusive.**

Whilst it is important to be in line with your organisation's policy on absence management, you may need to take your cue from the employee themselves. If there is a disagreement or you have concerns, talk to HR and/or occupational health. Transparent, supportive conversations exploring the employee's concerns can be helpful in trying to identify the root causes of their stress and what the pressures are.

If the employee reports work as the cause of or contributor to their stress, and with relationships within the team or with their manager in particular, then you may need to reconsider the best method and person to maintain contact with the employee.

A discussion with HR for advice or a referral to occupational health can be helpful in obtaining advice on how the situation may be best managed.

Remember that it is your responsibility as a line manager to ensure contact with the employee and how this might be best achieved with the most favourable outcome. Formal training in this area for line managers can be very helpful in understanding the best way to communicate with employees who are suffering from work-related stress.



## What is my Action Plan?

Talk openly about mental wellbeing and create a working environment for others to do the same. These are key factors in creating a healthy and productive workplace.

- ❖ Understand your organisation's position on stress and review all relevant policies regularly.
- ❖ Think about the members of your team - do any of them display signs of stress you need to address?
- ❖ If you have any concerns, start by having a conversation.
- ❖ Ensure you have the Stress Risk Assessment and any other documents from this toolkit you find useful in an easily accessible place.
- ❖ Ensure you know how to make a referral to occupational health and understand the process you need to follow.
- ❖ Consider a 'stress audit' of individual job roles or the demands of the team as a whole as a preventive measure particularly at times of change within the organisation.
- ❖ Consider whether you would benefit from further training on speaking to your employees about stress, and managing any issues at work. If you feel you would benefit from this, speak to your line manager or HR about your training needs.
- ❖ Finally, it is important to realise that anyone in an organisation may need support if they are having a difficult time. Middle management often have one of the most difficult jobs balancing the demands of their managers with the demands of the employees they manage often with significant constraints. Lead by example and look after your own wellbeing.





## Who are we?

Cordell Health Ltd is a well-established social enterprise specialising in providing early intervention and expert support to organisations in delivering workplace health and wellbeing.

We are able to provide support to all levels of an organisation and have a number of training packages as well as other services available. If you would like further information please enquire at: [training@cordellhealth.co.uk](mailto:training@cordellhealth.co.uk).

## Please Contact Us

 [cordellhealth.co.uk](https://www.cordellhealth.co.uk)

 [enquiries@cordellhealth.co.uk](mailto:enquiries@cordellhealth.co.uk)

 0118 207 6190

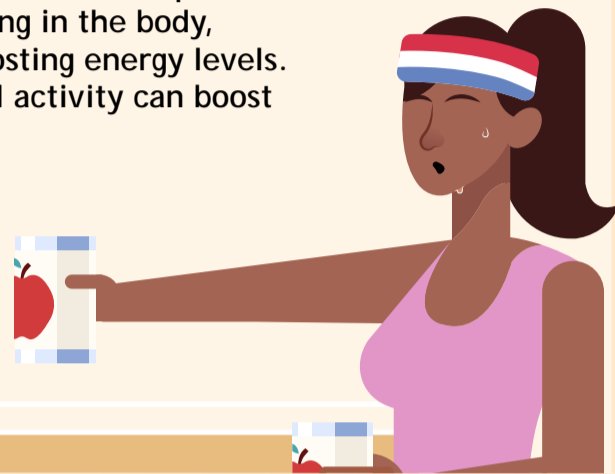
Please Follow Us!



# 8 Essential Steps to Emotional Wellbeing

## 1. Physical Activity

Exercise releases chemicals called endorphins which trigger a positive feeling in the body, increasing happiness and boosting energy levels. Research shows that physical activity can boost self-esteem, mood and sleep quality, as well as reducing the risk of stress and depression.



## 2. Social Connection

A good support network and regular interactions with friends is one of the key factors in determining overall happiness and life satisfaction. Spending time with those closest to us helps to foster a sense of belonging, provides purpose and improves levels of self-worth.



## 3. Intellectual Stimulation

There is strong evidence of the positive benefits of lifelong learning and the ongoing development of new skills. It has been shown that adult learning fosters a sense of identity, an ability to cope and increased confidence.



## 4. Mindfulness/Relaxation

Slowing down and having a regular period of relaxation or down-time to your day can help to balance out the effects of chronic stress. Some people use mindfulness or meditation, others yoga or tai-chi; simple deep breathing exercises are also beneficial. Practice regularly for peace in a fast-paced world.



