

Reducing Work Related Stress

A Guide for Managers



Our belief is that plain good management can reduce work-related stress where it is already occurring, and can prevent it in the first place. (United Kingdom Health and Safety Executive)

Workplace stress has become a major issue in the last decade both in Australia in other Western countries. Anecdotally this is reflected in individual perceptions of the pace and demands of the contemporary workplace. This is confirmed by surveys that repeatedly show employees at all levels believe they are under much more "stress" than they have been historically. In real business terms, this focus on stress has also been reflected in the growth of "stress" related WorkCover claims.

Staff at Deakin University and the University sector in general share this widespread view of workplace stress. This Guide has been developed to help you manage workplace stress. The document has four parts:

- (1) What is workplace stress
- (2) What can I do about workplace stress
- (3) The supportive manager
- (4) Advice on managing individual cases

What is workplace stress

What is stress?

Stress is the mind and body's reaction to change. It isn't a disease. But if stress is intense and goes on for some time, it can lead to mental and physical ill health (eg depression, nervous breakdown, heart disease).

But stress can be a good thing, can't it?

Being under *pressure* often improves performance. It can be a good thing. But when demands and pressures become excessive, they lead to *distress*. And it's clear from the recognised symptoms of distress that it's actually *bad* for you.

What are the most important potential work stressors

Studies carried out by the United Kingdom Health and Safety Executive have shown that the following are the most important potential factors that can effect stress:

Teamwork:	Effective communication and cooperation in the work unit
Supervision:	Quality of guidance and support provided by supervisors
Workload:	Reasonable level of job demands
Challenge:	Amount of stimulation and challenge staff get from their jobs
Fairness:	Perceived fairness of treatment with regards to evaluations and rewards
Involvement:	Perceived quality of communication and staff input
Change:	How well the organisation prepares for and adjusts to change
Compensation:	Satisfaction with pay and benefits (weakest predictor of stress once a level has been reached)

As a manager, is it my concern?

Yes. It's your duty at law to make sure that your staff aren't made ill by their work. And stress *can* make your staff ill. Also, action to reduce stress can be very cost-effective. The costs of stress to your area may show up as high staff turnover, an increase in sickness absence, reduced work performance, poor timekeeping and more client complaints. Stress in one person can also lead to stress in staff who have to work with the person or even cover for their colleague.

Also, employers who don't take stress seriously may leave themselves open to compensation claims from staff who have suffered ill health from work related stress. Fortunately, reducing stress need not cost you a lot of money.

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Under health and safety law, what must I do about stress?

Where stress caused or made worse by work could lead to ill health, you must assess the risk. A risk assessment for stress involves:

- looking for pressures at work that could cause high and long-lasting levels of stress;
- deciding who might be harmed by these; and
- deciding whether you are doing enough to prevent that harm.

If necessary, you must then take reasonable steps to deal with those pressures. You must review the assessment whenever you think that it may no longer be valid. You should make sure that you involve your staff, including health and safety representatives in the assessment process.

Isn't stress also caused by problems outside work? Are you saying I have to do something about that?

You're not under a legal duty to prevent ill health caused by stress due to problems outside work, e.g. financial or domestic worries. But non-work problems can make it difficult for people to cope with the pressures of work, and their performance at work might suffer. So being understanding to staff in this position would be in your interests.

Are some people more likely to suffer from stress than others?

We're all vulnerable to stress, depending on the pressure we're under at any given time: even people who are usually very hardy. As a manager, you're responsible for making sure that work doesn't make your staff ill. If you notice that someone is particularly vulnerable because of their circumstances, look at how their work is organised. See if there are ways to relieve the pressures so that they do not become excessive. However, unless you know otherwise, you could assume that all your employees are mentally capable of withstanding reasonable pressure from work.

How do I recognise stress in a particular person?

Many of the outward signs of stress in individuals should be noticeable to managers and colleagues. Look in particular for changes in a person's mood or behaviour, such as deteriorating relationships with colleagues, irritability, indecisiveness, absenteeism or reduced performance. Those suffering from stress may also smoke or drink alcohol more than usual or even turn to drugs. They might also complain about their health: for example they may get frequent headaches.

