

in equilibrium

**Stress Management Training for Managers
Resources**

CONTENTS

	Page
Early Identification of Stress and Increased Vulnerability	4
The CUSP™ Framework	8
HSE Management Standards (2004)	20
Work Pressure Profiling Tool	24
Individual stress risk assessment forms	33
Individual stress risk assessment guidance notes	39
Stress Management competency indicator tool	45
Stress management tools and techniques	56
Taking control of your life	56
Challenging stressful thoughts	61
Social support	65
Sleep	67
Anger Management	69
Practical Tips	74

Early identification of stress and increased vulnerability

One of the difficulties with stress is that people experience stress in different ways. This contributes to stress manifesting itself in different ways also. So it would be wrong to over-generalise when giving advice on how to identify stress and increased vulnerability in others. However, what we can say is that in some way 'stress will out.' By this we mean that, because stress has negative effects, it will usually manifest itself one way or another.

3 sources of data

Early identification of stress-related problems can be best achieved by reflecting on three sources of data:

1. **Negative changes in the individual.** Your perceptions are important. Are you seeing or hearing negative changes? Are those changes sustained?
2. **Objective data related to the impact of stress on the team/individual.** Is the stress having an effect that is measurable or quantifiable e.g. on performance, absence etc.
3. **Qualitative data.** Others' perceptions are also important. How do people describe their experience? Data like these can come from chance remarks, one-to-ones or perhaps most importantly from team meetings.

Negative changes in the individual

Of course, we all experience 'bad days' so we are really talking about situations when people don't quickly revert back to normal, where negative changes are sustained.

To be able to identify negative changes successfully, it helps to know your team well. This takes an investment of time and energy in really getting to know them so that you know when they are behaving normally, and when they are not.

There are many specific changes that people can show when they are experiencing stress. Overleaf you can see a table of ten of the most typical changes you might see or hear.

The important thing is to become more aware. As you do so you will notice that, where stress is concerned, there are some things you can see, some you can hear, and even some you can feel. It's a good idea to use all your senses to pick up potential problems.

See the 'stress identifier' checklist on the next page...

Are team members:	Yes	No
1. Making more mistakes and forgetting things?		
2. Showing a negative change in mood or fluctuations in mood?		
3. Avoiding certain situations or people?		
4. Using more very negative or cynical language?		
5. Becoming withdrawn?		
6. Showing a prolonged loss of a sense of humour?		
7. Becoming increasingly irritable and short-tempered?		
8. Showing a change in appearance, esp. poor self care?		
9. Showing changes in habits e.g. increased smoking, drinking?		
10. Looking haggard or exhausted all the time?		

You can use this stress identification tool as a kind of 'early warning system:' a warning that you need to act. It would be wrong to make assumptions at this stage. Rather, use the 'warning' as a cue to investigate further, to try to find out the stress-related problem's cause so that it can be tackled, or to find out what support may be appropriate for the person or team concerned.

This is not an exhaustive list. Any sustained negative changes in people should alert you that they may not be coping.

Objective data related to the impact of stress on the team/individual

As stress starts to have an effect it often will manifest itself in ways that can be measured objectively. One way of thinking about this source of data is that this represents the quantifiable impact of stress on the individual.

Think carefully about how stress might impact on the individual/team:

- **Absence.** Has sickness or other types of absence increased, or can you identify worrying trends or patterns in absence data?
- **Health.** Linked to the above, is the absence related to health problems that are stress-related? Many health problems are stress-related. Doctors spend a large proportion of their time treating people with 'psychosomatic' health problems. These are conditions where the symptoms are often physical, but where the origin or cause of the condition is stress-related or psychological in nature. For more background on this, see our background notes that you can download from our website... <http://www.in-equilibrium.co.uk/backgroundnotes.html>
- **Performance.** Has performance deteriorated recently in ways you can quantify e.g. sales figures, production levels, service levels, call handling? It is worth thinking about whether the employee concerned was previously a capable employee? If yes, it is more likely that deteriorating performance is linked to stress factors. Is there evidence of links between increasing pressure(s) (stressors) and worsening/poor performance?
- **Employee turnover.** Are more people leaving the team for stress-related reasons? Exit interviews may provide valuable data in this regard.
- **Requests for support.** Have requests for support increased in number recently?
- **Complaints.** Have complaints increased in frequency: from employees; about team members?
- **Accidents or mistakes.** Have there been increasing numbers of accidents or mistakes? Sadly, stress impacts on cognitive performance as well as general work performance. People under stress are as a consequence more likely to suffer concentration lapses and problems with memory.

Are there other quantifiable data related to the impact of stress that you could identify?

Qualitative data

While the first source of data is related to your perceptions, things you can see or hear, this source of data is related to others' perceptions. When people are under stress they often talk about how they feel, and comment (often negatively) on their experience.

Qualitative data is really about how people describe their own experience in their own words. It can come from conversations, formal and informal, comments, one-to-ones, and importantly from team meetings (which are a good place to gather data related to stress risk).

Good listening skills will help here (see the section on listening skills later). Are people saying things or describing their experience in ways that cause you concern? You can also be more proactive in gathering such data. For example, you could make a point of discussing how people feel and what people see as 'sources of pressure' within structured one-to-ones or team meetings. As mentioned earlier, if you could do this regularly, for example by including 'sources of pressure' as an agenda item.

Reflect on stress-related data regularly

We recommend you reflect on these three sources of data at least on a monthly basis. If you have concerns about an individual, it would be unwise to make assumptions or leap to conclusions. In fact, this is so important it is worth reinforcing: **please do not jump to conclusions or make assumptions, it is very dangerous to do so**. Rather take this as a prompt to discuss your concerns with the individual concerned. Remember to record any plan you develop to address any stress-related issues identified.

Stress prevention

A good working climate is one where stress is largely prevented. While we cannot, in all likelihood, eliminate all stress, much of it could be prevented. In this section we introduce a critically important framework called 'CUSP™' that you can use both to prevent stress and reduce the risk when stress has occurred.

A key aim here is to build an atmosphere and team environment which de-stigmatises stress. Stress is simply a reaction people have to excessive pressures or demands. We all have excessive pressures or demands sometimes, so such a stigma is pointless and damaging. Unless people feel able to be open about what is causing them stress, you'll find it difficult to make headway in tackling it in any meaningful way.

The CUSP™ framework

This is a very simple framework that works equally as well in terms of prevention of stress as it does in helping someone who is not coping. In other words you can use CUSP™ proactively and reactively. Here, we will be mainly looking at using CUSP™ proactively to prevent stress.

This framework can be applied to any situation where pressure is present. What it does is get you thinking about your options in a structured way. There are always options, because the experience of stress is individual and depends largely on perceptions. If you can change or influence someone's perceptions, the way they think about a situation, then the stress can be prevented or reduced.

CUSP™ stands for:

- **C**ontrol
- **U**ncertainty
- **S**upport
- **P**ressure

Control

We have known about the links between stress and control for many years now. Indeed, psychologists have based whole models of stress around the concept of control. If we feel that we don't have any control in our working environment, this can be very stressful, especially when combined with high pressures or demands. Indeed high demands + low control can accurately be described as a perfect recipe for stress. If we also feel unsupported at the same time this recipe is even more of a risk. We have to be careful when considering this. We are dealing with subjective perceptions, with the way people see things and feel about things, not just with 'objective' reality.

There are major implications here because, as managers, we can influence both perceptions of control and enable actual control. Thus we have the capacity to influence stress levels positively or negatively. In fact, the negative side of this is worrying. It suggests that if we are ignorant of the importance of control or do or say things that lessen perceptions of control then we may be damaging people. We may inadvertently be causing them severe stress and increasing the risk of depression. We may also be causing damage to their immune system, increasing the risk of colds and flu, and in the long term, of cancer and heart disease. See below for some tips on enabling control for your team.

Uncertainty

Feelings of uncertainty are also strongly associated with stress. In recent years, our working environments and cultures have changed markedly into ones where there is a lot of uncertainty. This is one reason for increases in stress levels across all sectors. The pace of change has increased and is still increasing, none more so than in our workplaces. High uncertainty is associated with feelings of insecurity and anxiety,

causing us to feel stressed. In periods of rapid organizational change, feelings of uncertainty increase and control decreases, a double whammy in terms of stress. This makes organizational change a high risk factor for stress-related injury and illness. The most important factor in minimizing/maximizing the risk is communication. See below for ideas on 'uncertainty reducers'.

Support

Probably the most robust result in all of Social Psychology is that support acts as a buffer against stress. What this means is that if we have the right kind of support, we can cope with more pressures or demands without suffering from stress. Put another way, the more pressure there is the more important support becomes. Research appears to show also that in terms of our social networks, if we have good supportive networks at work and away from work, such support actually boosts our wellbeing whether or not we're under pressure.

As managers, you are in a unique position where support is concerned because you can provide both social and practical support to your people. However, you must be careful not to make assumptions about what support people need. If we offer people the wrong kind of support or offer it in the wrong way we can end up causing stress rather than preventing or reducing it. As you work through the actions discussed on this course you will get some useful tips to help you support people appropriately and effectively.

Pressure

If you can identify, then tackle, the specific sources of pressure (stressors) in your team's working environment, you reduce substantially the potential for stress-related illness amongst your team. No two working environments are the same, so all are likely to have their own specific stressors apart from the more general, organizational sources of pressure.

It is important to acknowledge that there will be sources of pressure outside of your (and your team members') control. In terms of minimizing stress risk it is important to identify and target what you do have some influence over.

There are overlaps with the C, U, and S above, but this part of the framework is about thinking about what specifically could cause stress in your area, and what you could do to address those potential causes.

Summary of CUSP™

Research and experience then tells us that if you can:

- Enable increased perception of control;
- Reduce uncertainty, and the associated anxiety and insecurity;
- Provide support, especially in highly pressurised or stressful situations;
- Tackle sources of pressure (stressors) in your work area...

then you will minimize the risk of stress-related illness and increase wellbeing and performance at work.

Practical hints and tips for **C**, **U**, **S** and **P** can be found below.

(C) Control Enablers

Enabling control is not about abdicating responsibility. It is not about adopting an 'anything goes' mentality. You are a manager. You still have to take tough decisions, and still have to manage poor performance. So enabling control is about encouraging people to take responsibility for their own performance while being clear about what is expected of them.

