

Prior to reading this you should read the Employees Guide- Stress and Wellbeing.

Your responsibilities as a manager

NHS 24, like most employers, cares about our staff and has both a legal and moral duty of care.

In relation to stress and well being, our aim is to prevent the risk of staff developing a stress-related illness because of their work.

Part of your role as a manager is to identify stress-related issues, discuss them with the individuals concerned and take appropriate supportive action.

This does not mean you are required to provide counselling – there are professionals available to do this through the employee assistance programme.

Employee Assistance Programme HELP, telephone number: 0800 587 5670

Website: www.sg.helpeap.com

Through general team management of your own and other staff and regular '1 to 1s' you will get to know staff. This can help you identify when changes occur, and prompt you to provide assistance.

Your role

The impact of pressures within a staff members personal life cannot be ignored.

As well as listening and supporting, you may be able to point the individual in the right direction for help.

If it would help, work with the individual and make short-term reasonable adjustments to their working arrangements.

Key practical steps

During the course of the day, as a manager you may find yourself saying:

Is that genuine stress?

I think I'd better have a word with them. Something's definitely wrong there.

No, I won't go out this evening with my team, I'll only start going on about work.

We are going to have real problems achieving these targets.

Here are some practical steps you can take:

- Accept that stress exists, and that staff will all have different stressors and different ways of coping/dealing with it
- Be aware of your own personal stress, and take steps to deal with it as this may also be having an adverse effect on your colleagues and could be the cause for other peoples stress. (Avoid sharing your own stress, especially with vulnerable members of staff.) Face up to the existence of work problems.
- Watch out for stress in your colleagues as part of your normal management role.
- Be willing to listen to problems and to offer help.
- Be aware of potential stressors (job and work environment).

The tell-tale signs of a problem existing in your team/department are:

- Changes in behaviour
- High turnover of Staff
- Absenteeism
- Presenteeism

Have you heard of Presenteeism?

It includes working excessive hours but having low productivity, being easily distracted, achieving very little and even coming to work when you're ill. This is certainly a sign of a problem.

A good manager will, when they identify stress in an individual, take steps such as:

- Try and discuss informally in first instance.
- Establish what work is urgent, important, routine
- Try and take away some of the workload
- Insist (gently) on lunch breaks, holidays
- Encourage contact with Employee Assistance Programme HELP, telephone number: 0800 587 5670 Website: www.sg.helpeap.com

Stress Risk Assessment

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) have provided six management standards as a guide for risk assessment.

Each Standard looks at one of the six key aspects of work (Relationships, Roles, Control, Demands, Change, Support) which, if not managed properly, can lead to work-related stress. The Standards are intended to help and encourage employers to meet their legal obligations.

NHS24 provides an assessment form and guidance notes to help you carry out a risk assessment should one be required. Areas are provided for you to explore, and there are discussion points under each of the management standards. This will help you to ascertain the stressors an employee may be experiencing.

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) five-step approach to risk assessment includes:

- Look for the hazards / stressors (i.e. the issues causing stress).
- Decide who might be harmed and how.
- Evaluate the risk and decide what needs to be done.
- Record your findings.
- Monitor and review.

If further guidance is required, contact your HR advisor, Health and Safety Lead or union representative.

What to do!

If an employee is showing signs of stress...

- Hold an informal meeting in a private room to assess whether there is a problem, whether it is significant, and if so to offer support. Then you can decide (based on the outcome of discussion) if a risk assessment is required to be carried out.

Remember that stress is not a sign of weakness but a normal and natural reaction to excess pressure that even normally robust people can succumb to. Support is available to help them.

Managing your own pressure

The following plan may help you to manage you own pressure.

- Learn to manage your own time effectively and help your team do the same
- Delegate
- Control interruptions
- Use a daily action plan
- Set objectives
- Prioritise tasks
- Handle each piece of paper once
- Learn to say 'No'
- **Do it now**

Now we shall look at some examples of management behaviour and the good and bad practices associated with them.

Management Behaviour	Good Practice	Bad Practice
Isolation	Make myself available to staff to listen when needed	Sit at my desk and concentrate on my own task
Composure	Act calmly in pressurised situations	Pass on my own stress to others I am working with
Communication	Speak personally to staff members and follow up with e-mail	Rely on e-mail to pass on information when staff are sitting nearby
Delegation	Delegate as much work as possible to competent staff	Insist on doing most of the important work yourself
Mediation	Act as mediator in conflict situations	Act to keep the peace rather than address the situation
Monitoring	Regularly ask 'How are you'	Assume, rather than check that staff are ok
Involvement	Socialise with the staff, taking an interest in their outside life	Keep your distance from the staff

The 3 pre-requisites in managing a person with stress

Reflective Listening

1. Reflective listening is crucial when having a meeting or conversation with a person that is suffering from a suspected or diagnosed mental health condition, regardless of what that condition is. The LEAP model is a useful tool to have at hand, it helps to focus a conversation and keep its solution focused. Always remember the LEAP model.

Bear in mind that a manager who is caring and demonstrates concern will help a person with any kind of mental health issue to remain motivated and feel that they are a worthwhile member of a team.