How do I find out if stress could be a problem for my area or workgroup?

First, take informal soundings to get some idea of what problems there might be: for example, see if your staff are disillusioned with their work. This may show up as an increase in absenteeism (especially frequent short spells of sickness), lateness, disciplinary problems or staff turnover, or a reduction in output or quality of work. There may, of course, be other reasons for these symptoms, but if they could be related to stress at work, get your staff to tell you about it by:

- talking and listening to them. You could base the discussion on the sort of pressures mentioned later in this Guide;
- asking them to describe the three 'best' and the three 'worst' aspects of their job, and whether any of these put them under uncomfortable pressure.

You can use the information you collect to identify common and persistent pressures, and who might be harmed by them.

Several off-the-shelf questionnaires do the same kind of thing. These can be helpful but tend to be lengthy and may not ask the type of questions that are relevant to your area. Also, interpreting the findings may require specialist knowledge.

Remember to:

- respect the confidentiality of your staff;
- tell your staff what you plan to do with any information you collect;
- involve them, as much as possible, in subsequent decisions;
- involve safety representatives, if you have them, in your plans and decisions;
- if you employ five or more staff, record the important findings from your risk assessment, for example by writing them down;
- check from time to time that the situation hasn't changed.

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A particular issue at Deakin is “distance management” where particularly direct line managers are not on the same campus as a portion of their staff. This can lead to two stress issues – staff feeling alienated from their manager (in the worst cases, “us” versus “them”), and not being close enough to the workplace to feel the mood of local staff. This issue can be addressed in a number of ways that are dependant upon the situation:

- ❑ The use of local team leaders or campus representatives
- ❑ Regular attendance, and more importantly, availability on the campus. Availability means leaving time outside the business schedule to catch up with people and socialise. This needs to be tempered with the stress of constant travel and the associated loss of time involved.
- ❑ The clustering when feasible of functions on a campus to warrant the appointment of a team leader
- ❑ The use of phone and to a lesser effect e-mail to keep in contact. The effectiveness of phone communications is dependant on the quality of the existing relationships. This in turn makes the induction process when these relationships are built critical.
- ❑ Where staff are having problems, then the amount of face-to-face contact needs to increase.
- ❑ Clear job and role expectations and objectives that are well understood by both you as the manager and the staff involved.

What about me?

Stress can potentially affect everyone in the workplace including you, your managers and your manager. Particularly at risk are the middle managers and supervisors who often feel like the “meat in the sandwich” with pressure from above and large expectations from below.

If you are a manager with managers reporting to you, you have the same responsibility to them as to all other staff. The information in this document is equally applicable to your management of your managers. Your managers look to you to set the standard and provide leadership in developing the workplace culture. If you want supportive managers, you will have to provide them the support in terms of assistance, feedback and guidance.

If you personally are suffering excessive stress, you have the same rights to access the support and resources found in this document. If for particular reasons you do not want to use the internal Employee Assistance Program you can access an external equivalent through Health Services (Division of Student Life) or through a Senior Personnel Consultant in Personnel Services (Human Resources Services Division). If you are highly stressed it is likely that this is being transmitted to your staff and its is unlikely that you are being effective as a supportive manager.

Although good management technique and leadership skills are “natural” to some, for most it is a learned skill. One of your responsibilities is your own development and you need to spend time on this. The University has a number of skill development programs that can help you become a better manager – use them. <http://www.deakin.edu.au/training/>

The University recognises that responsibility for professional development lies jointly with the individual staff member and the University through devolved accountability to line managers, although it is also recognised that specialist areas within the University provide a variety of professional development services. Deakin's development framework includes key staff capabilities grouped into three core development areas of:

- ❑ Leadership and Management
- ❑ Interpersonal/Personal
- ❑ Academic/Technical/Specialist

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What can I do about workplace stress?

If I do find out that stress is, or could be, a problem, what can I do about it?

There's no single best way of tackling work-related stress. What you do will depend on your working practices and the causes of the problem. But only providing training or help (or both) for sufferers won't be enough – it won't tackle the source of the problem! The section below on work-related stressors shows some of the pressures at work that might be relevant, along with some suggestions about what to do.