1. **Delegation.** In stress terms, delegation is a critical management skill because it enables control. It says 'I trust you to get this done without me always looking over your shoulder.' Good delegation will also reduce the pressure on you, as you won't have to micromanage. Ask yourself, and encourage others to ask you, difficult questions about letting go of control. Enabling control is not easy for many managers. It may make you feel very uncomfortable and vulnerable to start with, but stick with it and it will pay great dividends.
2. **Enable control over the physical environment** e.g. the look of the office, the use of plants, make workstations more attractive etc. This can have several benefits in addition to boosting perceptions of control:
 - More relaxed surroundings
 - Improved mood
 - Better air quality e.g. through use of plants
 - Improved overall working environment
 - New environment may contain 'anchors' to positive emotions and attitudes
3. **Offer as much flexibility as you can over working arrangements.** If individuals can make choices that reflect their needs or lifestyle, this will reduce the risk in various ways:
 - Reduces stress risk attached to non-work pressures
 - Addresses commuting stressors
 - Enhances sense of control

4. **Encourage people to be assertive with you** (not passive, not aggressive), and be prepared to accept constructive criticism of you and your management style. View it as an opportunity to adapt your style to suit each individual. If people see that you respond well to assertive communication and to constructive criticism, they will feel as if they have more control. You will also stand a better chance of finding out how you cause them stress. The more you know about how they feel, the less the risk because you can respond more quickly thus reducing the risk of stress-related illness.
5. **Involve people in decision making** both at the individual level and at the team level. As a rule give as much control to your team members over decisions as you possibly can, and if you cannot involve people in the decision making process, explain clearly and unambiguously why that is the case (because that will reduce uncertainty). Explain the decisions you have taken.
6. **Consult and involve people on decisions about workload.** People often feel that they are overloaded because of the perception that it is not within their control. In fact, if people feel they have some control, they generally work harder, achieve more, and are more satisfied with the outcome.
7. **Encourage employees to develop their own ‘microroutines’**, which work for them e.g. taking short breaks every 45 mins and a longer break every 90. Breaks are important, especially if people are under pressure. We all need recovery time to manage stress effectively. So encourage people to take control over this important aspect of their working life. People rarely abuse this. On the contrary, they value being trusted in this way, while manager-controlled breaks can be resented and a cause of dissatisfaction
8. **Change will inevitably have an impact on perceptions of control**, so take care to assess any risks to your team associated with the change and take special care to communicate clearly about what is happening as often as possible.
9. **Taking people for granted undermines their sense of control.** Try very hard not to do it, and encourage people within your team not to do it either.
10. **The opposite of enabling control is an aggressive style of management.** Bullying, aggressive styles of management take control away from people. It makes them fearful and causes them severe stress with very negative consequences for their health and wellbeing. If you receive any feedback that you are perceived as ‘aggressive’, take that feedback seriously and try sensitively to find out what has led to that perception. Talk it over with a mentor or someone at HR. You may need to consider some additional training or one-to-one coaching to improve your interpersonal skills. Again, try not to regard such perceptions as a personal attack. Rather, they are an opportunity to change your style and become a better manager.

(U) Uncertainty Reducers

As uncertainty increases so do feelings of anxiety and insecurity. This increases the risk of stress. Approaches that reduce uncertainty and ambiguity reduce the risk substantially. Many of these approaches involve communication and decision making. Reducing uncertainty is particularly important in times of organizational change when the risk of stress is high.

1. **Communicate!** Especially during times of organizational change, effective communication is vital to manage the risk of stress. In risk assessment terms, change is a hazard that has the potential to cause very real and lasting harm. The risk is high. Without effective communication people fill in the gaps, usually with nightmare scenarios. This leads to them ruminating constantly about what might happen, putting them in chronic 'fight-flight' (stress). This can be very damaging to mental and/or physical health. Bear in mind that in change situations you are the main information resource, sometimes the only reliable source. In stress terms, what is known is always better than what is unknown. Even when the news is bad, real eventualities can be planned for and alternative strategies generated. This not only reduces uncertainty, but also increases a sense of control.
2. **Be open, approachable and welcoming with your team.** If individuals perceive you in this way they are much more likely to share their worst fears with you. If you don't know what these fears are, it will be very difficult to address and challenge those fears. In addition, the more they know you as a human being, warts and all, the better you will know them. So give of yourself, invest in relationships. In terms of stress prevention, it's the best investment you can make.
3. **Avoid being secretive.** You may not think that you are secretive, rather that you are protecting your team e.g. 'What they don't know they won't worry about'. Unfortunately, if you are perceived as secretive, this may cause stress because individuals may develop nightmare scenarios, or believe you are deliberately withholding information from them. 'Protecting' people in this way usually backfires horribly.
4. **Be clear about roles, tasks and priorities.** Uncertainty and ambiguity about your role can be a major stressor. This is especially the case if you aren't sure what the role really is or who you're answerable to. Clarifying these issues reduces 'role ambiguity', potentially a major stressor. Also, working with your team on clarifying what the priorities are and what's really important can help by reducing stress associated with 'role conflict'. Role conflict occurs when people feel they have conflicting demands and priorities. Again it is clear that good communication is a critically important factor in minimizing the uncertainty associated with these 'role' stressors.
5. **Don't assume people will know why...** Assumptions that employees will work out why something has been done in a particular way are very dangerous. It may be

obvious to you, it probably won't be to them. Never make assumptions about what people know. For example, you could use process checks. Here, you check out and clarify where people are and if they are with you (i.e. understand what to do and what you want). Make sure you give time for this to happen so that people have the same understanding that you have. Use the process check as an opportunity to ask questions. Ask whether you're going too fast or too slow.

6. **Be careful about behaviours that may be ambiguous.** If team members interpret your behaviour as confusing in any way, the risk of stress increases. In addition, your behaviour may be interpreted as aggressive. If that is the case, you are less likely to find out if people are not coping because they will be afraid of the consequences if they raise their fears.
7. **Give as much clear information as possible.** If you can, make sure information comes directly from you in person. Share information in a timely manner, especially if the information is related to changes that will affect your team. Think very carefully about withholding information. Is it really necessary to withhold? Are you withholding information because of negative assumptions that may not be correct? Of course some information must remain confidential, but if information cannot be shared, don't keep quiet, make sure that people understand why.
8. **Use emails sparingly and with great care.** Emails can cause a great deal of stress. They can appear curt, even rude, and are very often ambiguous. They have no emotional content, and you cannot query something or ask for justification. Because of overload, they can also add to the pressure, increasing feelings of lack of control and inability to cope. Email is a vastly overrated form of human communication. None of us can probably avoid using it, but don't be a lazy manager, go and speak to people whenever you can, and if you can't, pick up a phone. Use email less, speak to people more!
9. **Give people regular feedback.** People need to know how they are doing and what you think. If you don't tell them they will make assumptions and those assumptions may not be positive, causing them stress. So give constructive feedback. This reduces uncertainty and reduces the risk of stress.
10. **Try not to give people mixed messages.** This sounds easy but isn't. Work life is very complicated. For example, sometimes managers would like their employees to be innovative, to show initiative, but not to make any mistakes. Mixed messages like this increase levels of ambiguity, so try to avoid them. Better still, encourage people to let you know when you're giving mixed messages. That way you will be able to clarify what you really mean.

Change and uncertainty

Organizational change significantly increases pressure on people because it causes high levels of uncertainty, and employees can feel they have very little control over what

is happening to them. That makes change a special case where stress is concerned. We recommend that managers should always take steps to minimize the risk of stress posed by change by seeking to increase control, reduce uncertainty, and by providing appropriate support. See all the specific hints and tips in this section.

(S) Providing Support

As previously stated, probably the most robust result in all of Social Psychology is that support acts as a buffer against stress. As with the other elements of CUSP™, support is important from a proactive and reactive point of view.

If people feel supported generally, that will help prevent stress. It doesn't necessarily mean that people will use support structures, but the fact that they are there and people know that they are there quite simply helps from a stress point of view. Likewise if your team members feel supported by you and perceive you as being supportive, it doesn't necessarily mean they will always come to you for support. The important thing is that they feel supported.

1. **Encourage individuals to come to you if they need to talk anything through.** Make sure individuals know when they can come to see you. If you can't have a totally "open door" policy, find a way to let the team know when your door (metaphorical or real) is open and when you would rather not be disturbed. Avoid being so booked up with meetings and other appointments that you are never available to your team.
2. **Meet with individuals on a one-to-one basis.** We talk more about the importance of one-to-ones for identifying stress later. Providing a regular confidential "space" to talk through work issue is also a key mechanism for ensuring that individuals feel supported by you. One-to-ones are also an important way for you to understand what other support your team members need.
3. **Listen.** If individuals want to talk about things, listening to what they have to say is key to providing support (in fact, it may be more important than helping them practically). If you dismiss people's concerns or don't take the time to understand what they are saying, they will not feel supported and you are unlikely to know what other support you should be providing.
4. **Give practical support and advice where appropriate.** Helping individuals understand things, advising them and providing them with coaching or mentoring will all build their sense of being supported by you. Beware of stepping in and providing advice when it is not needed or doing things for individuals that they could learn by doing themselves, as this can reduce perceived control (see above).
5. **Hold regular team meetings.** Use team meetings as a way of ensuring two-way communication between you and your team and between team members. Make

sure that team meetings are interesting and involve input from all those present. Don't be afraid of discussing sources of pressure openly at team meetings.

Such discussions will help in a number of ways. Firstly, members of your team and will feel listened to. Secondly, you will gain an appreciation of how pressured people are feeling. Thirdly, you will become clearer about potential causes of stress for your team.