## 5. Giving back

Altruistic behaviour releases endorphins in the brain and is associated with pleasure, social connection and trust. Giving to others, either with time, effort or material goods, creates positive feelings and improves our own self-worth. It heightens levels of co-operation and social connection, strengthening entire communities and workplaces.



## 6. Staying positive

Research has shown that gratitude is a big contributor to happiness in life and whilst enforced 'always looking on the bright side' isn't necessarily helpful, learning skills and techniques in this field can improve our resilience and performance as well as overall life satisfaction.



## 7. Sleep

Sleep is as essential to life as eating, drinking and breathing and there are strong links between sleep and emotional wellbeing. Some of the processes that occur during sleep are cell recovery and regeneration, information processing and memory consolidation. Good sleep helps us produce new insights and creative ideas as well as affecting our ability to use language and sustain attention.



## 8. Nutrition

The benefits of a good diet on our physical health is long established but its effect on our mental health is less spoken about. A well-balanced diet rich in vegetables and nutrients is linked to reduced depression, improved energy and increased overall wellbeing.





# Stress Risk Assessment - Individuals

Employee Name		Date of Assessment	
Line Manager Name			

Demands	Existing control measures	Agreed actions (if applicable)	Review Dates

Control	Existing control measures	Agreed actions (if applicable)	Review Dates

Support	Existing control measures	Agreed actions (if applicable)	Review Dates

Role	Existing control measures	Agreed actions (if applicable)	Review Dates

Relationships	Existing control measures	Agreed actions (if applicable)	Review Dates

Change	Existing control measures	Agreed actions (if applicable)	Review Dates

Advised to see GP:    Yes    No        Advised to contact EAP:    Yes    No        Referred to Occupational Health    Yes    No

<b>Employee Name</b>	Print:	Sign:
<b>Line Manager Name</b>	Print:	Sign:
<b>Date for Review</b>		

## Guidance Notes for Managers

These guidance notes are designed to help managers identify possible sources of stress and their solutions, subject to operational viability. The list is not meant to be exhaustive.

Potential Stressor to Consider	Agreed Action/s
<b>Demands</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are deadlines within role achievable?</li> <li>• Consider pressures outside of work</li> <li>• Is employee working excessive hours?</li> <li>• Out-of-hours contact expectations?</li> <li>• Is the employee subject to work demands from different groups/people?</li> <li>• Are staff numbers adequate?</li> <li>• Are demands equal to abilities?</li> <li>• Have the demands increased?</li> <li>• Demands too low / boring or repetitive work.</li> <li>• Demands similar to others in the same role?</li> <li>• Are there specific demands such as travel time for rural field-based employees?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Offer support in prioritising tasks and cut out unnecessary work and bureaucracy.</li> <li>• Assist in the scheduling of work to ensure adequate and appropriate resources.</li> <li>• As far as is reasonably practicable give warning of urgent jobs.</li> <li>• Can projects / tasks be postponed temporarily?</li> <li>• Support employee when undertaking new and unfamiliar tasks.</li> <li>• Meet regularly with employee/s and senior management to review workload/staffing levels.</li> <li>• Ensure job demands in terms of quantity, complexity and intensity are compared to the individual's skills and abilities.</li> <li>• Where reasonably practicable, rotate boring and repetitive jobs.</li> <li>• Where possible increase the variety of tasks - through projects?</li> <li>• Avoid encouraging staff to work long hours, take work home or build excessive time in lieu.</li> <li>• Encourage employee to take annual leave allowance.</li> <li>• Encourage a healthy work-life balance and lead through example.</li> <li>• Do they have adequate training for the role?</li> </ul>
<b>Control</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Does the employee have any say in how to do and plan their work?</li> <li>• Can employee set own work speed?</li> <li>• Can employee decide when to take a break?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Where practicable, enable employee to exert autonomy &amp; delegation within role.</li> <li>• Encourage empowerment &amp; provide training if required.</li> <li>• Provide scope for varying working conditions.</li> </ul>