Remember to:

- ❑ involve your staff and their representatives – they are certain to have good ideas you could use;
- ❑ follow up any changes you make to ensure that they're having the effect you intended;
- ❑ review what you've done when you make major changes in your workplace (eg organisational change, new equipment, work systems or processes) to make sure that stress hasn't increased;
- ❑ lead by example – as a manager, you can communicate powerful signals about the importance of stress.

But why would staff want to tell me about their stress?

You're right. Staff may be reluctant to admit they are feeling stressed by work. This is because being stressed can be seen as a sign of weakness. You can help by making it easier for your staff to discuss stress. Reassure them that the information they give you will be treated in confidence. Try to avoid judgemental language and constantly referring to stress. If you use examples, relate them to performance and output not personal judgements of behaviours.

One of things people can fear the most is the perception of personal criticism or implied personal failure. In exploring stress with an individual you should use non judgemental language, be objective not subjective and remember to approach that matter in a way that deals with the behaviour not the personality.

It is also essential that you use the principles of good communication – establish a rapport, actively listen, ask open ended exploratory questions and paraphrase to ensure understanding.

What can I do to prevent stress from becoming a problem?

Most of the 'things to do' boil down to good management. They're ongoing processes that need to be built into the way your unit is run.

- ❑ Show that you take stress seriously, and be understanding towards people who admit to being under too much pressure. Avoid being judgemental or seeking explanations in personality "flaws".
- ❑ Encourage your managers to have an open and understanding attitude to what people say to them about the pressures of their work, and to look for signs of stress in their staff.
- ❑ Ensure that staff have the skills, training and resources they need, so that they know what to do, are confident that they can do it and receive credit for it.
- ❑ If possible, provide some scope for varying working conditions and flexibility, and for people to influence the way their jobs are done. This will increase their interest and sense of ownership.
- ❑ Ensure that people are treated fairly and consistently and that bullying and harassment aren't tolerated.
- ❑ Ensure good two-way communication, especially at times of change. Don't be afraid to listen and be honest about your own feelings. However do not "dump" your stress or anxiety on the staff member.
- ❑ Understand and be sensitive to the ebb and flow of the workplace in terms of staff movements, workload changes and fluctuating external demands. Plan for these fluctuations in advance.
- ❑ Be approachable and available for your staff, and address issues clearly, honestly, in a timely manner and in an objective manner.

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Ask yourself whether you do these things. If you don't, or are unsure whether you do, take another look at the suggestions on 'what management can do' (in the work-related stressors section below).

What should I do if a staff member complains about being stressed?

(see also the last section on managing individual cases)

First, listen to them! If the stress is work-related:

- try to address the source(s);
- involve the staff member in decisions;
- if necessary, encourage them to seek further help through their doctor;
- if you are not their line manager, ensure that he or she treats the staff member with understanding and maintains confidentiality.

Where you can't control the work-related sources of stress, it may be appropriate to move the staff member if you can. If a period of sick leave is recommended, keep in touch with the staff member and their doctor. This should be done personally if practical. However be sensitive where the staff member actually wants to be left alone. Remember that they may be able to return to work to do part of their job, work reduced hours or do a different job, before they are ready to return to their old one. Try to be flexible!

Don't be tempted to think that getting rid of someone provides an easy way out! If you don't act reasonably in dismissing an employee, they could claim unfair dismissal. Before deciding on your course of action affecting an individual or group, think about the implications for the individual or group. For example will it put other under excessive stress, will the action isolate the individual or even be discriminatory.

As a manager it is your role to decide on the best action to meet the situation. Training is great if time management strategies are needed, increased supervisory assistance works well if the person is feeling out of their depth, counselling may help if there are a lot of personal problems – finding the best match between the underlying cause and the actions available is essential. At this stage you may want to seek assistance from Senior Personnel Consultant or through Managers Assist.

Finally, bear in mind that if one of your staff members is suffering from work related stress, they may represent the tip of an iceberg. Find out whether others are also experiencing stress at work.

Should I be providing stress management training?