6. **Encourage employees to support one another.** Fostering a supportive team atmosphere is key to ensuring that your team feel supported, not just by you, but by their peers. Set an example of respect and good treatment and help your team to follow it. Help resolve any conflicts that arise between team members in a sensitive, fair and supportive way.
7. **Give individuals the opportunity to ask questions.** Whether in team meetings, one-to-ones, informally or by other means, make sure that individuals have a chance to ask you questions.
8. **Avoid blame.** Everyone makes mistakes. If anything goes wrong, look first to remedy any problems and then for learning points. Don't look to allocate blame. This does not mean avoiding managing poor performance. If one member of your team is performing poorly, that will be stressful for the rest of the team, so the poor performer must be helped to improve their performance.
9. **Ensure that individuals get the training and development they need to do their job well.** This may be about you or other colleagues providing on-the-job development or about more formal training and development activities. Either way, you need to understand what the development needs of your team are and ensure that those needs are met (including supporting individuals in the transfer of skills learnt in training into the workplace). This is particularly important if a person's job has changed in any way.
10. **Make sure employees know about all available support structures.** If your organization has an Employee Assistance Programme or other counseling service, make sure your team know how to access it and what support it provides. Make sure that individuals also understand what other support structures are available to them, for example occupational health advice, access to advice and support from Human Resources and anything else available through the organization or through the local community.

(P) Reducing pressure

In seeking to prevent stress, the aim is not to reduce pressure for the sake of it. The right amount of pressure can be motivating and good for both health and performance. However, excessive pressure or demands will cause stress, especially when the pressure is unremitting or 'chronic'.

In today's workplace, the risk of stress comes mainly from 'overload', or too much pressure. But you should also bear in mind that a lack of challenge or too little pressure ('underload' as it is sometimes called) may also cause stress-related problems.

While enabling control, reducing uncertainty and providing support (the C, U and S of CUSP™) will make an enormous difference in terms of how well your team can cope with the inevitable pressures in the workplace, there may also be things you can do that will directly reduce the pressures they are under. When thinking about how you can prevent stress in your team, it is useful to think about the pressures on individuals, identify the ones you have some influence over and look at ways to reduce them. The following points give common-sense, general ideas on 'pressure-reducers':

1. **Set achievable objectives.** Make sure that when you set individual + team objectives that what you are asking them to do is reasonable. Avoid giving anyone an excessive workload. Monitor this regularly, not just at the time of appraisal.
2. **Distribute tasks fairly between team members.** When considering who should do what within your team, ensure that you are not giving anyone an unfair proportion of the overall workload.
3. **Set realistic timescales.** Allow people enough time to carry out the work you give them. Bear in mind how long tasks take and what other priorities a person has when setting deadlines for particular pieces of work.
4. **Make priorities clear.** When you ask employees to do work, make clear which responsibilities or tasks are the most important. Also clarify which are the most urgent. Help individuals prioritise their workloads to ensure that the important things get done and that deadlines are not missed.
5. **Plan ahead.** Think about workload planning and scheduling. Aim to minimise peaks and troughs wherever you can. If your work area has particularly busy periods for any reason, ensure that you don't make the busy periods busier by making demands for things that could have been handled in a quieter period.
6. **Hand over tasks as soon as you can.** Don't sit on requests or pieces of work that have come in and only hand them over when the deadline is approaching.
7. **Avoid giving team members conflicting tasks or roles.** When setting objectives or giving people work, think about the range of roles, responsibilities and tasks that they have. Look to see whether they have conflicting roles or priorities within their workload and aim to resolve any conflicts.
8. **Match tasks to skills.** When allocating work, bear in mind the strengths and weaknesses of your team members. Aim to play to people's strengths and give them tasks for which their skills are a good fit.

9. **Avoid giving individuals repetitive and boring work where possible.** Giving people insufficient challenge and stimulation in their work can cause stress. Consider how you can add interest and challenge to people's jobs.
10. **Minimize environmental pressures.** Consider aspects of the work environment such as noise, lighting, temperature, pollution etc. If these things make the workplace uncomfortable for individuals, they can cause stress. Find ways of tackling these issues wherever possible. This is area where 'quick wins' are often possible. Anything you can do to improve the working environment for your team will contribute to preventing and reducing stress.

Using CUSP™ reactively: tackling stress-related issues

We have been looking so far at using CUSP™ to prevent stress. Unfortunately, we can't prevent all stress, and sometimes we have to react once someone has become stressed in order to minimize the risk to their health and wellbeing. Fortunately, the CUSP™ framework can be used reactively as well. The main difference being that you are applying the framework to a specific situation rather than to your work area in general. However, the principles are the same. Anything you can do to boost or enhance a sense of control, reduce uncertainty, provide support, or reduce pressure will help the person who is experiencing stress. Because the person is already under stress, they are a more vulnerable to stress related illness, so anything you can do here will help to minimize the risk to their health and wellbeing.

It's a good idea to revisit all the hints and tips for C, U, S, and P, and think about which of these could be applied to the specific stress-related situation you are dealing with.

The vitally important role of listening

Here, you are likely to be dealing with a situation where an employee is already experiencing stress. Face to face communication, and especially listening, becomes vitally important. You need to build up as good a picture as you can of how the person feels and how they see the situation they are in.

Support for the stressed person

When using CUSP™ reactively, the aspect of providing **support** becomes particularly important. From a reactive point of view, there are two aspects to providing support:

1. How best to offer support
2. What sort of support to provide

You would no doubt agree that it is vitally important to be supportive when reacting to a specific stress-related situation, but it is also important to find out as best you can what practical support the stressed person needs. Good communication skills will help enormously here. In discussion with the person concerned, asking the right sort of questions in the right way should take you most of the way towards finding out 'what sort of support to provide.'

Know your support structures and services

Please make yourself as aware as you can be of all the support structures or services your employer provides. For example, does your employer provide a confidential counselling service? You may need to be in a position to refer someone to a support service, or point someone in the right direction (remember to make sure you record you have done so). Therefore, if you don't have sufficient knowledge about the support services and how people can access them, you will not be adequately equipped to manage risk effectively and put into effect what you have learned on this course.

Know your policies

If there are policies related to stress and related issues, pay particular attention to those. Do you have a specific policy on stress? Do you know what that policy says, particularly about the role of managers? You should. Are you familiar with your policy on absence or attendance, and what you need to do to manage absence effectively? Does your organization have a policy on 'dignity at work' or related to bullying and harassment, and would you know what to do if such issues come up? Is there a policy related to compassionate leave? Do you have a policy related to family friendly working or flexible working? If so, do you know how much flexibility you have in giving people options? If you aren't sure about any support structures and policies, contact your Human Resources or Personnel department for help and advice.

Reduce pressure for the person under stress

It is worth remembering that someone under stress may already be experiencing high levels of pressure, so reducing pressure will be especially important. Think carefully about any adjustments that could be made to reduce the pressure. Prolonged exposure to excessive pressure or demands is a major risk factor for stress-related illness. Reducing pressure, even if it is only for a time-limited period can reduce this risk substantially.

THE MANAGEMENT STANDARDS (HSE 2004)

DEMANDS

Includes issues like workload, work patterns, and the work environment

The standard is that:

- Employees indicate that they are able to cope with the demands of their jobs; and
- Systems are in place locally to respond to any individual concerns.

What should be happening / states to be achieved:

- The organization provides employees with adequate and achievable demands in relation to the agreed hours of work;
- People's skills and abilities are matched to the job demands;
- Jobs are designed to be within the capabilities of employees; and
- Employees' concerns about their work environment are addressed.

CONTROL

How much say the person has in the way they do their work

The standard is that:

- Employees indicate that they are able to have a say about the way they do their work; and
- Systems are in place locally to respond to any individual concerns.

What should be happening / states to be achieved:

- Where possible, employees have control over their pace of work;
- Employees are encouraged to use their skills and initiative to do their work;
- Where possible, employees are encouraged to develop new skills to help them undertake new and challenging pieces of work;
- The organization encourages employees to develop their skills;
- Employees have a say over when breaks can be taken; and
- Employees are consulted over their work patterns.

SUPPORT

Includes the encouragement, sponsorship and resources provided by the organization, line management and colleagues

The standard is that:

- Employees indicate that they receive adequate information and support from their colleagues and superiors; and
- Systems are in place locally to respond to any individual concerns.

What should be happening / states to be achieved:

- The organization has policies and procedures to adequately support employees;
- Systems are in place to enable and encourage managers to support their team;
- Systems are in place to enable and encourage employees to support their colleagues;
- Employees know what support is available and how and when to access it;
- Employees know how to access the required resources to do their job; and
- Employees receive regular and constructive feedback.

RELATIONSHIPS

Includes promoting positive working to avoid conflict and dealing with unacceptable behaviour

The standard is that:

- Employees indicate that they are not subjected to unacceptable behaviours, e.g. bullying at work; and
- Systems are in place locally to respond to any individual concerns.

What should be happening / states to be achieved:

- The organization promotes positive behaviours at work to avoid conflict and ensure fairness;
- Employees share information relevant to their work;
- The organization has agreed policies and procedures to prevent or resolve unacceptable behaviour;
- Systems are in place to enable and encourage managers to deal with unacceptable behaviour; and
- Systems are in place to enable and encourage employees to report unacceptable behaviour.

ROLE

Whether people understand their role within the organization and whether the organization ensures that the person does not have conflicting roles

The standard is that:

- Employees indicate that they understand their role and responsibilities; and
- Systems are in place locally to respond to any individual concerns.

What should be happening / states to be achieved:

- The organization ensures that, as far as possible, the different requirements it places upon employees are compatible;
- The organization provides information to enable employees to understand their role and responsibilities;
- The organization ensures that, as far as possible, the requirements it places upon employees are clear; and
- Systems are in place to enable employees to raise concerns about any uncertainties or conflicts they have in their role and responsibilities.

CHANGE

How organizational change (large or small) is managed and communicated in the organization

The standard is that:

- Employees indicate that the organization engages them frequently when undergoing an organizational change; and
- Systems are in place locally to respond to any individual concerns.

What should be happening / states to be achieved:

- The organization provides employees with timely information to enable them to understand the reasons for proposed changes;
- The organization ensures adequate employee consultation on changes and provides opportunities for employees to influence proposals;
- Employees are aware of the probable impact of any changes to their jobs. If necessary, employees are given training to support any changes in their jobs;
- Employees are aware of timetables for changes;
- Employees have access to relevant support during changes.

How will the Management Standards influence management practice?

The Management Standards are more about organizational action in terms of risk assessment and benchmarking than individual management action. The model underlying the Standards is one of constant improvement. HSE want employers to conduct organizational stress risk assessments using the Management Standards as a template, in order to establish a benchmark of how well the organization is doing at preventing and reducing stress at work. Once a benchmark has been established, the employer should work to improve its performance over time. The ultimate goal is to reach the standards set now by the best 20% of employers (measured in 2004). HSE have developed tools and guidance to enable employers to conduct suitable and sufficient risk assessments.