Potential Stressor to Consider	Agreed Action/s
Support	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If work gets difficult are colleagues/manager available to help and support.</li> <li>• Is employee given the opportunity of supportive feedback on the work they do?</li> <li>• Are there any other issues / stressors that need to be taken account of - e.g. difficulties at home, unexpected life changes, etc.?</li> <li>• New starter.</li> <li>• Sickness absence &amp; returning to work.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Explain how to raise concerns and call on your support.</li> <li>• Hold regular team &amp; 1:1 meetings.</li> <li>• Be approachable and receptive to feedback.</li> <li>• Offer to support them through referring to Employee Assistance Programme and / or Occupational Health.</li> <li>• Ensure new staff properly inducted +/- provide mentor.</li> <li>• Recommend/action reasonable adjustments to facilitate return to work &amp; monitor.</li> <li>• Undertake return to work interview, measure trends and changes &amp; investigate variations.</li> </ul>
Relationships	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Could role/job be inherently subject to personal harassment in the form of unkind words or behaviour?</li> <li>• Poor relationships with others.</li> <li>• Is there a high probability of friction and anger between colleagues?</li> <li>• Staff complaints or rising absence trends.</li> <li>• Bullying or confrontational communication styles.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promote an atmosphere of mutual respect &amp; appreciation of difference.</li> <li>• Ensure all employees are aware that inappropriate behaviour at work will not be tolerated.</li> <li>• Encourage team working.</li> <li>• Discuss the problem openly with individuals.</li> <li>• Investigate causal factors.</li> <li>• Follow complaint and conflict resolution procedures.</li> <li>• Seek the support of HR if an allegation of harassment or bullying is made &amp; refer to the policy relating to Bullying &amp; Harassment at work.</li> <li>• Consider relevant training e.g. communication or assertiveness skills.</li> </ul>

Potential Stressor to Consider	Agreed Action/s
Role	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is the role clearly defined with clear duties and responsibilities?</li> <li>• Are there clear lines of communication and management responsibilities?</li> <li>• Is the role clearly linked to goals and objectives for the department?</li> <li>• Does the employee know how to do the job?</li> <li>• Does role involve excessive physical demands such as heavy lifting; standing for long periods of time; repetitive movements that may cause concern?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clarify goals and objectives for the job/role - ensuring no ambiguity.</li> <li>• Ensure responsibilities and demands are commensurate with the role.</li> <li>• Build in the opportunity to provide regular clear feedback on performance.</li> <li>• Provide training where required.</li> <li>• Review &amp; consider job selection, skill criteria &amp; supervision requirements.</li> <li>• Refer to OH/SHE advice on musculoskeletal disorders and incorporate into practice e.g. task rotation, manual handling practices.</li> <li>• Encourage suggestions on how to improve work environment - and give these due consideration.</li> </ul>
Change	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is the employee consulted / updated about changes at work that affect them?</li> <li>• Is the employee clear about how the change will affect them in practice?</li> <li>• Is there adequate consultation about workplace issues / changes?</li> <li>• Are new skills/training required?</li> <li>• Are there group dynamic changes?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure clear and appropriate communication on proposed changes.</li> <li>• Ensure the individual understands the reasons for change and the likely timescales.</li> <li>• Give support to the individual during the change process understanding the fear uncertainty can bring.</li> <li>• Ensure adequate consultation wherever possible and provide opportunities for comment and input.</li> <li>• Consider any new training needs.</li> <li>• Acknowledge that change is inherently stressful and encourage team cohesion as soon as possible.</li> </ul>

# Dealing with Stress

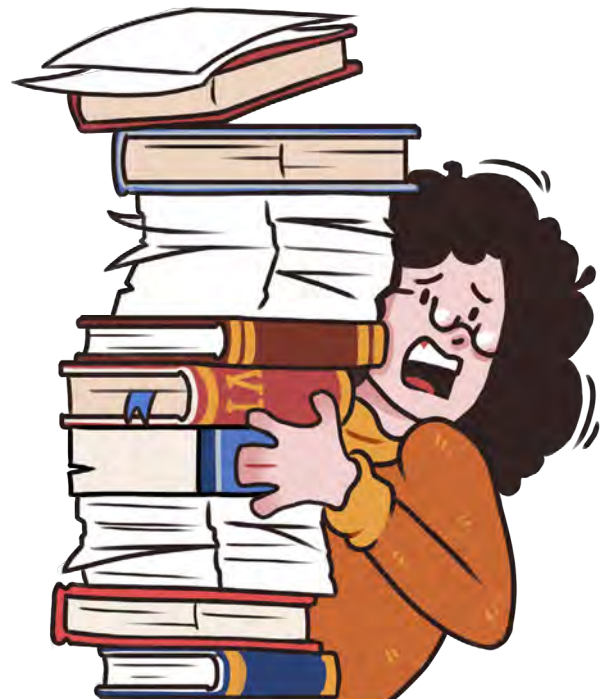
## What is stress?

Stress is the body's reaction to sustained excessive pressure. Pressure is a normal, healthy part of life and helps us achieve and perform at our best. Stress occurs when that pressure becomes excessive, overwhelming us and affecting our ability to cope. It can affect our mood, our physical health, our personal lives and our jobs. Long-term stress has been linked to a number of health conditions such as heart disease and depression.