Stress management training comes in various forms. It usually teaches people to cope better with the pressures they may come across. Because it focuses on the individual, it tends not to tackle the causes of stress at work. In most cases simply providing training will not resolve major or entrenched problems. However, it can be useful as part of a 'bigger plan' to tackle work-related stress.

Should I be using the Employee Assistance Program?

The counselling service provides counsellors to whom individuals can talk privately about their problems. The Employee Assistance Program (EAP) can provide or access various services (eg counselling, performance management, financial advice, legal assistance).

Keep in mind that these services must protect the confidentiality of the individual, so any information they can give you may not help you tackle the causes of stress at work. On the other hand, like training, they can be useful as part of a 'bigger plan' to tackle work-related stress.

Can I use the Managers Assist Program?

If you are responsible for managing staff this program gives you an opportunity to explore solutions to interpersonal conflicts, communication processes and meeting the challenge of human resource management. The program is offered on the same professional basis as the Employee Assistance Program and the services are available through face to face or telephone consultation, appointments can be made by contacting the Student Life reception area on your campus

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The Managers Assist Program helps managers and team leaders in managing situations such as:

- a staff member with problems impacting on work performance or behaviour;
- interpersonal conflict
- a distressed or troubled staff member
- assisting a staff member not coping with change
- difficulties with team functioning

The Managers Assist Program is a resource service, providing suggestions and options. A manager/team leader accessing the service decides on appropriate action, applying relevant University Human Resources policy. The manager can also talk to their senior personal consultant for policy and organisational advice. The manager/team leader remains in control in managing the situation.

Do I need external consultants to help me deal with this?

In most cases, complex and expensive risk management procedures aren't necessary to tackle stress. Ordinary good management and regard for people may well be as effective as a high profile approach. But if you're worried that stress is a major problem and you can't deal with it internally, you could think about getting strategic assistance from Human Resources Services.

Where can I get more information or help?

From Who	When appropriate
Seeking advice will depend upon the situation and the person involved. Your options include:	
Discussing the matter with your manager	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> if the problem is being caused by workloads or other organisational demands <input type="checkbox"/> if you are personally involved in the issue, for example if there is conflict
Referring the person to the Employee Assistance Program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> where the problem is personal or interpersonal rather than organisational http://www.deakin.edu.au/studentlife/counselling/staff.htm
Using the Managers Assist Program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> where you want advice or guidance in dealing with difficult interpersonal situations involving either individual staff members or a team as a whole.
Discussing the matter with your Senior Personnel Officer in Human Resources Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> for technical advice on leave or disciplinary matters <input type="checkbox"/> where you need a sounding board to discuss strategies <input type="checkbox"/> where you need advice on resources available to help you in resolving the matter http://www.deakin.edu.au/hrs/contacts/index.php#area
Discussing the matter with the Campus Health and Safety Officer in Human Resources Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> where the situation is or may turn into a WorkCover claim http://www.deakin.edu.au/hrs/contacts/index.php#ohs
Discussing the matter with the person's co-workers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> in general DO NOT seek advice on how to manage the situation from co-workers – you risk complicating or worsening the situation <input type="checkbox"/> do listen to information or unsolicited advice that comes from co-workers but judge it critically
Other information can be obtained from Human Resources or Health Services	<p><u>Work and Family Guide: Balancing family and work (information and resources)</u></p> http://www.deakin.edu.au/hrs/ps/family.php

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The Supportive Manager

The basic roles of the manager and supervisor are

Goal setting	letting staff know what they are supposed to do
Coaching	making sure staff know how to do their jobs
Monitoring	keeping tabs on staff performance
Feedback	letting staff know how they are doing
Positive reinforcement	rewarding good performance

A supportive work environment can be provided by:

- Dealing with staff in a sensitive and caring fashion
- Regularly monitoring staff satisfaction and well-being
- Ensuring staff know whom to talk to about problems
- Fostering a team approach and good relationships between members of staff