However, the Management Standards will also have a significant impact on all managers, because they are the people on the ground who manage stress risks in an ongoing way, and it is managers who must implement improvements introduced as a result of carrying out risk assessments. Notice that for each Standard, systems should be in place to respond to individual concerns. In reality, it is likely to be managers that will be responding, because if individuals have concerns about stress at work managers will need to work with them to make adjustments so that risk is reduced. What you are taught on this course will enable you to work proactively to prevent stress at work, and reactively when stress-related problems occur to reduce the risk of stress. Therefore, this training will contribute to your organization's compliance with the Management Standards in the years to come.

For more information on the Standards, visit the HSE website: www.hse.gov.uk/stress.

Work Pressure Profiling Exercise

Introduction

In this exercise, the idea is to think about the pressures you face at work in a structured way. In thinking about your work pressures, try to be as objective as you can. For instance, if you were on an interview panel for someone applying for your job, what would you tell them were the main pressures of the job based on your experience over the last six months or so?

We will be asking you to consider six areas or categories of work pressures, when completing your Work Pressure Profile. These are the categories that have been identified by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) as important when considering risk to health and well-being of employees:

- **Demands**
- **Control**
- **Support**
- **Relationships**
- **Role**
- **Change**

There are four stages to this exercise:

- 1. Think about and identify work pressures**
- 2. Rank the pressures**
- 3. Complete your Work Pressure Profile**
- 4. Complete the risk management questions**

Please make sure you complete stage 1 before starting on stage 2.

The questionnaire and relevant forms can be found after the following instructions.

Stage 1: Think about and identify work pressures

This stage involves filling in the left hand column of the questionnaire, please refer to: 'Work Pressure Profile Questionnaire (Stages 1 and 2).' Please do not fill in anything in the right hand column until you have completed stage 1.

For each category, we will explain what we mean by each term (e.g. the meaning of 'demands', 'role' etc). Then we will ask you to think about and write down any pressures in that category. There may be categories where you think that there are no sources of pressure for you in your job/role. If that is the case, just leave that section blank. On the other hand there may be areas/categories where you identify several different pressures. If that is the case write all the pressures in the space. If you run out of space for a particular category, just use space somewhere else on the form.

This is very important: when you fill in the questionnaire, **don't worry if you think of a pressure but are not sure which category it is in.** For example, if you are not sure whether one of the pressures of your job comes under the category of 'demands' or 'role', it doesn't really matter. Just make sure you write it down somewhere in the left-hand column of the questionnaire.

Stage 2: Rank the pressures Please read the following instructions carefully

The first thing we would like you to do is to look back over all the work pressures you have identified in all of the categories. Which ones stand out as being the most important?

We would like you to give a ranking (number) to each of the work pressures you have identified. For example, if you have written down ten different pressures, we would like you to rank them from 1 to 10. **Please take into account all of the work pressures you have identified under all of the categories, when ranking the pressures** i.e. don't rank them category by category, but rank them overall.

Number 1 would be the work pressure you regard as causing the most stress in your job, number 2 the second most important as a cause of stress, and so on. Once you have made your mind up write the number (ranking) in the right hand column next to the work pressure you have written down.

Take your time with this task; don't rush. There are no right or wrong answers in this exercise. Just be honest and reflect on your experience of the job over the last six months.

Stage 3. Complete your Work Pressure Profile

Next, complete your **Work Pressure Profile**.

Simply write down your top 5 work pressures in the space provided, and the Management Standard categories they fit into. Don't worry if you are not sure about the category. It is the work pressures and where they rank that are the important things.

Stage 4. Complete the risk management questions (group discussion)

In the final part of this exercise, we would like you to think about how you might use the 'work pressure profiling' tool to manage work pressures effectively in your area and with the people you manage.

Work Pressure Profile Questionnaire (Stages 1 and 2)

What is the name of your job/role?	
Stage 1: Work pressures in your job/role	Stage 2: Rank#
<p>Demands 'Demands' covers a number of potential sources of pressure at work. Having too much to do (overload) or too little to do (underload) are both examples of demands. Having too much work that is boring, repetitive and lacking in challenge is another example. So is work that is too hard or complex, and/or work that you haven't been trained for where you don't feel competent. Shift-work may be demanding, depending on shift patterns and you're ability to cope with them. There could also be demands in your (physical) working environment, such as noise, lack of space, cold/damp or a dry atmosphere. Risk of aggression or violence is another example of a demand.</p> <p>Please write down examples of work pressures related to demands (e.g. overload, underload, shift-work, environment etc.)</p>	

<p>Control. A feeling of not having control at work can cause stress for people, particularly if they already feel under pressure. Examples of 'lack of control' pressures include not feeling involved in decisions, not having a say or that your opinion doesn't count. Another example would relate to lack of flexibility. Pressure can increase if people feel that they don't have choices, for example over when to take breaks or the way work is scheduled and organised.</p> <p>Think about your job and write down below examples of pressures in your job associated with a lack of control at work.</p>	
<p>Support. When people don't feel supported this can add to pressure at work. Support comes in different forms. For example, support from other people is often referred to as 'social support'. Another form of support is 'practical support', such as having the right resources or equipment. Training is an example of practical support and is very important as it provides the skills you need to do your job. Support can come from different sources e.g. your colleagues or your manager.</p> <p>Think about and write down below any examples of pressures associated with a lack of support at work.</p>	Rank#

<p>Relationships. Poor working relationships can be a significant pressure at work, particularly when they are associated with conflict or negative behaviours such as bullying or harassment.</p> <p>Are poor working relationships a source of pressure for you? If so, please write down any examples below.</p>	
<p>Role. There are sometimes specific pressures associated with the role. For example, sometimes people aren't clear about what they should be doing, or who they are answerable to. This is called 'role ambiguity' and can be a cause of stress. Another problem associated with the role is where people feel that they are 'wearing too many hats'. This results in 'role conflict' where people find it difficult to prioritise.</p> <p>Think about and write down examples of any pressures associated with 'role ambiguity' or 'role conflict' within your job.</p>	

<p>Change. Change at work can increase the pressure on people, particularly if it is not managed well. Poorly managed change can make people feel uncertain, anxious and insecure. What can add to pressure is where people don't feel consulted or involved, and where communication has been poor.</p> <p>Are there examples of pressures associated with change, or the way it has been managed/communicated, over the last six months? If there are, write them down below.</p>	Rank#

Work Pressure Profile (Stage 3)

Job/role title:		
Ranking (highest first)	Pressure description	HSE category e.g. Demands
1 (pressure that contributes most to stress at work)		
2		
3		
4		
5		
Other main pressures		

Individual stress risk assessment

Please read the ‘individual stress risk assessment guidance notes’. They take you through each question, providing information, practical guidance and advice you need to complete that question. The guidance notes can be found on page 39 of this document.

If you want to use these forms at work, we recommend you run it past your HR Adviser (or similar) and that you make sure you comply with your organisation’s policy on data protection re the storing of personal data.

Question 1. Is there anything giving you cause for concern that the employee may be experiencing stress?

Yes No

If Yes, complete the box below and continue.

If No, go straight to question 4.

Note down what is causing you concern and/or anything else you wish to discuss with the employee in this box (e.g. stress-related data).

Question 2. What are the employee's perceptions about this?

Please record the employee's perceptions. How do they see the situation?

Question 3. Are there issues unrelated to work that are making the employee more vulnerable to stress at this time?

Yes No

Question 4. What work pressures is the employee experiencing? Which of these does the employee regard as the most important?

Ranking	Pressure description	HSE category e.g. Demands
1 (most important or stressful)		
2 (2 nd most important)		
3		
4		
5		
Other main pressures		

Question 5. Action planning. What could you, as manager, and/or the employee do to minimise stress risk associated with pressures identified?

Date:

Manager name:

Employee name:

Stress management actions (agreed actions to prevent and reduce stress at work)		When?	Who?	Expected Outcomes
Signed. Manager	Signed. Employee	Evaluation and review date agreed		

Any personal data should be kept in accordance with data protection policy.

**Question 6. Does this stress risk assessment highlight issues that are relevant for the whole organisation?
(If so, what are they and how might they be addressed?)**

Yes No

If yes, please complete the table below.

Stress issues in the organisation	How might they be addressed?

This information should be fed back to Departmental Management in accordance with agreed processes for stress risk assessments

Question 7. Action Plan evaluation/review. Have implemented actions minimised risk?

Date:

Manager name:

Employee name:

Evaluation of actions implemented? Has stress been prevented or reduced? Has risk been minimised?			
New steps/adjustments required?	When?	Who?	Expected Outcomes
Signed. Manager	Signed. Employee	Next evaluation and review date	

Any personal data should be kept in accordance with data protection policy

www.in-equilibrium.co.uk

Individual stress risk assessment guidance notes

These notes provide advice and guidance on how to complete the Individual Stress Risk Assessment forms.

A general point that relates to all of the forms is that you should make sure you comply with your organisation's policy on data protection (keeping records).

Unless the use of these forms by line managers has already been agreed and endorsed by your employer (your trainer would have commented on this on the training day), we recommend you contact your HR adviser or similar before using them.

Our advice is: if in doubt, ask. Never be afraid to ask for support.

Please do not use these forms unless you have been on the relevant training course provided by In Equilibrium.

Proactive and reactive stress risk assessment

Please note that if you wish to conduct proactive stress risk assessments (aimed at prevention) you would not normally need to address questions 1 to 3. Rather, you would be best to commence with work pressure profiling at question 4.

If you are conducting a reactive stress risk assessment (i.e. assessing and managing risk in response to concerns about stress problems), you should address all the questions.

Question 1: Is there anything giving you cause for concern that the employee may be experiencing stress? Answer yes or no.

If yes, note down the relevant data and then continue.

If no, go straight to question 4.

There are three sources of data to consider where stress risk is concerned:

1. **Observable negative changes:** consider whether you have noticed any sustained negative changes in this employee, for example in their behaviour, health, performance, attitudes, mood or appearance.
2. **Objective, quantitative data (quantifiable, measurable):** review your management data relating to this employee, for example, their levels of sickness absence, performance indicators, accidents or complaints. Do any of these data give cause for concern about this individual?

