



Line management behaviour and stress at work

Updated guidance for line managers



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What is stress?

Stress is the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressures or other types of demands placed upon them.

There is a clear distinction between pressure, which can be a motivating factor, and stress, which can occur when this pressure becomes excessive.

Why does stress need to be tackled?

- About one in six people say they find their work either very or extremely stressful.
- Work-related stress accounts for over a third of all new incidents of ill health.
- The CIPD 2008 Absence Management survey found stress to be the leading cause of long-term absence in non-manual workers.
- Each case of stress, anxiety or depression leads to an average of 30.2 working days lost.
- In 2007–08, a total of 13.5 million working days were lost to stress, depression and anxiety.
- Nearly a third of organisations responding to the CIPD 2008 Absence Management survey reported an increase in stress-related absence in the last 12 months.

What is already being done about stress at work?

The UK Health and Safety Executive (HSE) has published national Management Standards for work-related stress which provide guidance on best practice for employers. The overall aim of these standards is to bring about a reduction in the number of employees who go off sick or who cannot perform well at work because of stress.

The Management Standards and supporting processes are designed to:

- help simplify risk assessments for stress
- encourage employers, employees and their representatives to work in partnership to address work-related stress throughout the organisation
- provide a yardstick by which organisations can gauge their performance in tackling the key causes of stress.

Full details of the Management Standards can be found at www.hse.gov.uk/stress/standards

Why is stress management particularly important to me as a manager?

The Management Standards initiative is driven from Health and Safety; however, much of the responsibility for its implementation will fall on line managers. This means managers need to know what stress is; and also understand what skills, abilities and behaviours are necessary to implement the Management Standards and manage employees in a way that minimises work-related stress.

As a manager, you play an important intermediary role between individual staff members and the organisation. As a result, you can help determine how well your organisation manages stress in its employees.

More importantly, as a manager you have a huge impact on the work-related stress of your employees. In fact, the recent CIPD Absence Management survey found that respondents cited management style in the top three causes of work-related stress overall. For instance:

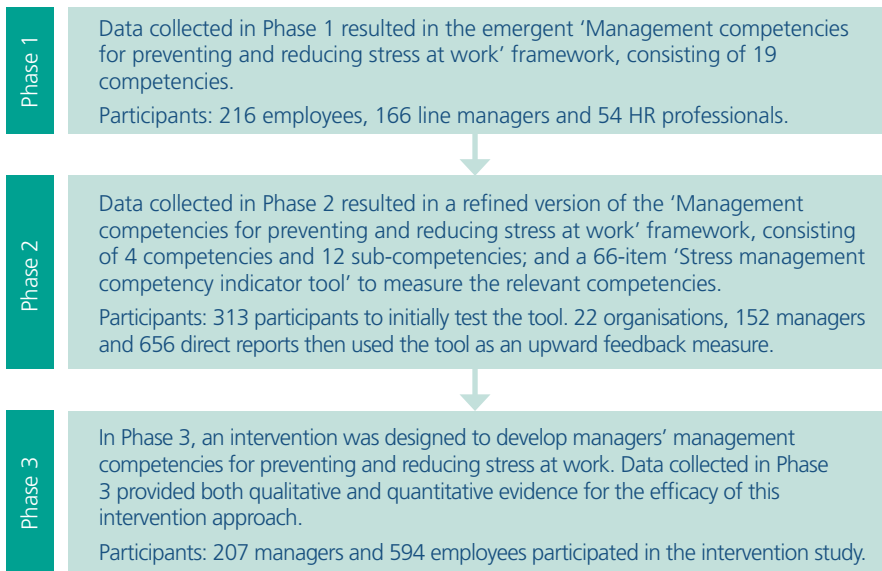
- You can prevent (or conversely cause) stress by the way that you behave towards your employees.
- Your influence may mean employees can be protected from, or exposed to, stressful working conditions, for instance negotiating an extension to a deadline in a team that is already working to full capacity.
- Working closely with your team, you are well positioned to identify stress in others at an early stage.
- If one of your employees suffers from stress, you, as their manager, are likely to be involved in the solution.

- Finally, increasingly managers are responsible for the uptake and roll-out of risk assessments for work stress within their team/department.

To be able to help you become the most effective 'stress manager', we need to understand exactly what behaviours are important in this context.

What do line managers need to do to prevent and reduce stress?

Supported by the CIPD, the HSE and Investors in People, a team of occupational psychologists from Goldsmiths, University of London and Affinity Health at Work have been conducting research into what behaviours managers need to show in order to prevent and reduce stress in their team. The following flow diagram shows the phases of research that have been carried out. The framework of manager behaviours identified is shown on the next two pages of this leaflet.



