Imperial College
London

HEALTH +
WELLBEING

MANAGER'S GUIDE

Tackling stress at work

In our fast-paced work environment, individuals can find themselves caught in a cycle of negative emotions and behaviours — also known as stress.

IMPERIAL EXPECTATIONS

Imperial Expectations articulate how College expects its leaders, managers and supervisors to behave. They underpin your responsibility as line managers for the way work is carried out.

Imperial Expectations link in with key work-related factors identified by the Health and Safety Executive as having the potential to cause stress related illness (i.e. the risk):

— Demands of the job

— Control over how work is carried out

— Support and encouragement provided by management and colleagues

— Relationships within the workplace

— Role within their team

— Management of change

Further information can be found in the HSE document 'Managing the Causes of Work Related Stress'

SIGNS OF STRESS IN THE WORKPLACE

— Decreased effectiveness and productivity

— Low levels of engagement

— Poor working relationships

— Higher rates of turnover

— Attendance and timekeeping issues

Where this becomes apparent in a team, managers can seek advice from Human Resources and the Learning and Development Centre.

Where individuals report issues there is a two-part process designed to assist a problem solving approach to their perception of how their work is contributing to their stress. Identify your Work Stressors is the first stage, by spending time working through the questionnaire, considering the relevance of recognised sources of work place stress to their situation, the individual should be in a position to better articulate their difficulties and may have some ideas which will help to resolve them.

When to suggest using the Identify your work stressors tool

Individuals have varying capacities to cope with factors which can contribute to work related stress. Some people may be more vulnerable to developing illness associated with work related stress than others. In particular, those who:

▶ Have been absent from work due to work-related stress or difficulties with coping in the past

▶ Have personal difficulties which may be unrelated to work

▶ Are inexperienced in their role

▶ May have experienced a period of uncertainty or change relating to their role

▶ Have a history of significant or persistent physical health problems

▶ Have a personality type which tends towards perfectionism, over work or being unable to cope with pressure

▶ Demonstrating behaviours which could be attributed to work related stress

Human Resources or the Occupational Health Service may recommend the individual use the tool to help them understand the difficulties they are experiencing. You may be aware of some additional factors that will need to be handled sensitively and in confidence. By anticipating difficulties and finding solutions (adjustments and review of work processes) you will help manage the problem before it becomes a crisis.

This tool allows the individual to consider which areas of their work are contributing to their stress. It gives them the opportunity to formulate their thoughts and reflect on the particular stressors. When they have used the tool they should have a list of issues with examples, this is the first part of this problem solving approach. When the individual has completed the questionnaire they are asked to think about changes they can make for themselves, and it is recommended they request a meeting with their line manager to discuss their findings.

Taking it forward

When an individual requests a meeting, allow reasonable time to discuss the issues raised and arrange to revisit when you have had the opportunity to give their concerns careful consideration, you can use the Management Support Plan below to help summarise the issues and devise an action plan with a review date. If either you or the individual is worried about their health it would be appropriate to discuss with Human Resources and refer to Occupational Health for assessment and advice.

Solutions should assist the individual to be productive in their role, actions such as extending deadlines, assistance with prioritisation, regular 1:1 meetings, home working, collaborative working, delegation, addressing training needs along with temporary adjustments to work or processes which may be contributing to the problem while seeking to find a more long-term sustainable solution. Reassigning core responsibilities may be seen as a threat and be counterproductive unless they are identified as primary stressors and the individual is in agreement.

Please refer to page six for a more detailed explanation of the topics and the types of adjustment/support which can be put in place. You may not have all the answers or be in a position to resolve the issues immediately, but by setting a follow-up meeting you can reflect on the discussion, and consider what support, training or adjustments which will help the individual.

LDC and Occupational Health have developed training for line managers, Managing for Wellbeing, which is recommended for all staff with line management responsibility and aims to develop your understanding of stress, and the implications for the organisation. It will support line managers in using the Stress Management Competencies Tool; a framework which has been developed by the CIPD & HSE.

You can use this template to record which areas of concern have been identified and discussed with the staff member and to help devise an action plan.

Please refer to page six for more detailed information.

Employee name   Date of meeting

Background information

DEMAND

Potential sources of stress include:

☐ Workload   ☐ Communication   ☐ Skills training and development

☐ Insufficient challenge   ☐ Work place hazards and environment   ☐ Rest

Management support

CONTROL

☐ I am unable to organise own work   ☐ I am unable to use my initative to complete work

☐ The rigid work rotas make it difficult for me to complete my work

Management support

SUPPORT

☐ I do not get useful feedback about my work   ☐ I have difficulty discussing work issues with my manager

☐ I feel I have insufficient information to carry my work   ☐ I feel unable to ask colleagues for assistance

☐ I do not have the opportunity to attend training   ☐ I feel team communication is not effective

Management support

ROLE

☐ I am not absolutely clear about the purpose of my job   ☐ I am not clear about what is expected of me

☐ I am concerned about conflicting responsibilities within my role

Management support

RELATIONSHIPS

☐ I feel there are strained relationships within the team   ☐ I am being treated unfairly or without respect

☐ I am being bullied or harassed   ☐ My knowledge and skills are not valued

Management support

CHANGE

What changes are you concerned about?