3. Subjective, qualitative information (the ways people describe experience in their own words): consider your interactions with this team member (e.g. from team meetings, informal chats, one-to-ones, return to work interviews) as a means of identifying whether there are any particular stress-related problems or sources of pressure in their current work situation. Also, have others' comments about this employee given you cause for concern?

It would be wrong to leap to conclusions or make assumptions about what these data mean (you are a manager, not a psychologist). Rather you should discuss your concerns/data with the individual to clarify whether the individual is experiencing stress-related problems, and how that individual sees the situation they are in (see Question 2 below).

Question 2: What are the employee's perceptions about this?

For this question, record how the employee sees the situation; that is, their perceptions, feeling and opinions. In order for this to happen you will need to make the employee feel that you are willing to commit time and space to this discussion.

Active listening skills, open questions, and clarification will all be important in discovering the way the employee feels. Remember it is too early to make assumptions. At this stage you are trying to find out how things are from the **employee's** perspective.

Question 3: Are there issues unrelated to work that are making the employee more vulnerable to stress at this time?

As a result of your discussions, have you become aware that the employee has issues outside of work that are contributing to stress levels?

Answer yes or no.

Please note that it is not normally necessary or advisable for a manager to record issues personal to the employee and not work-related. However, being aware that there are non-work 'circumstances', enables you as a manager to take account of increased vulnerability and make appropriate adjustments or provide support.

Question 4: What work pressures is the employee experiencing? Which of these does the employee regard as the most important?

If possible, give the employee the opportunity to think about this (time and space) and complete their own work pressure profile. Give the employee the Work Pressure Profiling example forms (in this document), and give them the chance to look through them.

When you do this, talk the employee through the work pressure profiling process and answer any questions they have. Reassure them that this is purely about identifying and tackling work pressures (which all jobs have), it is not about 'baring your soul' or asking the employee to speak about non-work issues they may not be comfortable about discussing with you (their manager).

Please write the work pressures the employee identifies into the work pressure profile and rank the pressures as the employee sees them. That is, the most important from the employee's perspective would be ranked 1, the second most important ranked 2, and so on. The employee's perception is what is most important here.

Which of the HSE Management Standards' categories do the pressures identified fit into? Please use your judgement as to which category each falls into and mark this on the form. More than one 'pressure' as identified by the employee may fall into the same category. It also is likely that some categories may not be represented at all. There is no need to fill in the whole table i.e. if the employee only identifies two specific pressures, that's fine, just fill in the top two rows.

As a reminder, the HSE Management Standards divide pressures (hazards) into 6 categories:

- Demands
- Control
- Support
- Relationships
- Role
- Change

It is important to clarify what each one means, so you can categorise them appropriately. The following explanations are taken from the pressure profiling questionnaire:

Demands. 'Demands' covers a number of potential sources of pressure at work. Having too much to do (overload) or too little to do (underload) are both examples of demands. Having too much work that is boring, repetitive and lacking in challenge is another example. So is work that is too hard or complex, and/or work that you haven't been trained for where you don't feel competent. Shift-work may be demanding,

depending on shift patterns and your ability to cope with them. There could also be demands in your (physical) working environment, such as noise, lack of space, cold/damp or a dry atmosphere. Risk of aggression or violence is another example of a demand.

Are any pressures identified related to demands at work?

Control. A feeling of not having control at work can cause stress for people, particularly if they already feel under pressure. Examples of 'lack of control' pressures include not feeling involved in decisions, not having a say or that your opinion doesn't count. Another example would relate to lack of flexibility. Pressure can increase if people feel that they don't have choices, for example, over when to take breaks or the way work is scheduled and organised.

Do any of the pressures identified relate to feelings of a lack of control?

Support. When people don't feel supported this can add to pressure at work. Support comes in different forms. For example, support from other people is often referred to as 'social support'. Another form of support is 'practical support', such as having the right resources or equipment. Training is an example of practical support and is very important as it provides the skills you need to do your job. Support can come from different sources e.g. your colleagues or your manager.

Are pressures identified by the employee related to either (a lack of) social support or (a lack of) practical support?

Relationships. Poor working relationships can be a significant pressure at work, particularly when they are associated with conflict or negative behaviours such as bullying or harassment.

Are there specific pressures relating to relationships that the employee is experiencing?

Role. There are sometimes specific pressures associated with the role. For example, sometimes people aren't clear about what they should be doing, or who they are answerable to. This is called 'role ambiguity' and can be a cause of stress. Another problem associated with the role is where people feel that they are 'wearing too many hats'. This results in 'role conflict' where people find it difficult to prioritise. This is an example of what is often called 'role conflict'.

Are pressures identified related either to role ambiguity or role conflict?

Change. Change at work can increase the pressure on people, particularly if it is not managed well. Poorly managed change can make people feel uncertain, anxious and insecure. What can add to pressure is where people don't feel consulted or involved, and where communication has been poor. Think about your job.

Do any pressures that the employee identifies relate to change management?

Question 5: Action Planning: What could you, as manager, and/or the employee do to minimise stress risk associated with pressures identified?

Please summarise any agreed actions here. Please make sure you are specific about what will be done, when, and who is responsible. Include all actions designed to minimise risk. Make sure you list actions you will take as a manager, for example:

- Any adjustments that will be made e.g. flexible working, changes to working patterns or hours, phased return, working from home, changes to tasks/roles etc.
- Any supports put in place e.g. referral to occupational health, employee assistance programme (counselling); additional management support of supervision, additional resources etc.
- Any training interventions agreed.

Please take into account reasonable practicability and the implications for other team members when developing action plans. Agree with the employee how and when action plans will be monitored and reviewed.

If you need to, make copies of the table.

Question 6: Does this stress risk assessment highlight issues that are relevant for the whole organisation? If so, what are they and how might they be addressed?

Please reflect on the issues raised by this stress risk assessment. Has the stress risk assessment highlighted general issues that could be fed back (e.g. to Department Management; the HR Board and/or Health and Safety)? If so, please list them.

If you have any suggestions as to how these general stress issues might be addressed please write these in the right hand column opposite the stress issue you listed in the left hand column. The employee's ideas on this and your opinions are both important.

If you need to, make copies of the table.

Question 7: Action Plan evaluation/review. Have implemented actions minimised risk?

This question is to be answered on the review date agreed at stage/question 5.

The main purpose of the review meeting is evaluation. Has the action plan you implemented been successful from both your and the employee's perspective? Has the risk to well-being (stress) been reduced? Please record a summary of this evaluation.

If the implemented action have been only partially successful, or not successful, consider and discuss with the employee any further steps or adjustments that are required. Write down agreed steps or adjustments in the space provided.

If further steps are required, make sure that you record when they will be implemented and who is responsible, along with the relevant HSE category (are new adjustments related to demands, support etc?).

You will need to agree another evaluation and review date if further steps or adjustments have been planned. Otherwise, the risk assessment process is now complete.

If you need to, make copies of the table.

Stress management competency indicator tool

The following tool was commissioned by the HSE with support from the CIPD and Investors in People. The tool is available on the HSE website and has been replicated on the following pages for your use after the training course.

The 'Stress management competency indicator tool' is designed to allow you to assess whether the behaviours identified as effective for preventing and reducing stress at work are part of your management repertoire or not. The aim is to help you to reflect upon your own behaviour and management style.

The next four pages look in turn at four behavioural areas identified as being important for managers to prevent and reduce stress in their team. You are asked to consider a range of specific manager behaviours and put a tick in the column that most closely represents your level of agreement with each statement. You can then use the instructions at the end of each table to calculate your score on the behavioural area covered by that table. (NB the term 'team members' is used to refer to people who report directly to you/who you manage.)

The overall assessment process allows you to use the scores from the questionnaire to assess your effectiveness in preventing and reducing stress in your team. It allows you to identify whether any of the areas are Development Needs for you, or whether you are Reasonable or Effective in each area.

Some tips and ideas on how you can use your assessment to improve your effectiveness in preventing and reducing stress at work, through your management behaviour, are provided after the overall assessment. Finally, there is a summary of the competencies required to prevent and reduce stress at work.

Area 1

Respectful and Responsible: Managing Emotions and Having Integrity

Behaviour/Competency	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Slightly Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Integrity					
I am a good role model					
I treat my team members with respect					
I am honest					
I do what I say I will do					
I never speak about team members behind their backs					
Managing Emotions					
I act calmly in pressured situations					
I take a consistent approach to managing					
My moods are predictable					
I don't pass on my stress to my team					
I approach deadlines calmly					
I welcome suggestions for improvements from my team					
Considerate Approach					
I allow my team to plan their workloads					
The deadlines I create are realistic					
I give more positive than negative feedback					
I deal with problems myself rather than relying on others					
I allow my team to approach their work in their own way					
I show a consideration for my team's worklife balance					
Note down the total number of ticks in each column					

Now multiply each column total by the number indicated to calculate your column score	x 1 =	x 2 =	x 3 =	x 4 =	x 5 =
Add the column scores together and note the total score (maximum score is 85)					
Now divide your total score by 85 and multiply by 100	(...../85) x 100 =				

Area 2 Managing and Communicating Existing and Future Work

Behaviour/Competency	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Slightly Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Proactive Work Management					
I clearly communicate job objectives to my team					
I develop action plans					
I monitor my team's workload on an ongoing basis					
I encourage my team to review how they organise their work					
When necessary, I stop additional work being taken on by my team					
I work proactively					
I see projects/tasks through to delivery					
I review processes to see if work can be improved					
I prioritise future workloads					
Problem Solving					
I deal rationally with problems					
I follow up problems on behalf of my team					
I deal with problems as soon as they arise					
I am decisive when decision making					
Participative/Empowering					
I give employees the right level of job responsibility					
I correctly judge when to consult the team and when to make a decision					
I keep my team informed of what is happening in the organisation					
I act as a mentor to my team					

I delegate work equally					
I help team members to develop in their role					
I encourage participation from the whole team					
I provide regular team meetings					
I give the right level of direction to my team members					
Note down the total number of ticks in each column					
Now multiply each column total by the number indicated to calculate your column score	x 1 =	x 2 =	x 3 =	x 4 =	x 5 =
Add the column scores together and note the total score (maximum score is 110)					
Now divide your total score by 110 and multiply by 100	$(\dots\dots\dots/110) \times 100 =$				