Checklist to promote good supportive management

Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Have clear regular two-way communication with your staff? Are there formal meetings? Is there the opportunity for informal discussions? <input type="checkbox"/> Shares information? <input type="checkbox"/> Ask for staff opinion? <input type="checkbox"/> Has frequent face to face meetings? <input type="checkbox"/> Communicate and discuss team objectives, mission and values?
Feedback	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Gives regular feedback? <input type="checkbox"/> Gives recognition when job is well done? <input type="checkbox"/> Recognise and praise individual or group achievements, hard work and efforts? <input type="checkbox"/> Do you give supportive and constructive criticism when required?
Mentoring	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Utilises employee's abilities? <input type="checkbox"/> Supports and recognises their staff in meeting with his/her own managers? <input type="checkbox"/> Ensures that individual credit for good work is acknowledged in meetings with more senior management <input type="checkbox"/> Expresses confidence in staff member's ability to do a difficult job well? <input type="checkbox"/> Helps staff members learn from mistakes
Allowing autonomy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Encourage staff members to make decisions on their own <input type="checkbox"/> Encourages independent work? <input type="checkbox"/> Lets staff members do the work from start to finish where ever possible
Facilitates work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Makes sure that staff have the tools/equipment/training needed to do the job <input type="checkbox"/> Encourages appropriate training of staff <input type="checkbox"/> Is available to answer questions and provide guidance
Recognise staff as individuals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Have time for individual members of staff? <input type="checkbox"/> Provide opportunities for staff to discuss their concerns? Listens sympathetically to their concerns and take action about these concerns as appropriate? <input type="checkbox"/> Prepares staff for proposed changes in staffing, work tasks and responsibilities?
Planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Thinks through the impact your actions and decisions have on the staff for whom you have responsibility? <input type="checkbox"/> Understands and is sensitive to the ebb and flow of the workplace in terms of staff movements, workload changes and fluctuating external demands. <input type="checkbox"/> Plans for fluctuations in workload in advance. Does not go from "crisis" to "crisis"
Recognise that staff have a life outside work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Makes it easy for staff members to rearrange job schedule <input type="checkbox"/> Allows staff members to take advantage of flexible work arrangements

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Treats staff fairly	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Treats all members of staff fairly and promotes equity <input type="checkbox"/> Recognises and deals sensitively with cultural and other differences <input type="checkbox"/> Does not let personal dislikes or prejudices influence support for or acknowledgement of staff
Workdesign	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Have clear roles and responsibilities for your staff which they understand and work to? <input type="checkbox"/> Regularly review known work pressures such as excessive workload, tight deadlines, staffing levels, and need for staff skills development? <input type="checkbox"/> Identify jobs where stress has been or is a problem and see what can be done to reduce the risk of stress to job holders? <input type="checkbox"/> Ensure that instructions and requests to staff are clear and are not conflicting? <input type="checkbox"/> Where possible, ensure staff have some control of their work tasks and that their work has variety.
Health, safety and welfare	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Take health and safety seriously? <input type="checkbox"/> Where there are relationship problems, tackle these early, identify issues and agree the steps to try and resolve the matter? <input type="checkbox"/> Visit your staff in the workplace? <input type="checkbox"/> Know how long your staff work? <input type="checkbox"/> Encourage staff to take their full entitlement of holidays each year? <input type="checkbox"/> Provide as good a work environment as possible with the appropriate equipment to do the work efficiently?

Checklist of actions to support staff who feel stressed	<p>Do you:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Treat stressed employees in the same way as those with a physical health problem? <input type="checkbox"/> Discuss the issue with individuals and demonstrate that you are concerned about their health? <input type="checkbox"/> If work is affected, discuss the problem with your Senior Personnel Consultant who may refer the individual to Employee assistance or Occupational Health? <input type="checkbox"/> Ask if there is anything you can do to help? <input type="checkbox"/> Consider any simple modifications to work? <input type="checkbox"/> Advise the individual about sources of help within or outside the University? <input type="checkbox"/> Actively follow up an individual with stress problems and continue to demonstrate your wish to support them? <input type="checkbox"/> Review and if necessary modify the work tasks and responsibilities of individuals who have had sickness absence due to stress or depression, and continue to monitor their rehabilitation progress?
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Work Related Stressors