## How do I know if I'm stressed?

Signs that you are becoming overwhelmed and suffering from stress include:

- ❖ Irritability or mood swings
- ❖ Difficulty concentrating or making decisions
- ❖ Tearfulness
- ❖ Tiredness, frequent complaints of muscle aches & pains or headaches
- ❖ Flare-ups of underlying health conditions such as asthma or irritable bowel syndrome
- ❖ Feeling constantly worried or anxious
- ❖ Having trouble sleeping or feeling tired all the time
- ❖ Changes to your eating pattern
- ❖ Smoking or drinking more than usual



According to the Mental Health Foundation's 2018 study, in the previous year

**74%** of people have felt so stressed that they have been overwhelmed or unable to cope

**51%** reported feeling depressed and 61% reported feeling anxious

**46%** reported that they ate too much or ate unhealthily due to stress

## What should I do?

The first thing to do is recognise and acknowledge there is a problem and identify the causes of your stress.

Take action on those causes of stress that you have control over. It could be something at work - in which case have a conversation with your line manager. It could be relationship problems or other events in your personal life which you need to address. The important thing is to tackle what you can, which is empowering in its own right.

Use your support network - identify one or two close friends or allies to help you identify any steps you need to take and support you through them. Things are always more achievable with others.

You won't always be able to remove all of the causes of your stress but there are some lifestyle changes to make which will help you cope with the stressors left behind:

- ❖ Keep physically active
- ❖ Eat a healthy and balanced diet
- ❖ Maintain good hydration
- ❖ Make time for relaxation
- ❖ Stay in close contact with family and friends and above all, get help and support when you need it.



**There is always help and support available and with time and action, you will recover. Don't be afraid to take the first step - you have the ability to get through this.**

## Sources of support

NHS: <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/reduce-stress/>

Mind: <https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/types-of-mental-health-problems/stress/what-is-stress/>

Rethink: <https://www.rethink.org/advice-and-information/living-with-mental-illness/wellbeing-physical-health/stress-how-to-cope/>

Your Employee Assistance Programme, if applicable.

# Talking to Your Employee About Stress

Expressing feelings does not come naturally to many people. Employees might not be able to communicate to their line managers about whether they are under any emotional strain and in turn, as a manager you may be uncomfortable talking about emotional matters.



Evidence demonstrates that creating a working culture where people can be open about how they feel leads to increased employee engagement and performance. Therefore, investing time in developing your communication skills around the issue of stress is likely to be beneficial for you, your employee and the organisation as a whole.

In general, silence might create misunderstanding, which not only has a negative impact on teams and working relationships but also if accumulated, can create work-related stress itself. Silence also feeds to prejudice around stress and mental health. Everyone's experience of stress is different, and there may be no apparent outward sign for some time - another reason why it is essential to establish a culture of open communication.

If you feel an employee is experiencing stress, as a manager you may need to take the lead and raise it with them and how to go about it is the main focus of this section of the toolkit. A conversation about stress or mental health, in general, might be necessary for either of the below three circumstances:

- ❖ The line manager suspects that an employee may be experiencing stress
- ❖ An employee voluntarily indicates that they may be suffering stress
- ❖ An employee has had a period of sickness absence due to stress

## A Reflective Space

Think about this type of conversation as a 'Reflective Space'. A Reflective Space is something used frequently in the therapeutic world and whilst you are of course not a counsellor or therapist, it might be useful to approach the first conversation in a similar, open manner. It doesn't need special skills but you may need to make a more active use of some of the skills you use in your day to day life, such as empathy and listening skills. Think of it as simply providing an environment for people to discuss whatever is on their mind, as the first stage in dealing with it.

Maintaining this open approach throughout the conversation helps you as a manager to look more deeply at what is happening, and helps the employee to be able to identify the cause of the stress.



## Other things to consider

**01 Location** - Choose a private and quiet place where you won't be overheard.

**02 Confidentiality** - You may want to reassure them at the beginning of the conversation that should they need to share any sensitive information, they could ask for confidentiality parameters. Be honest and clear about confidentiality and with whom you may need to share the information if necessary.

**03 First Steps** - It is essential to start the conversation off in a supportive way. It doesn't need to be awkward or difficult, just imagine how you would do it in regard to asking someone about their physical health. Perhaps a good place is to start by simply asking how they are doing.

**04 Neutrality** - Go into the conversation with a certain neutral frame of mind so that the employee would be able to talk about sources of their stress freely. The neutrality also helps the manager to be able to intuit the essence of what the employee has to say. Bringing pre-judgements and assumptions might distort the purpose of the conversation. Maintain a compassionate neutrality throughout the discussion.

