

PEOPLE MATTERS SPECIAL: MENTAL HEALTH MATTERS

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Spotlight on stress & burnout

Today, the aim is to increase awareness of the causes and cures of what has been labelled the modern day health epidemic by the World Health Organisation – “stress”.

The Education Support Partnership's *2018 Teacher Wellbeing Index* revealed that 67% of education professionals describe themselves as stressed.

Stress-related absence has increased for two-fifths of businesses in the past year, according to new research from the [CIPD and Simplyhealth](#). The top causes of stress-related absence were excessive workloads and management style.

What causes stress?

It is generally accepted that going to work is a good thing. However, according to the Health & Safety Executive (HSE) there are six main factors that can lead to work-related stress if they are not managed effectively:

1. Demands
2. Control
3. Support
4. Relationships
5. Role
6. Change

What's the difference between pressure and stress?

Most employees thrive with a degree of pressure. It can motivate them to perform to the best of their ability. Stress kicks in at the point we experience too much pressure and feel unable to cope as a result. Bear in mind that not all stress is bad and that there are many ways we can manage it.



What is stress?

The Health and Safety Executive defines stress as “the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressures or other types of demand placed on them”. Recent research shows that this ‘adverse reaction’ can seriously undermine the quality of people's working lives and, in turn, the effectiveness of the workplace.

The stress response is a survival strategy urging the body to respond in one of two ways. Fight or flight. It is *not* a mental health condition.

Stress happens when we can't control what is happening to us. From being chased by a lion to being faced with an unmanageable workload day after day.

When stress like this becomes an everyday occurrence, the part of our brain that regulates blood pressure and heartbeat – and enables us to learn, plan, concentrate and make judgements – begins to

How can I tell if an employee is feeling stressed?

Line managers play a vital role in identifying and managing stress within WHMAT. They are likely to see the problems which cause stress first hand. In addition, line managers will often be the first point of contact when an individual is feeling stressed.

An employee experiencing excessive levels of stress will usually exhibit a change in their behaviour. They may become withdrawn, flighty, frustrated or argumentative. It's important for line managers to address the issue early to prevent conflicts in the workplace or sickness absence arising.

An informal chat can be invaluable. Avoid pointing out mistakes or being critical: this may lead employees to become defensive. Your priority should be to make them feel supported.

Managers should also invite stressed colleagues to complete a stress risk assessment with them, so that issues can be discussed openly and solutions proposed by both parties (ask HR for a copy of WHMAT's Stress at Work Policy, or see www.washwoodmat, policies tab).

Practical steps to alleviate the problem might include assessing workload, providing additional training, or introducing flexible working if their stress is related to their homelife.

An employee is feeling stressed due to problems at home. How can I help?

Take the time to talk to them to offer advice and support to help them manage their working life.

In addition, sign post them to 24/7 confidential counselling via Perkbox's Employee Support Hub – go to <https://whmat.perkbox.com/search/perks?=&CIC> and click on redeem perk or via the Education Support Partnership Charity on 08000 562 561.

The Stress Intelligence Model – 5 Stages

We can help manage our own stress levels through the following:

Stage 1 – Stress Awareness

Raise awareness of your own relationship with stress by understanding your triggers and responses.

Stage 2 – Stress Knowledge

Understand what stress is and the impact that it can have on your mental and physical health (see this article).

Stage 3 – Self Care

Commit to self-care – healthy eating, exercise, quality sleep, committing to a work-life balance. Put your oxygen mask on first before you help others.

shut down.

This can lead to an increased risk of developing anxiety, depression or other mental health problems. It also increases the risk of physical health problems. These include insomnia, heart problems, muscle pain and it has also been linked to cancer and obesity.

What is burnout?

It's a state of emotional, physical and mental exhaustion caused by excessive and prolonged stress. It can affect anybody regardless of job or age.

Stage 4 – Lifestyle Management

Manage your wellbeing by maintaining a healthy and balanced lifestyle.

Step 5 – Everyday Energy

Create moments of sanctuary to replenish your everyday energy levels. Practising yoga, meditation or mindfulness (being in touch with and aware of the moment) can be helpful, or find another way to recharge.

(Liggy Webb, Best-selling author & Presenter)

HR are on hand to discuss any stress-related questions that you have.

For questions or feedback, please contact Michelle Gabriel, Director of HR.