

# TOOLBOX TOPIC

## WORK RELATED STRESS



Most jobs will involve some level of stress, and this level will fluctuate over time as a result of various factors. However, when workplace stress becomes excessive or chronic, it can cause significant problems for an individual's physical health, and increase the risk of anxiety and mood related problems.

Over two in five working Australians rated issues in the workplace as a source of stress

DATE:

/ /

SUPERVISOR/  
MANAGER:

EMPLOYEE NAMES:

### QUESTIONS TO GENERATE DISCUSSION

These are the most common caused for stress at work. Read them out then get a show of hands from staff who feel this reason for stress in the workplace/or get them to reflect to talk with manager about at a later time.

**Factors specific to the job**, such as poor physical conditions, safety issues, unrealistic deadlines, long hours, or an unmanageable workload.

**Factors specific to the individual's role** in the organisation, such as confusion about responsibilities, poor job-person fit, poor time management, difficulties in managing separate or conflicting roles within an organisation (for example, that of supervisor and colleague), or uncertainty about the future of the organisation.

**Career development issues**, such as being passed up for a promotion, or lack of job security.

**Relationship issues**, such as poor support from supervisors, conflict with co-workers, harassment, discrimination or bullying.

**Problems with organisational structure / climate**, such as low levels of perceived control over work tasks, over-supervision, lack of consultation on important issues, office politics, or budget problems, pressure to complete work tasks or check emails outside of normal work hours.

**Stress outside work**, such as a long commute to work, lack of sleep, grief/loss, separation / divorce, mental / physical illness, financial or caring parenting responsibilities.

## TIPS/TREATMENT FOR WORKPLACE STRESS

### COGNITIVE STRATEGIES

Recognising and challenging unhelpful thoughts and attitudes is a highly effective strategy for managing work stress. This strategy involves the client working with the psychologist to:

- Identify a specific situation causing stress (e.g., “I haven’t completed the project and it’s due tomorrow”)
- Note the thoughts the client has about the stressful situation (e.g. “I’m terrible at my job”)
- Develop objective alternatives to combat these thoughts (e.g., “I’ve faced deadlines like this before and everything turned out alright”)
- Review the alternative, more helpful thoughts and observe the reduction in symptoms of stress
- Develop a strategy to notice the warning signs of stress in future situations, and rehearse the process of challenging and changing negative and unhelpful self-talk

### IMPROVING TIME MANAGEMENT

When combined with the use of positive self-talk, time management techniques can have a lasting impact on work-related stress. Some skills for time management include:

- Beginning the work day by reviewing or planning for the day’s events, including breaks for resting and eating
- Keeping a ‘to-do’ list and prioritising tasks according to urgency or importance
- Minimising distractions and interruptions (for example, turning off email alerts)
- Learning to say ‘no’ to requests outside of one’s immediate work responsibilities
- Delegating responsibilities to others where appropriate.

### SEEKING COLLEAGUE SUPPORT WITHIN THE WORKPLACE

Support from others in the work environment can help individuals to feel more confident about their stress-management abilities. This support can take a number of forms:

- Instrumental support, such as adequate equipment, staff, and funding to complete the work
- Emotional support, such as a colleague or supervisor who makes time to listen, gives reassurance, or shares humour
- Informational support, such as advice or career mentoring

### PRACTISING ASSERTIVE COMMUNICATION AND PROBLEM-SOLVING APPROACHES

Problem-solving communication strategies for conflict management can buffer the effects of occupational stress. These skills support individuals to:

- Manage conflict in a positive and timely manner rather than avoiding individuals or tasks
- Stay focused on their own tasks and outcomes
- Express their needs and opinions clearly and respectfully
- Be aware of the priorities and preferences of colleagues and work towards mutually beneficial outcomes
- Accept compromise when it is feasible and appropriate to do so.

### CHANGING LIFESTYLE BEHAVIOURS

Studies have shown that the following activities are effective in reducing work-related stress:

- Relaxation techniques, such as breathing exercises, guided imagery, or progressive muscle relaxation
- Meditation; physical exercise; spending more time outdoors; quitting or reducing smoking; reducing alcohol and drug use.