Management support

Review date

Agreed plan:

+ 5

Review date

Agreed plan:

SECTION 1 — DEMAND

Demand includes such things as your workload, working patterns and your work environment.

Potential sources of stress include:	Management actions
WORKLOAD /JOB DESIGN	
Difficulty getting through your workload in the time available	Review the range of duties, responsibilities and associated deadlines: are they realistic?
Difficulty in meeting deadlines	Check understanding: is the person doing more than is needed?
Having competing deadlines	Review task distribution within the work team: is it balanced?
Needing or being required to work long hours to get through work	Review co-operation within the work team: can it be improved?
Reporting to/undertaking work for more than one person	Provide assistance with prioritisation
	Assistance with task planning
	Are there external factors creating barriers to progress? Where management responsibilities are shared — communication with oth er manager is essential. Managers should be responsible for negotiating priorities with each other and instructing and assisting the individual to prioritise their work
COMMUNICATION	
Constant communication during off-duty time by e-mail, text and phone?	Clarify expectations
	Set parameters to reduce /remove unnecessary out of hours work communications
SKILLS, TRAINING & DEVELOPMENT	
Not having the necessary skills for the work you are expected to do	Discuss perceived lack of skills & provide for training needs
	Consider time management training
	Consider job coaching or mentoring
INSUFFICIENT CHALLENGE	
Not feeling challenged by your work	LDC consultancy
Not having enough work to do	Project work
	Organise a placement or secondment
WORKPLACE HAZARDS AND ENVIRONMENT	
Unpleasant work environment	Undertake appropriate Risk Assessment for work processes
Unsafe work environment	Seek ergonomic advice from Safety Officer/ Occupational Health.
	Explore opportunities to optimise environment
REST	
Long hours	Schedule work in a way which allows recovery time, particularly after busy periods
Feeling that there is no time to take breaks and holiday	Check all leave is being taken

SECTION 2 — CONTROL

Control is about the amount of influence you have over how you do your work.

Potential sources of stress include:	Management actions
Rigid work routines or rotas	Increase scope for the person to set their own work routines.
Limited opportunity to organise your work yourself	Seek comment from staff in 1-2-1 & team meetings on how work is organised
Limited opportunity to exercise initiative in getting your job done	Discuss tasks where the person feels that they could act on their initiative
	Invite staff to contribute towards changes in procedures at development stage

SECTION 3 — SUPPORT

Support is about the resources, the support and encouragement provided by your manager, your colleagues and by College to help you manage your job.

Potential sources of stress include:	Management actions
Getting little or no feedback on the quality of your work	Use 1-2-1s to give feedback on performance
Give praise for good work	Set-up regular 1-2-1s, with privacy. Let the individual know when else they can speak with you
Not feeling able to talk to your manager if you had a problem with your work	Introduce annual ES if not already in place
Not being given the information you need to do your job	When allocating tasks ensure you give all the information
Not feeling able to ask colleagues for help if needed	Create opportunities for collaborative working
Not having sufficient opportunity to attend training or take up development opportunities	Review priorities at 1:1 meetings to facilitate
Ineffective communication within the team	Hold regular team meetings. Have standing meeting agenda items for 'changes', 'management decisions', 'College news' etc.
	Provide opportunities to raise questions

SECTION 4 — ROLE

Role is about understanding the purpose of your job and being clear about your responsibilities.

Potential sources of stress include:	Management actions
Not being clear about what the purpose of your job	Review the person's job description:
	— Is it up-to-date?
	— Does it provide a clear overview of the job and responsibilities?
	— Is it realistic?
Not being clear about what is expected of you	Talk through performance expectations and concerns
Having conflicting roles	Consider providing a mentor to help the person develop their understanding of their role
	Clarify priorities

SECTION 5 — RELATIONSHIPS

Relationships are about how people work together, respect and behaviour.

Potential sources of stress include:	Management actions
Feeling that relationships with colleagues or your manager are strained	Enquire about working relationships in 1-2-1 meetings
Being treated in a way you consider is unfair or disrespectful	Discuss expected behaviour standards in a team meeting
Being harassed or bullied in your work	Consider mediation (formal or informal) to resolve inter personal disputes
Feeling that your skills and knowledge are not being appreciated	Investigate allegations of unreasonable behaviour or bullying
	Review how and when you provide feedback on a member of staff's performance

SECTION 6 — CHANGE

What changes are you concerned about?	Listen

SECTION 7 — OTHER

Are there any other aspects of your work not previously mentioned that you have found stressful?	Discuss concerns

SECTION 8 — EXTERNAL FACTORS

Difficulties in our lives away from work can temporarily reduce our ability to cope with our job, leading to stress at work.	Suggestion:
	OH Referral
Health effects	
	Flexitime; occasional work from home
Care responsibilities	
	Confidential Care
Legal/ financial problems	