Area 3 Managing the Individual within the Team

Behaviour/Competency	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Slightly Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Personally Accessible					
I prefer to speak to my team personally than use email					
I provide regular opportunities for my team to speak one to one					
I return my team's calls/emails promptly					
I am available to talk to when needed					
Sociable					
I bring in treats for my team					
I socialise with the team					
I am willing to have a laugh at work					
Empathetic Engagement					
I encourage individuals' input in discussions					
I listen when a team member asks for help					
I make an effort to find out what motivates my team members at work					
I try to see things from my team members' point of view					
I take an interest in my team's life outside work					
I regularly ask team members 'How are you?'					
I treat all team members with equal importance					
I check everyone is OK rather than just assuming					
Note down the total number of ticks in each column					

Now multiply each column total by the number indicated to calculate your column score	x 1 =	x 2 =	x 3 =	x 4 =	x 5 =
Add the column scores together and note the total score (maximum score is 75)					
Now divide your total score by 75 and multiply by 100	(...../75) x 100 =				

Area 4: Reasoning/Managing Difficult Situations

Behaviour/Competency	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Slightly Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Managing Conflict					
I act as a mediator in conflict situations					
I deal with squabbles in the team before they become arguments					
I deal objectively with employee conflicts					
I deal with conflicts head on					
I try and resolve issues rather than act to keep the peace					
Use of Organisational Resources					
I seek advice from other managers when necessary					
I use HR as a resource to help deal with problems					
I seek help from occupational health when necessary					
Taking Responsibility for Resolving Issues					
I follow up team conflicts after resolution					
I support employees through incidents of abuse					
I make it clear I will take ultimate responsibility if things go wrong					
I address bullying					
Note down the total number of ticks in each column					
Now multiply each column total by the number indicated to calculate your column score	x 1 =	x 2 =	x 3 =	x 4 =	x 5 =
Add the column scores together and note the total score (maximum score is 60)					
Now divide your total score by 60 and multiply by 100	(. / 60) x 100 =				

Overall Assessment

You have now calculated a percentage score for each of the four behavioural areas (or three behavioural areas if you are not measuring your ability to manage difficult situations) that have been identified as important for preventing and reducing stress at work. In order to interpret what these scores mean, use the following guidelines:

75% or below = Development Need: This is an area in which you would benefit from some development. Please refer back to the questionnaire to explore which of the behaviours you could consider using more often in the future in order to be more effective at preventing and reducing stress in your team.

76% to 89% = Reasonable: You show a good awareness of the behaviours needed for effectively preventing and reducing stress in others. It may be helpful to refer back to the questionnaire to see if there are any behaviours you could add to your repertoire in this area to increase your effectiveness in managing stress in others.

90% and above = Effective: You demonstrate the behaviours that have been shown to be effective in preventing and reducing stress in your team.

Your 'Stress management competence' profile

Fill in each of the right hand columns. In the effectiveness column, add 'Development Need', 'Reasonable' or 'Effective' using the guidance above.

Competency	Percentage	Effectiveness
Respectful and responsible: Managing emotions and having integrity		
Managing and communicating existing and future work		
Managing the individual within the team		
Reasoning/Managing difficult situations		

What Do I Do Next?

In order to improve your effectiveness at preventing and reducing stress at work, we suggest the following steps:

1. Look for the behavioural area in which you received the lowest score and focus on this as your top priority. If you have identified several Development Needs or areas that you would like to move into the 'Effective' zone, take them one at a time – you don't have to change everything at once!
2. Look back at the questionnaire to explore what behaviours are relevant to this area. On the following page is a summary of the four behavioural areas, and outlines of the key behaviours in each. Identify the ones that you indicated you do least and consider what you need to do in order to show these behaviours more often. It may simply be a matter of being more aware of how you are behaving at the moment and making small shifts to add the relevant additional (or alternative) behaviours to your repertoire.
3. You may find it helpful to check out with your team whether they would find it helpful for you to show more of these particular behaviours and how that would be different from what you do at the moment. You could ask them to give you feedback on how you are doing.
4. If you feel that it will be difficult for you to make these behavioural changes on your own, consider seeking support. For example, informal coaching or support from your own manager and/or from the HR department might be helpful; you might find it helpful to get some formal coaching or mentoring; and/or you might want to attend a training course to develop the relevant skills.

Summary of the 'Management Competencies for Preventing and Reducing Stress at Work' Framework

Competency	Sub-Competency
Respectful and responsible: Managing emotions and having integrity	Integrity <i>Being respectful and honest to employees</i>
	Managing emotions <i>Behaving consistently and calmly around the team</i>
	Considerate approach <i>Being thoughtful in managing others and delegating</i>
Managing and communicating existing and future work	Proactive work management <i>Monitoring and reviewing existing work, allowing future prioritisation and planning</i>
	Problem Solving <i>Dealing with problems promptly, rationally and responsibly</i>
	Participative/empowering <i>Listening to, meeting and consulting with the team, providing direction, autonomy and development opportunities to individuals</i>
Managing the individual within the team	Personally accessible <i>Available to talk to personally</i>
	Sociable <i>Relaxed approach, such as socialising and using humour</i>
	Empathetic engagement <i>Seeking to understand each individual in the team in terms of their health and satisfaction, motivation, point of view and life outside work</i>
Reasoning/Managing difficult situations	Managing conflict <i>Dealing with conflicts decisively, promptly and objectively</i>
	Use of organisational resources <i>Seeking advice when necessary from managers, HR and Occupational Health</i>
	Taking responsibility for resolving issues <i>Having a supportive and responsible approach to issues and incidents in the team</i>

Stress Management Tools and Techniques

Taking 'Control' of Your Life

This tool contains a number of elements that can reduce stress risk:

- Reflection
- Analysis
- Acceptance
- Prioritising
- Planning
- Action

When you have a chance to really use this tool, give some serious thought to how you could apply these elements more generally in your life.

To use this tool, follow the instructions below:

1. Take a blank piece of paper. Reflect for a few minutes on all of the 'sources of pressure' in your life. Think about your whole life: home, work, relationships, environment and so on. Refer to 'Sources of Pressure' (p58) to help you develop your own list.
2. Now use your 'My control Inventory' (p59). Place each item in your 'sources of pressure' list into one of the two columns. That is, for each item decide quickly whether this is something you have 'some control' over or 'no control' over.
3. Once you have your two lists, challenge the list items on the right. Do you really have no control over these things? Are there some, when you really think about them, where you do have some control? If so, move them into the left column.
4. Now, accept that you cannot control the things remaining on the right. 'Release' them, let them go. Stop trying to influence what you cannot control. Stop knocking your head against a brick wall.
5. Concentrate your efforts on the list on the left. Go through the list and prioritise them. Which of these things are the most important in terms of your stress levels right now?

6. Take the 'Things I can control – Actions to Reduce Stress' table (p60). Select the five most important items in order of importance from the left hand column of your 'Control Inventory' and write them into the left hand column of the 'Things I can control – Actions to Reduce Stress' table.
7. Start with the most important thing and do some action planning. What is the most important thing you could do now that would reduce your stress associated with that thing? Then think about what you can do in the near future, and then the medium future and so on. This is basic planning. Don't be over-ambitious; concentrate most on what you can actually do in the short, medium and long term.
8. Once you have completed this exercise, how do you feel?
9. It is vitally important that you follow through and put these actions into effect. Again, be realistic. Don't try to do everything at once but focus on the most important things first, even if that is only one thing. Make a commitment to yourself to do that thing or things. If you see that through, you will get a real sense of achievement. If, on the other hand, you are too ambitious, and don't see it through, you will be disappointed and feel as if you have let yourself down. This will only add to your stress.
10. This kind of action planning is a wonderful stress management habit. If you can do this habitually you will have progressively more and better feelings of control over the things that really matter in your life.

Sources of Pressure

We have many sources of pressure in our lives, all of which have the potential to cause stress. Think about and list all of the sources of pressure in your life. Below are listed some categories to help you develop your own list. These categories are designed to get you thinking and generating your own list. There may well be sources of pressure that you have that don't come into any of the categories. Try to be as specific as you can. Once you have completed your list place them into your 'my control inventory' table, dividing them between things you have some control over and things you have no control over.

- Change.** What changes are you dealing with in your life?
- Major life events** in the recent past, present or near future.
- Commuting** to and from work. Does this cause you problems?
- Decision making.** Are you facing any difficult decisions at present?
- Health.** Have you any concerns about your health or others' health?
- Emotions.** Are you angry, frustrated, upset, or worried about anything?
- Environments.** Does your home or working environment cause any problems?
- Money.** Do you have any money issues outstanding?
- Family.** How are things with your family; any particular issues?
- Relationships.** How are your most important relationships?
- Communication.** Are you having any difficulties in communication with important others?
- Organisation and Planning.** Are things in order and well planned or are they disorganised and shambolic? Is your life cluttered?
- Phobias.** Do you have any irrational fears?
- Social.** How is your 'social' life? Are you getting enough support? Are you seeing enough of the people you enjoy being with?
- Work.** How are things at work? What sources of pressure are you facing?
- Spiritual.** Do you have any difficulties with regard to spiritual concerns?

My Control Inventory

Things I have (some) control over	Things I have no control over

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Things I can control – Actions to Reduce Stress

Most important thing in terms of my stress level	Actions I can take now and in the future to reduce the stress associated with that thing.

Challenging Stressful Thoughts

It is not events themselves which necessarily cause stress but the way we perceive and react to them. Most people think that stress is something that happens to them. But how you approach life - your beliefs, your thoughts, and your attitude – can have a major effect on your long-term pressure/stress management.

Do you see a glass of water as half empty or half full?

Is your attitude automatically negative or hostile?

Personality traits which are prone to turning pressure into stress

The Perfectionist

- Do you feel constant pressure to achieve?
- Are you hard on yourself when you make a mistake?
- Do you always feel you haven't done enough?

The Control Freak

- Do you need to control everything and everyone?
- Are you a bad delegator?
- Do you think lack of control is a sign of weakness?

The People Pleaser

- Do you need to have everyone like you?
- Do you care more for others than yourself?
- Do you hide your negative feelings so as not to displease others?