	<i>Problems that can lead to stress</i>	<i>What management can do</i>
Culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> lack of communication and consultation <input type="checkbox"/> a culture of blame when things go wrong, denial of potential problems <input type="checkbox"/> an expectation that people will regularly work excessively long hours or take work home with them 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> provide opportunities for staff to contribute ideas, especially in planning and organising their own jobs <input type="checkbox"/> introduce clear business objectives, good communication, and close employee involvement, particularly during periods of change <input type="checkbox"/> be honest with yourself, set a good example, and listen to and respect others <input type="checkbox"/> be approachable – create an atmosphere where people feel it is OK to talk to you about any problems they are having <input type="checkbox"/> avoid encouraging people to work excessively long hours
Demands of the job	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> too much to do, too little time <input type="checkbox"/> too little/too much training for the job <input type="checkbox"/> boring or repetitive work, or too little to do <input type="checkbox"/> random interruptions <input type="checkbox"/> delays in filling vacant positions <input type="checkbox"/> poor or inappropriate fit for the job <input type="checkbox"/> the working environment (heat, cold, noise) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> prioritise tasks, cut out unnecessary work, try to give warning of urgent or important jobs <input type="checkbox"/> make sure individuals are matched to jobs, provide training for those who need more, increase the scope of jobs for those who are over-trained <input type="checkbox"/> change the way jobs are done by moving people between jobs, giving individuals more responsibility, increasing the scope of the job, increasing the variety of tasks, giving a group of workers greater responsibility for effective performance of the group <input type="checkbox"/> make sure other workplace hazards, such as noise, harmful substances and the threat of violence, are properly controlled
Control	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> lack of control over work activities <input type="checkbox"/> lack of consultation or advanced notice about workplace and workload changes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> give more control to staff by enabling them to plan their own work, make decisions about how that work should be completed and how problems should be tackled <input type="checkbox"/> consult meaningfully with staff on changes <input type="checkbox"/> be honest with staff about your responsibility to make decisions. Consultation does not mean consensus agreement

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	<i>Problems that can lead to stress</i>	<i>What management can do</i>
Role	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> staff feeling that the job requires them to behave in conflicting ways at the same time <input type="checkbox"/> confusion about how everyone fits in <input type="checkbox"/> constant and demanding contact with staff or students 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> talk to people regularly to make sure that everyone is clear about what their job requires them to do <input type="checkbox"/> make sure that everyone has clearly defined objectives and responsibilities linked to business objectives, and training on how everyone fits in
Relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> poor relationships with others <input type="checkbox"/> mistrust.- vicious office politics disrupts positive behaviour. <input type="checkbox"/> bullying, racial or sexual harassment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> provide training in interpersonal skills <input type="checkbox"/> follow the procedures to prevent bullying and harassment <input type="checkbox"/> join in the cultural activities of the organisation <input type="checkbox"/> encourage and support team building
Support and the individual	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> lack of support from managers and co-workers <input type="checkbox"/> lack of recognition, being unappreciated <input type="checkbox"/> not being able to balance the demands of work and life outside work <input type="checkbox"/> not being honest about work performance and expectations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> support and encourage staff, even when things go wrong <input type="checkbox"/> encourage a healthy work-life balance <input type="checkbox"/> see if there is scope for flexible work schedules (eg flexible working hours, working from home) <input type="checkbox"/> take into account that everyone is different, and try to allocate work so that everyone is working in the way that helps them work best
Change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> fears about job security <input type="checkbox"/> doubt - staff are uncertain about what is happening and where things are headed in their position 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> ensure good communication with staff <input type="checkbox"/> provide effective support for staff throughout the process
Future	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> lack of career opportunity <input type="checkbox"/> unclear organisational direction and policies <input type="checkbox"/> inconsistent performance management - bonuses but no review. Positive feedback and then criticism or sidelining with no understanding of why. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> identify individual needs <input type="checkbox"/> give fair opportunities for development <input type="checkbox"/> keep staff informed of what is happening in the broader organisation <input type="checkbox"/> keep staff informed of the skills and attributes that the organisation will require in the future and help staff match their skills development opportunities to these