**05 Empathy** - Empathise rather than sympathise with your employee's situation. Ask simple, short and non-judgmental questions. Simply stating that you want to really understand what they are feeling and experiencing can facilitate the discussion. Try not to guess what is going on and instead always ask for clarification.

**06 No Goal** - Set no goals for the first conversation you have with them, except to develop some understanding of what your employee is feeling and experiencing. Just having this conversation might be enough for some work related stress to be lifted without any further action plans to be needed. Sometimes, all an employee needs is to feel understood by their line managers.



Bear in mind that people may not always be ready to talk straight away; tell them your door is always open or arrange another meeting in a few days. Excessive stress that can't be sufficiently managed within the boundaries of this conversation requires further action and may need to be escalated as per your organisation's policy. If so, whilst your supportive and empathetic tone will remain important, the conversation will need to be targeted more toward the specific issues of concern. Using the stress risk assessment guidance notes will help with this.

When the Reflective Space collapses - an increased level of fear, a possible feeling of threat, or anticipation of the blame can lead to a fight-flight response from either party at any given time during the conversation. Consequently, anxiety might become the driving force which may lead to an employee or you adopting a reactive manner which jeopardises the neutrality needed.

On this occasion, don't be afraid to use a 'time out' for both parties. Give yourself space to think and absorb the reasons for the collapse in the conversation. Talking this through in general terms, whilst maintaining confidentiality, with an appropriate manager or HR representative may help.

**Success is achieved through mutual respect and a consistent effort by all parties involved.**

# Returning to the Workplace: A Guide for Line Managers

As we approach what is hoped will be the final lifting of lockdown, organisations are looking to the future and transitioning to their expected longer-term working arrangements, whether it be a full return to the workplace, or a hybrid system of part-home and part-office based working.

As a line manager you may find this leads to feelings of uncertainty in your teams, and conflicting preferences from each member. You may find yourself caught between the needs of the business and the needs of your employees, giving rise to challenges if they do not match. Alternatively, you may simply want to ensure you have covered every aspect of the return to work and are as best placed as possible to facilitate a smooth transition to the future of workplace working.



Either way, here you will find some simple tips designed to make the process as smooth as possible:

- ❖ Understand the organisational policy. Your employer may have a defined roadmap to follow with set parameters, or there may be a medium-term policy before anything more permanent has been decided. Find out what the expectations are for you and your team, and how much scope you have within those parameters. If you have individual requests from your team that conflict with the policy, do you know where to go for support and advice?
- ❖ Consider all interested parties. You may need to balance the needs of the business with the needs of your employees and in order to help, it would be beneficial to consider all key stakeholders. This includes clients, colleagues, and the wider organisation.
- ❖ Be as flexible as possible. Additionally, don't feel as though you need to come with all the solutions yourself. Allow your team to be creative and produce their own ideas, within the guidelines you

set. Aim to have a working arrangement that allows for some face-to-face team meetings to benefit from the colleague interaction.

- ❖ Communication is key and reiterating company decisions at team meetings ensures full dissemination of the messages and allows your team to ask questions. There is the old adage that 'if you have nothing to tell them, tell them you have nothing to tell them', and communicating regularly will help to reduce uncertainty and reassure your team.
- ❖ Detailing workplace Covid security measures in your communications will help those who are anxious about returning to work alongside others, particularly those who have worked from home for the majority of the pandemic. Consider allowing visit days before they return in earnest to allay any anxiety and fear of the unknown. Ideally combine this with a team meeting.
- ❖ Understand your organisation's policy for those with specific concerns. Those who may be clinically extremely vulnerable or have concerns regarding wearing a face covering, for example. Is there a formal policy or do you have an HR representative you can approach for support? Consider referring your employees to occupational health for an individual health risk assessment if needed.
- ❖ Is any additional equipment required to facilitate hybrid working and avoid unnecessary undue manual handling during travel?
- ❖ Understand and respect individual perspectives and feelings. Our experiences of the pandemic are individual - some have been furloughed whilst others workload increased, some may have experienced personal loss or chronic ill-health and some struggled to balance work with childcare.
- ❖ Seek to identify all the supports available - either for your employees who may be struggling with the transition or for you in your role as the line manager. These may be resources via the organisation's intranet, or occupational health and HR advice. Our Covid Employer Resource bundle has a range of materials for line managers and employees: <https://cordellhealth.co.uk/covid-19-support-bundle>.



- ❖ Try to have patience and not be too hard on yourself or others - it will take some time to re-form as a team and for the new ways of working to normalise. Self-care is a critical business advantage and line manager behaviours are key to wellbeing in the workplace. Prioritise your own health wellbeing, as well as others'.