Lacking in Self-Esteem

- Do you feel that you have poor judgement?
- Do you feel like an impostor?
- Do you feel that you don't do as good a job as others?

Challenge your limiting beliefs

We all have limiting beliefs, which frustrate our progress and frequently result in stress. Many of these beliefs have implied “shalls” and “can’ts” such as

- I’m not as good as other people
- Life is a struggle
- Change is difficult

Limiting beliefs can cause stress when they make us collide head-on into other people. You may have a fight with your partner because they didn’t change the sheets every week: “Everyone changes the sheets every week,” you say. Where does this idea come from? “Everybody knows it. My mother taught me.”

In fact, this is not an immutable law. Believing there is an immutable law that “everyone” knows can cause stress until you acknowledge that it’s really just your preference.

Challenge your limiting beliefs by:

- Articulating them
- Labelling them as beliefs and not as truths
- Admitting they are opinions which can be changed
- Admitting that beliefs held by others may be just as valid

Reframing

When experiencing stressful situations you lose the ability to see what you’re doing that can make things worse. Reframing is a technique which changes the way you look at things which can make you feel better about them. Remember that there are always many different ways of looking at any situation. The reality may not change, but there are different ways of perceiving that reality. This being so, you might as well pick the perception that’s going to cause you the least stress.

For example, let’s say you just lost your job. Can you find the upside to this?

- Maybe you hated it, but lacked the courage to leave. Now you have the opportunity to find something better.
- Its scary finding a new job, but we never grow when we’re not challenged. This could make you a stronger person.

Suppose a co-member of your team drives you mad by always acting superior. How could you reframe that behaviour?

- They are probably insecure.
- They may see you as a threat. By trying to put you down, they are hoping to rise above you.
- They may be having personal problems.

Distorted, Negative Thinking

Do you know any negative thinkers? Their thinking style is the opposite of optimism – it destroys confidence, interferes with their performance, and dampens their mental skills.

Examples of negative thinking

- “We’ve got a new contract, that’ll mean working late.”
- “I’ve got a new boss, I’d better watch my step.”
- “All these people are so successful. What am I doing here.”

Types of Negative Thinking

Thinking in black or white terms

You are either the best programmer in the world or the worst. You snapped at your son, so you’ve got to be the worst parent in the world. It’s all or nothing.

It’s not really so.

Instead realise that you can’t be defined by any single act, and one mistake doesn’t usually destroy an entire project.

Overgeneralising

Similar to black and white thinking, the overgeneraliser sees every mistake as part of a dark and twisted pattern of inevitable failure. Every time you fail you see it as evidence that you will never get it right.

Instead, evaluate each incident on its own merits, and force yourself to be objective.

Personalising

This is the favourite ploy of those who walk around attracting guilt like a magnet. The boss ignores you and you wonder what you’ve done wrong. Only to find out later she fell out with her husband that morning.

Instead, the right reaction is not to assume the worst without more obvious evidence. If you really have done something wrong you’ll hear about it soon enough.

Challenging Stressful Thoughts

Use the following table to challenge your limiting beliefs and thinking errors:

<p>Step 1: Think of a situation or event in which you felt stressed and note it down.</p>	
<p>Step 2: Note down how you felt and how you behaved in that situation.</p>	
<p>Step 3: As you think about the stressful situation/event and re-experience the feelings you had, note down the thoughts you had.</p>	
<p>Step 4: Look at the thoughts you had and see what underlying beliefs led you to think that way. Challenge your thinking and beliefs. Are they: - logical? - realistic (supported by the evidence)? - helpful?</p>	
<p>Step 5: Identify a more helpful belief and way of thinking about that event or situation and note it down.</p>	

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Social Support

Other people are very important to your ability to cope. Thousands of studies from the field of Social Psychology have repeatedly shown that social support is the #1 buffer against stress. The more pressure there is, the more important that support becomes.

We are social animals. Unfortunately, many people forget this, and the media can glorify individuality and self-reliance to the point that people feel that they **should** be able to cope. Yet we need other people and other people need us.

Generally the risk of isolation and loneliness has increased in recent times. These days, we don't tend to identify with our communities like we did or stay in the same communities, we don't stay with the same careers or companies like we used to, and even within our companies the pace of change has increased dramatically. In addition, we work very long hours, and spend increasing amounts of time commuting. All of these changes have contributed to reducing potential opportunities to build good social relationships, and both give and receive social support.

What can we do to make sure we get the social support we need?

Do an audit of your social life. Key questions you could ask yourself would be:

- What are the most important social relationships in my life?
- Are those relationships as good as they could be?
- What could I do to invest in those relationships?
- Do I need to develop some new relationships/friendships?
- If so, what actions do I need to take?

A key issue is that of **investment**. Investment in relationships is one of the most important things you can do to prevent and reduce stress, and boost your health and wellbeing in the long term. Social psychological research has shown unequivocally that the most powerful influence technique is reciprocity – that is, you have to give to get.

The personal development guru, Stephen Covey talks about the ‘emotional bank account’, the idea that with relationships you have to make deposits. If you keep making withdrawals, you will become ‘overdrawn’, and the risk of the relationship breaking down increases. Of course, just like the stock market, we have to bear in mind that investments can go up as well as down as anyone who has teenagers will testify!

So we have to take a long-term view, and trust that most of the time our investments will pay off. Yes, some people will occasionally let us down, but in terms of stress risk, the biggest risk for our health and wellbeing comes from not making the investment.

Sleep

Good quality sleep: this means waking up refreshed with enough mental and physical stamina for the new day. This is essential for performing at your best, which helps you manage increasing workloads and have enough energy for a good work life balance. We all know the difference a really good night's sleep can make.

Do You have a sleep problem? an individual has a degree of sleep problem if they have difficulty getting to sleep, if they wake up during the night and have difficulty getting back to sleep, or wake up in the morning not feeling refreshed. Regularly sleeping through the alarm clock is not a good sign.

Chronic tiredness: a quarter of the working age population are said to be chronically tired, and doctors say more and more have TATT, Tired All The Time. The more consistently we can get good sleep the better. Think how much energy you have felt and how you have performed after a good night's sleep compared to a poor night's sleep.

More than a third of all adults in the UK have sleeping problems. If you think you are one of them then don't just accept it. There are many things you can do to improve the quality of your sleep, some of which are covered below:

- **Dealing with excess adrenaline**

Individuals who have difficulty switching off after work or before going to bed may have excess levels of unused adrenaline in their body. If this is not used up before sleep, it can prevent the brain waves slowing down enough to obtain the most restorative deep sleep. If you cannot switch off, take a brisk walk, or a work out in the gym.

- **Eat early to ensure good quality sleep**

Are you eating and drinking less than 2 hours before you go to bed? It can take food up to 2 hours to fully digest, so if you do eat late you risk indigestion

Drinking before you go to bed can also disturb your sleep, particularly if you drink coffee or tea as they act as a stimulant. However, some people do find that an evening drink such as chamomile tea can help them sleep later on. Alcohol will also affect your sleep quality. It may help you fall asleep but it will also dehydrate you, causing you to wake early with a dry mouth and throat.

- **Empty your mind**

Is your mind too active? Are you thinking about tomorrow's demands and challenges? If you are, try writing down all your plans for the following day before you go to bed to free your mind for sleep. This is a simple but very effective technique. Anxiety always reduces when we increase our perception of control. The act of writing things down also means we don't have to worry about forgetting to do them. It also unclutters your mind and slows it down. It is better to avoid having things around that may trigger thoughts which could keep you awake. For example, keep work-related items out of the bedroom.

- **Acquire relaxation skills**

Everyone knows that you can't 'force' yourself to go to sleep any more than you can 'force' yourself to remember things. A very pleasant way to drift off to sleep is to practice physical and mental relaxation, especially breathing relaxation combined if necessary with muscle relaxation.

This also works very well if you want to get to sleep. If you combine it with a visualisation of a peaceful scene it can be an enjoyable way of drifting off to sleep. Remember, relaxation and visualisation are acquired skills; so the more you practice them the easier they become.

- **Nightly rituals**

Nightly rituals, whatever they are, can also send a strong message to your unconscious that you are ready for sleep. Examples include listening to soothing music, having a bath or reading a novel.

The above is certainly not an exhaustive list, but the main message is that you find, through trial and error, what works for you. And remember, we all need different amounts of sleep, so don't worry if you are not sleeping as much as your partner. They may need more than you do.

Edinburgh has a sleep laboratory headed by Prof. C.J. Idzikowski and he has written a paperback with a CD, called *Learn to Sleep Well Kit: A Practical Guide to Getting a Good Night's Rest*. It was published in 2002 and is still available on Amazon.

Anger Management

Anger is a completely normal, usually healthy, human emotion. However, when anger gets out of control and turns destructive, it can lead to problems: problems at work, in your personal relationships and in the overall quality of your life.

The goal of anger management is to reduce both your emotional feelings and the physiological arousal that anger causes. You can't get rid of, or avoid, the things or the people that enrage you, nor can you change them, but you can learn to control your reactions. Learning new behaviours takes a lot of practice. You may have had years of training in how to act angry, now you need to learn new skills to deal with problems.

The Anger Myth

There is a myth that anger has to be expressed or you will explode into a violent rage. The anger will build up like water behind a dam. If you don't express it, you will come bursting out all at once destroying everything. Research strongly disagrees with this myth. The research shows that anger doesn't work. The more you act angry or think angry thoughts, the more you feel angry. Anger feeds on itself. It never helps to hit walls or pillows, or to yell. It just makes you act more angry.

Remember: ANGER IS A CHOICE!

You don't have to act angry. You can solve your problems in other ways. Up till now, anger may have been automatic, a decision made without thinking, a choice made out of habit. It is possible to feel angry and act in a way that is more productive.

What Strategies Can You Use to Keep Anger at Bay?

Relaxation

Simple relaxation tools such as deep breathing and relaxing imagery can help calm down angry feelings. There are books and courses that can teach you relaxation techniques, and once you learn them you can call upon them in any situation. If you are involved in a relationship where both partners are hot-tempered, it might be a good idea for both of you to learn these techniques.