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Advice on managing individual cases

Do's	Do nots
Prompt, well thought action is necessary when you believe there is a stress problem	Do not delay unless you have concrete reasons to believe the matter will resolve itself
Use your judgement about the best approach based upon your knowledge of the person	Do not hesitate to seek advice from Human Resources Services, but it is your problem to resolve
Consider whether you are part of the perceived problem. If so, involve a credible third party	Do not use your involvement as an excuse for lack of action
Start low key, casually and at an informal level but have your facts marshalled. Have specific examples where the person's performance has deteriorated or where it is affecting the performance of others	Do not make a fuss or back the person into a corner. Do not operate on a wing and a prayer.
If the person's problem is not affecting their performance or that of others be prepared to back off and respect their privacy. Even when the issue is work-related you must be sensitive to privacy issues.	Do not use respect for privacy as an excuse for inaction. Offer assistance. If it is refused, leave the offer open whilst continuing to monitor work performance and impact.
If a discussion starts to get heated or personal, break it off. Get a third party involved to protect both yours and the other person's integrity	Do not get into arguments. If the matter needs to be pushed and the person concerned is not responding well, break off and make arrangements for a more formal meeting
Do be prepared to act as a sounding board and assist the other person to come to a personally acceptable decision. Facilitate the persons self development and awareness	Do not act as a judge, confessor or lecturer. If this is what the person wants, refer them to professional assistance. Avoid seeming indifferent but do not become emotionally involved
Do accept that some problems are out of your league. If the matter cannot be resolved locally, identify the best course of action and best forum for its resolution	Do not become involved over your head. Do not hesitate to seek outside professional assistance or seek advice from more senior management.
While taking a sincere interest in the personal well being of your staff, remember your prime responsibility as a manager is with the person's performance.	Do not become enmeshed in personal disputes, keep to the facts about the person's performance. Do not speculate or jump to conclusions. Do not apply your own personal values or beliefs in evaluating the performance of staff
Respect confidences and the person's privacy.	Avoid moral dilemmas, do not say or do anything that will compromise your integrity or that of the University's.
Do document any decisions or commitments about future performance or behaviour. Show the document to the person concerned and get their agreement	Do not leave this more than 1-2 days, as things can change or deteriorate rapidly.

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If the person's away from work:

Do's	Do nots
Follow up personally any absence from work over 3 days. This can be in the form of a phone call: how are you? Is there anything we can do? Do this even though the person may have "rung in"	Do not leave this to others unless there is a concrete reason to do so: the personal touch can be critical Do not go overboard especially if there was a poor relationship initially.
If it is a prolonged absence (over 2 weeks) maintain regular contact. If appropriate arrange a personal visit perhaps with a co-worker. If appropriate arrange flowers, get well card.. etc.	Do not forget about the person. Do not start to believe that it is "for the best" that the person is away.
After any prolonged absence (over 1 month) arrange a suitable return to work program. If the absence involves sickness or injury, consider limited hours and duties. Even if it is a holiday, people take time to get back into the swing of things.	Do not give a returning worker a month's backlog to catch up with in the next week, as well as their normal job.
If the person's absence is welcomed by you or other employees then you have a major problem. Similarly, if you believe there is no good reason for the absence, do something about it.	Do not ignore difficult situations: they inevitably get worse. Do not be reluctant to start the formal disciplinary/warning system if justified

Summary

Stress in the workplace is an issue for everyone. Unhealthy levels of stress can not only affect the person experiencing it but also work colleagues, the local manager as well as the person's family and friends. The local manager has good legal, organisational and humanitarian reasons for effectively dealing with workplace stress.

Workplace stress is primarily an organisational issue although it is shaped and influenced by personal characteristics and behaviours. Although stress may seem a very difficult and personal issue to deal with as a manager, a systematic and measured approach will lead to the best outcome for all concerned.

This document will help you address existing stress by assisting you to identify, analyse and manage the issue. More importantly as a manager you should strive to have a workplace where stress is managed like other normal workplace issues. The supportive manager is aware of and is sensitive to the current level of stress in the workplace, and has management techniques to keep it within reasonable bounds.