

## Stress – avoiding, coping, and eliminating

by Mike Hill



Every now and then, in and out of work, people feel like they have had enough. This is down to all kinds of things. Outside of work, it might be down to DIY at home going wrong, or what next door's dog keeps doing in your garden... or serious family issues. But at work, there are themes that may cause stress.

The Health & Safety Executive defines Stress as 'the adverse reaction a person has to excessive pressure or other types of demand placed upon them.' Stress is one of the greatest causes of time off work due to illness in Britain today. In 2018/19, work-related stress, depression and anxiety caused 44% of work-related ill health and 54% of working days lost. That's a lot of stress-filled days for employees, and a major disturbance to productivity for their teams – and don't forget, other team-members' workloads go up when this happens.

So what's the cause here?

The HSE considers that a number of factors cause stress: the demands of your job; your control over your work; the support you receive from managers and colleagues; your relationships at work; understanding your role in the organization; the changes taking place and how that change is managed.

With the idea of how work is organized being key to the employee's mental wellbeing, the HSE has come up with a set of

Management Standards to try and tackle the factors it has identified. Where, for example, employees feel that they have

- too little control over your work,
- believe it cannot be done in the time allotted,
- two different managers to report to at the same time
- little understanding of how their work fits in with the council,

this can produce stress and the arrangements need to be reviewed to address the issues. Remember while managers want to see the work done, they also want a happy and productive workforce. Managers are not mind readers, if you have an issue let them know so they can try and help. Getting it sorted may take time so keep communicating as this will help to enable improvement.



In 1987, John Walker was dismissed by Northumberland County Council on the grounds of "permanent ill-health." The court heard that he suffered mental exhaustion, acute anxiety, sleeplessness and bouts of weeping. Mr Walker had suffered a nervous breakdown owing to stress in 1986; before his return to work, the employer had promised to change his working arrangements to alleviate the work levels and stress caused.

Unfortunately they did not do so, dismissing his concerns as "exaggerated" and aimed at getting extra leave, resulting in a second

nervous breakdown for which the court decided there had been a breach in the Council's duty of care owing to clear psychiatric damage.

It doesn't have to be like this.

If you are a manager, please observe your employees closely for signs of behavior that might be induced by stress. The Mental Health organization MIND describes sufferers feeling irritable, aggressive, impatient or wound up, overburdened, anxious, nervous, and uninterested in life. With these emotional states, behaviour may change. Emotional responses include finding it hard to make decisions, constantly worrying, avoiding situations that are troubling for them, snapping at people, biting nails, eating too much or too little and smoking or drinking alcohol more than usual as well as being tearful or crying. Ultimately there are direct health effects: panic attacks, blurred eyesight, sleep disorders, headaches, high blood pressure, feeling sick.

The HST can help - we recently updated [LBWF's stress policy](#). Useful guidance to support the policy includes:

- [Flowchart](#)
- [Management guidance](#)
- [Causes and signs of work stress](#)
- [Self-analysis test](#)
- [Staff guidance](#)
- [Individual wellbeing assessment](#)
- [Staff stress questionnaire](#)

Advice is also available from the HSE, MIND, and the NHS.

We also have training available including 'Stress Awareness for Managers' and 'Stress Reduction and Improving Resilience' for everyone. Please check out the training section overleaf.

### Schools Access to CLEAPSS

Schools buying the enhanced service from the Health and Safety Team and those schools buying the specific additional Service have been sent the log in details for accessing the superb CLEAPSS advice service

If you would like access to this top class resource, please contact the Health and Safety Team for more details:  
[healthandsafety@walthamforest.gov.uk](mailto:healthandsafety@walthamforest.gov.uk).

### Reporting accidents and incidents

By telephone: **03300 586 469**

## ACCIDENT CORNER

### An Accident Waiting to Happen: Stress Kills

While it is commonly recognized that stress causes mental anguish, emotional trauma, behavioural changes and nervous breakdowns, people talk about the other impacts less often: if this condition persists it has direct physical consequences. This can and does include heart attacks, strokes, irritable bowel syndrome and many more illnesses.



Stress has also driven people to despair and suicide.

Look hard at arrangements for work, ask for help, and give help. In line with good mental health practice, ask how your colleagues are – you may save them from serious ill health.

#### Health & Safety Team Contacts:

Team Member	Contact Number
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Clive Atkins	by email
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General Enquiries	020 8496 3413

**Don't forget the Employee Assistance Provider – talk to someone about anything troubling you on 0800 328 1437.**

## TRAINING

Uptake for the new health and safety courses has been very good and we are also getting requests to deliver bespoke training sessions for teams, including personal safety/lone working for Adult Social Care, Fraud and Early Years Intervention teams. If your team requires specific H&S training please contact us on [healthandsafety@walthamforest.gov.uk](mailto:healthandsafety@walthamforest.gov.uk), or 020 8496 3413 to discuss your needs. Please note the IOSH Managing Safely course is now full, so contact the H&S team to be put on the waiting list and we'll let you know when the next course is running.

Winter/Spring Courses 2020	Course Length	Provisional Date(s)
IOSH Managing Safely	4 Days	28/01, 4, 11 &12/02
Asbestos Awareness	½ Day	9/01/2020
Building Managers	½ Day	10/03/2020
COSHH (Hazardous substances)	½ Day	6/02/2020
DSE Assessment (Safe Computer Workstations)	½ Day	14/01/2020
Fire Safety	90 mins	22/01/2020
Evac Chair use	90 mins	22/01/2020
Manual Handling static objects	½ Day	23/01/2020
Personal Safety including Lone Working	½ Day	30/01/2020
Risk Assessment Workshop	½ Day	25/02/2020
Stress Awareness for Managers	½ Day	4/03/2020
Stress Reduction and Improving Resilience	1 Day	5/03/2020
Working at Height including Ladder Use	½ Day	15/01/2020

#### A Final Note:

Please use the email address: [healthandsafety@walthamforest.gov.uk](mailto:healthandsafety@walthamforest.gov.uk) to tell us what you think of the Newsletter, or to let us know what you would like to see in this Newsletter.

The team is currently working on developing the health and safety management system in line with good practice, including updating policies on asbestos, water management safety and first aid, drafts can be viewed on our intranet