Some simple steps you can try:

- Breathe deeply, from your diaphragm; breathing from your chest won't relax you. Picture your breath coming up from your stomach.
- Slowly repeat a calm word or phrase, such as 'relax', 'take it easy'.
- Repeat it to yourself while breathing deeply.
- Use imagery; visualise a relaxing experience, from either your memory or your imagination.
- Non-strenuous, slow yoga-like exercises can relax your muscles and make you feel much calmer.
- Practice these techniques daily. Learn to use them automatically when you're in a tense situation.

Cognitive Restructuring

Simply put, this means changing the way you think. Angry people tend to swear or speak in highly colourful terms that reflect their inner thoughts. When you're angry, your thinking can get very exaggerated and overly dramatic. Try replacing these thoughts with more rational ones. For instance, instead of telling yourself, 'oh, it's awful, it's terrible, everything's ruined,' tell yourself, 'it's frustrating, and it's understandable that I'm upset about it, but it's not the end of the world and getting angry is not going to fix it anyway.' Be careful of words like 'never' or 'always' when talking about yourself or someone else. 'This machine never works,' or 'you're always forgetting things' are not just inaccurate, they also serve to make you feel that your anger is justified and that there's no way to solve the problem. They also alienate and humiliate people who might otherwise be willing to work with you on a solution.

For example, you have a friend who is constantly late when you make plans to meet. Don't go on the attack; think instead about the goal you want to accomplish (that is, getting you and your friend there at about the same time). So avoid saying things like, 'You're always late! You're the most irresponsible, inconsiderate person I have ever met!' The only goal that accomplishes is hurting and angering your friend.

State what the problem is, and try to find a solution that works for both of you. Remind yourself that getting angry is not going to fix anything, that it won't make you feel better (and may actually make you feel worse). Logic defeats anger, because anger, even when it's justified, can quickly become irrational. So use cold hard logic on yourself. Remind yourself that the world is 'not out to get you,' you're just experiencing some of the rough spots of daily life. Do this each time you feel anger getting the best of you, and it'll help you get a more balanced perspective.

Keep an anger diary every day if you can. This is an opportunity to write down your thoughts and feelings and observe your progress. You will feel successful as you see yourself handling your anger better.

Angry people tend to demand things: fairness, appreciation, agreement, willingness to do things their way. Everyone wants these things, and we are all hurt and disappointed when we don't get them, but angry people demand them, and when their demands aren't met their disappointment becomes anger. As part of their cognitive restructuring, angry people need to become aware of their demanding nature and translate their expectations into desires. In other words, saying 'I would like' something is healthier than saying 'I demand' or 'I must have' something. When you're unable to get what you want, you will experience the normal reactions --frustration, disappointment, hurt -- but not anger. Some angry people use this anger as a way to avoid feeling hurt, but that doesn't mean the hurt goes away.

Avoid Mind Reading

Mind reading takes a road map from our past and places it unrealistically over the present. We expect people to respond to us the way others did in the past. The key to preventing mind reading is to check it out with the other person. Don't assume you know what they are thinking, ask them.

Once you begin asking the other person how she or he feels and what he or she thinks, you will learn a lot about yourself. You will learn about your old maps and how inaccurate they are.

- How do you feel?
- What do you want me to do?
- Tell me more about what you are thinking
- What do you suggest we do to resolve the problem?

Improving Self-Talk

It might help to develop some positive things to say to yourself. Make a list of positive self-statements and keep them with you. If you feel uncomfortable take them out and read them to yourself. For example:

- I'm smart and capable
- I can take care of myself
- I can handle this
- I'm responsible for what happens to me
- I can take care of my own needs

Problem-Solving

Sometimes, our anger and frustration are caused by very real and inescapable problems in our lives. Not all anger is misplaced, and often it's a healthy, natural response to these difficulties. There is also a cultural belief that every problem has a solution, and it adds to our frustration to find out that this isn't always the case. The best attitude to bring such a situation, then, is not to focus on finding the solution but rather on how you handle and face the problem.

When you have a problem use these problem solving skills. Continue to process through the options until everyone involved agrees to a solution

1. Write the problem down
2. Communicate your feelings
3. Ask for what you want
4. Acknowledge the other person's point of view
5. Develop a list of options
6. Discuss the pros and cons of each option
7. Keep working until you reach a consensus

Better Communication

Angry people tend to jump to - and act on - conclusions, and some of those conclusions can be pretty wild. The first thing to do, if you are in a heated discussion, is to slow down and think through your responses. Don't say the first thing that comes into your head, but slow down and think carefully about what you want to say. At the same time, listen carefully to what the other person is saying and take your time before answering. Listen, too, to what is underlying the anger. For instance, you like a certain amount of freedom and personal space, and your 'significant other' wants more connection and closeness. If he or she starts complaining about your activities, don't retaliate by painting you partner as a jailer, a warden or an albatross around your neck. It's natural to get defensive when you're criticised, but don't fight back. Instead, listen to what's underlying the words: the message that this person might feel neglected and unloved. It may take a lot of patient questioning on your part, and it may require some breathing space, but don't let your anger - or a partner's - let a discussion spin out of control. Keeping your cool can keep the situation from becoming a disastrous one.

Using Humour

'Silly humour' can help defuse rage in a number of ways. For one thing, it can help you get a more balanced perspective. When you get angry and call someone a name or refer to them in some imaginative phrase, stop and picture what that word would literally look like. If you're at work and you think of a co-worker as a 'dirt-bag' or a 'single-cell life

form,' for example, picture a large bag full of dirt (or an amoeba) sitting at your colleagues desk, talking on the phone, going to meetings. Do this whenever a name comes into your head about another person. If you can, draw a picture of what the actual thing might look like. This will take a lot of the edge off your fury; and humour can always be relied on to help un-knot a tense situation.

There are two cautions in using humour. First, don't try to just 'laugh off' your problems; rather, use humour to help yourself face them more constructively. Second, don't give in to harsh, sarcastic humour - that's just another form of unhealthy anger expression.

What these techniques have in common is a refusal to take yourself too seriously. Anger is a serious emotion, but it's often accompanied by ideas that, if examined, can make you laugh.

Practical tips for managing your own stress and reactions

Why this is important

If you are under stress your health is at risk and your well-being can be affected. This in itself is a good reason for taking action. However, it is easy to overlook the negative effects of your stress on colleagues. People under stress show negative changes, for example to their behaviour. These negative changes that you experience will have ripple affects, and these can be serious. So you need to be just a little bit selfish, and make sure you yourself are OK.

Your reactions influence your stress risk, in addition to the more obvious stress risk to others. Being on a short fuse, and being very reactive can be indicative of 'Type A behaviour'. This increases your risk from stress-related conditions and increases your risk of heart disease. In addition, just one very negative reaction can have a long-lasting and damaging effect on working relationships, especially with those you manage. So managing your reactions is critically important for your stress and for that of your colleagues!

Some basic stress management hints and tips

- Become aware of your own signs and symptoms, and of what causes your stress. We all tend to have one or two particular warning signs. What are your WARNING SIGNS?
- Go through a process of listing all your potential sources of pressure. Divide them into things you have 'some control' over and things you have 'no control' over. Challenge each item in your 'no control' list – do you really have no control over those things? If you change your mind shift that source into the 'some control' list. ACCEPT the sources you really cannot control – LET GO, stop knocking your head against a brick wall! Look now at your 'some control' list. Pick a 'top five' sources in terms of YOUR STRESS LEVELS. Write these into a simple table then do some Action Planning. What can you do right now to reduce the stress associated with that source, what can you do over the next week, and what can you do over the longer term? Finally, when it comes to implementing your plans don't be too ambitious and try to do everything all at once. It is better to give yourself the goal of addressing the top one or two and have the feeling of success, than trying to do all of them at once and have the feeling of failure.
- Bear in mind that your perspective can greatly influence stress levels. Take every opportunity to put things in perspective. Think about the feel-good things in your life. Don't only focus on what causes stress. Give consideration to what provides you with joy, happiness and contentment. Be thankful for those things and when you can, indulge in joy-giving activities.

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- Try to have a good work-life balance. Think carefully about what's really important for you, and make sure you give some priority to important things. It can be very easy to neglect the important things, like 'people' things (family and friends), and also neglect our own needs. Never forget that we all need to take responsibility for and care for our own health and well-being. If we don't care for ourselves, others will suffer, not just ourselves.
- Become aware of, and take control of, your breathing. Remember that either you control your breathing or your breathing controls you. Slow down and deepen your breathing whenever you feel stressed.
- Give yourself and others the benefit of the doubt.
- Don't take yourself too seriously, and try not to be a perfectionist. Expecting perfection (in yourself, others, and in human systems) will inevitably lead to disappointment.
- We are all social animals. We all need support. So never be afraid to ask for support, and never be afraid to offer it either. You need a social life. Invest in relationships (including at work), and particularly in friendships. Such investment will pay great dividends!
- Dance whenever possible! Any regular activity that provides good exercise (especially activities like dancing which are also social) is a great mood enhancer and improved your physical well-being too

Suggestions specifically about managing your reactions

- Be very careful about the assumptions you make about others, because your assumptions will influence your reaction, which could then negatively influence their behaviour. This can easily become a vicious circle and a self-fulfilling prophecy.
- Beware, and try to prevent, highly emotional reactions, especially those involving anger. Angry, 'red-mist' reactions are almost always very damaging (you'll regret them for a long time!).

- Use your breathing to calm yourself down.
- Listen and observe (ask what's going on?). This helps you detach yourself somewhat.
- Think before you speak. Give yourself time even if it's only two or three seconds.
- Don't take things personally even if you appear to be 'the target'. Ask yourself what might be the underlying causes of this behaviour.
- Swallow your pride, and apologise. OK, it might not be your fault, but the word 'sorry' can help diffuse the situation.
- If the underlying cause of the conflict has anything to do with you, take responsibility and action.
- Ask what you can do to help. This enables a focus on practical solutions and takes attention away from things which are out of control (focus on negative things which are not within someone's sphere of control can engender feelings of helplessness or hopelessness)
- Don't fight fire with fire, it will only make things worse. If you need to, be assertive, never aggressive.
- If the situation is really bad (and you worry that you may not be able to control your emotions), it is often better to temporarily get out of the situation than to blow up.
- Always take into account that you cannot control someone else's behaviour, but you can control your response to their behaviour.