Management competencies for preventing and reducing stress at work: refined framework following phase 2 of the research

Competency	Sub-competency	Do (✓) Don't (✗)	Examples of manager behaviour
Respectful and responsible: managing emotions and having integrity	Integrity	✓	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • is a good role model • treats team members with respect • is honest
		✗	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • says one thing, then does something different • speaks about team members behind their backs
	Managing emotions	✓	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • acts calmly in pressured situations • takes a consistent approach to managing
		✗	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • is unpredictable in mood • passes on stress to employees • panics about deadlines • takes suggestions for improvement as a personal criticism
	Considerate approach	✗	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • makes short-term demands rather than allowing planning • creates unrealistic deadlines • gives more negative than positive feedback • relies on others to deal with problems • imposes 'my way is the only way' • shows a lack of consideration for work-life balance
Managing and communicating existing and future work	Proactive work management	✓	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • clearly communicates employee job objectives • develops action plans • monitors team workload on an ongoing basis • encourages team to review how they organise work • stops additional work being taken on when necessary • works proactively • sees projects/tasks through to delivery • reviews processes to see if work can be improved • prioritises future workloads
		✓	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • deals rationally with problems • follows up problems on team's behalf • deals with problems as soon as they arise
	Problem-solving	✗	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • is indecisive at decision-making
		Participative/empowering	✓
	✗		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • gives too little direction to employees

Management competencies for preventing and reducing stress at work: refined framework following phase 2 of the research (continued)

Competency	Sub-competency	Do (✓) Don't (X)	Examples of manager behaviour
Reasoning/managing difficult situations	Managing conflict	✓	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> acts as mediator in conflict situations deals with squabbles before they become arguments deals objectively with conflicts deals with conflicts head on
		X	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> acts to keep the peace rather than resolve issues
	Use of organisation resources	✓	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> seeks advice from other managers when necessary uses HR as a resource to help deal with problems seeks help from occupational health when necessary
	Taking responsibility for resolving issues	✓	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> follows up conflicts after resolution supports employees through incidents of abuse makes it clear they will take ultimate responsibility if things go wrong
		X	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> doesn't address bullying
Managing the individual within the team	Personally accessible	✓	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> speaks personally rather than uses email provides regular opportunities to speak one to one returns calls/emails promptly is available to talk to when needed
	Sociable	✓	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> brings in treats socialises with the team is willing to have a laugh at work
	Empathetic engagement	✓	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> encourages employee input in discussions listens when employees ask for help makes an effort to find out what motivates employees at work tries to see team member's point of view takes an interest in team's life outside work regularly asks 'how are you?' treats all team members with equal importance
		X	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> assumes rather than checks that employees are okay

What are the key messages I should take from this research?

1 Being an effective stress manager does not require extra work.

We recognise that, as a manager, the pressures on you at work are already high and that finding the time to focus on stress management may be difficult. However, stress management doesn't have to be a separate activity; it is part of everyday management. It is about the way you behave on a day-to-day basis with those you manage.

2 There is not one key behaviour needed to be an effective stress manager.

Our research suggests that effective stress management requires a complementary set of behaviours. These behaviours are likely to differ in importance depending on the situation and the individuals within your team.

3 Some of these behaviours may be things you already do, but some you may not.

Reviewing your current management approach and receiving feedback from your staff will allow you to assess which of the behaviours set out in the framework above are part of your repertoire and which are not. To make sure that you manage in ways that prevent and reduce stress, if you identify any gaps in your skills or behaviours, you can seek targeted and specific help and guidance.

4 These management behaviours can help provide solutions to stress-related problems.

If you are involved in stress management activities, such as risk assessments or stress auditing, understanding how your management behaviour can contribute to preventing and reducing stress is a useful starting point from which to approach a solution.

5 It is possible to change behaviour.

The findings from Phase 3 of the research show that you can change your management behaviour in positive ways to prevent and reduce stress in your staff, particularly if you have development needs in this area.

6 Feedback on behaviour is important to support behaviour change.

It appears that feedback from others, particularly from direct reports, is important to help learn and develop new management behaviours. The increased insight and self-awareness provided when you get upward feedback is a good basis from which to understand what behavioural changes would be appropriate.

7 There may be barriers to showing positive manager behaviour.

Even when you are committed to behave in ways that prevent and reduce stress in your staff, you may find that it is not easy to do so: there will be barriers to behaving in positive ways. These barriers may be:

- related to the job, for example workload, tight deadlines, lack of resources, conflicting priorities or the behaviour of your own manager
- organisational barriers, such as processes and bureaucracy, IT problems and email overload, organisational or national initiatives or restrictions on what you can say to staff
- team capabilities or problem behaviours and attitudes shown by members of the team
- personal circumstances, pressures and stresses or lack of confidence.

To be able to overcome these barriers, you will need to adopt a range of strategies and self-management approaches, such as: planning, saying 'no', challenging and clarifying demands, delegating, communicating, dealing with problem performance, getting training and development and looking after yourself.

8 Seek support from others.

Once you have identified changes you want to make to your behaviour, it would be helpful to seek support from others in the organisation, including your manager, peers and team. Additional training and development may also be helpful.

Online tools available to support managers

During 2009 we will be developing a package of online materials to help managers show the behaviours set out in the framework on pages 4 and 5. These will be available for free download through the HSE website at www.hse.gov.uk/stress



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