L.E.A.P: –

Listen, Empathise, Ask questions and Problem solve. The point of this is to listen for what the person finds upsetting or motivating, empathise with them, ask questions and partner with them to address their issues jointly.

1. Steps in reflective listening

- Listen to what they are saying **DO NOT INTERRUPT**
- Empathise with the emotional component of what they have said
- ASK open questions and clarify problems. Keep questions simple
- Partner with the person to problem solve and find common goals. Keep goals and details clear and simple.

Always give the staff member lots of time to respond. A person with any mental health difficulties will need a bit more time to process information.

2. Professional boundaries

An important part of managing or helping someone with a mental health condition is to understand that you are not attempting to change their behaviour. However the goal is to contain the behaviours. One of the safest ways on containing behaviours is to have firm and fair boundaries in place and to be consistent within those boundaries. An example of a firm boundary is ensuring you have in place a time frame around how long you intend to address the issue with someone suffering from a mental health condition and which subjects you are going to discuss. By placing a time frame around the discussion and empathising what is being discussed, this will help contain any behaviour that can (and often does) escalate during the course of the conversation.

Remember

- Goal is not to change behaviours

- Plan your discussion in advance
- Be consistent
- Time frames are important
- Place a boundary of what is being discussed and stick to it
- Thought, feelings and behaviours will escalate without a boundary
- Take notes and file them
- Be aware that discussions are confidential, however if there is a perceived danger to anyone, the conversation is no longer confidential.

3. Professional Empathy

Professional empathy is empathy which is safe and consistent for both the manager and those they are managing.

During an episode those with a mental health condition mostly focus on themselves and what they are feeling and very often find empathising difficult. This type of behaviour may come across as all consuming and difficult to manage, especially if the person is not able to take into account the subtle emotional cues of others. Professional empathy is crucial when managing a person with a mental health condition. Very often a manager may become over responsible and find it difficult to know where to place boundaries around empathy. There are steps to take which will ensure the empathy a manager displays is both professional, compassionate and most importantly, safe.

Remember

- Set aside your own feelings, and listen without interrupting
- If you notice the person looks distressed, but is stating they are fine, then think about a different way of asking the questions – but DON'T PUSH
- If you have made all reasonable adjustments and there is nothing more you can do as a manager then it is important to acknowledge this.
- Speak to HR/H&S /OH/EAP for advise if things become too complicated
- Talk to you own manager about any difficulties you are facing managing a person that has mental health issues.

Managing mental health conversations – Do's and Don'ts

DO	DON'T
Have a conversation in a neutral and private space, not in your office, and away from other members of staff.	Attempt to initiate a conversation in front of anyone else

Make sure there are no interruptions, switch off your mobile phone	Initiate a conversation if you have another appointment looming
Remain focused. You only need information that will help you achieve the goal of supporting your staff member.	Attempt to diagnose, it may be tempting as you may be clinically trained – but DO NOT Attempt.
Ask open and non-controlling questions, for example, “I was wondering how you were doing?”	Ask questions that could create pressure such as “what is wrong with you then? Or “are you stressed or something like that?”
Use neutral language for example “you seem very low today”	Use medical language linked to illness such as “you seem depressed” unless the person you are having a conversation with uses it
Always allow the person time to answer, remember that the person will require longer to process the information due to their condition	Rush in with another question, without listening to the answer you’ve been given And dont Push for an answer – Be patient
Always end the meeting with a follow up appointment to review situation.	Dont leave the person in limbo with no structure to their rehabilitation.
Always think about confidentiality. Its is important that you discuss and agree with them exactly who else, if anyone, might need to know and what information is okay to share	Announce someones personal situation to the rest of the staff without agreeing what information is necessary beforehand
Agree achievable goals and targets	Agree to something that you cannot see through to completion

Dealing with change

Change Essentials

- Be clear on what change is required
- Plan, Plan, Plan: schedule, setting out clearly defined objectives and responsibilities; focus on the details
- Pre-empt resistance – focus on what staff feel they have got to gain or lose by change
- Set short term goals

- Prepare staff – tackle training and development prior to initialising the change to give staff the confidence and ability to clear the perceived raised hurdles
- Communicate regularly and effectively - ensure this is a 2 way process
- Get everyone involved – people are much more inclined to support what they helped create and resist what is forced upon them
- Avoid complacency – create an environment in which people are dissatisfied with the status quo; drive staff out of their comfort zones in a positive way
- Prepare for the unpredictable – continued adaptation is a necessity; an organisation prepared for uncertainty is better placed to optimise the opportunities which change creates.

Summary

And finally.....

- At NHS 24 we take your Health and Well Being very seriously.
- Work-related stress can be the result of conflict between the role, the needs of the staff member and the demands of the workplace.
- Work stresses go home with the staff member.
- Home stresses come to work with the staff member.
- Good employers and managers will recognise the signs and symptoms of stress and take appropriate supportive action.
- We have a legal and moral obligation to manage pressure and stress.
- Ongoing support is available for all managers' through EAP, HR and the Health and Safety team.

Reference

www.In-equilibrium.co.uk