

INCREASED RISK OF POOR MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING CONNECTED TO THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC

As a responsible employer, the company has a duty of care to take relevant actions to help protect the mental health and wellbeing of its employees. It has been well documented in the media that the COVID-19 crisis has had the capacity to adversely impact on the mental health of all of us who have lived through it.

Spotting signs of stress

If you are stressed you may notice changes in the way you think or feel, for example feeling negative, being indecisive, feeling isolated, feeling nervous or being unable to concentrate. You may notice that you are acting differently, for example, you may eat more or less than usual or smoke, drink or resort to substances to cope and you may have difficulty sleeping.

If you are feeling signs of stress at work it is important that you talk to somebody, for example, your manager. The company has an 'open door' policy in this respect and any of its managers or directors will listen to your concerns. By talking to us as soon as possible you give us the chance to help and stop the situation from getting worse.

Many workers are unwilling to talk about stress at work because of the stigma it has, but stress is not a weakness and can happen to anyone. If you are having difficulties with stress caused by non-work issues, there are many specific organisations that can help you.

How to deal with stress

To deal effectively with stress you need to think about your physical health, the way you react with others and your goals and priorities in life – that is what you consider to be truly important. Here are some principles that can help you deal better with stress and perhaps reduce it.

Try to live one day at a time – daily anxieties are a part of life, do not increase today's anxieties by adding tomorrow's to them. Stress can cause anxiety so try this: First recognise that stress is inevitable. Fretting over things you cannot prevent increases your stress. Also, understand that quite often things do not turn out as bad as you may fear they will.

Set reasonable standards – try to avoid setting unrealistically high standards for yourself or others. Know both your limitations and those of others. When you do this and set modest goals you encourage greater success. Keep your sense of humour, when you laugh, even when things go wrong you relieve tension and lighten your mood.

Know what stresses you – think about what stresses you and note your response. By becoming aware of your response to stress you may be able to deal with it more effectively. Look for ways to eliminate stress in your life and in the current situation. If that is unrealistic look for ways to reduce its impact by managing tasks or your own time effectively. Keep the big picture in mind, will this problem be a big issue in the near future? See the positive side of each situation and fill your own time by doing as many things as you can that you enjoy.

Try to be orderly – we all like a reasonable amount of order in our lives. Making plans and sticking to them can be calming. Identify and correct any attitudes that lead you to procrastinate.

Pursue a balanced lifestyle – leave time to balance work and chores with enjoying what you work for. Talk with others or those who can help if COVID affects your earnings. Keep technology in its place and avoid constantly checking e-mails, texts or social media.

Take care of your health – physical activity can lift your mood and improve your body's response to stress, avoid skipping meals and be sure to get enough rest. Avoid harmful solutions such as smoking, drinking or drugs, these rob you of your health and money and add to your stress. See your doctor if stress becomes overwhelming. Be kind to yourself if you feel stressed, doing otherwise can make you unhappy and alienate you from others.

Set priorities – address tasks or problems in order of priority, this will help you focus on what's important and can reveal items you can eliminate, delegate or put off. Look for ways to better use your time. The more you are in control the more you may lessen your stress. Make sure to schedule time to enjoy yourself.

Get support – talk things over with an understanding person. Talk with your line manager and remember the doors of the top management of the company are open to you at any time. Talking things over may help you see things differently or even find a solution you have overlooked. Just unburdening yourself can make you feel better. Ask for help – can we help in any way? We may be able to make changes in your work or workplace or share your workload. If a work colleague stresses you look for ways to improve the situation, for example kindly or tactfully telling the person how they make you feel or reducing the time you spend with that person.

What you can do

- How reasonable is your anxiety? Anxiety has been compared with a rocking chair in as much as it gives something to do but it doesn't get you anywhere.
- Take one day at a time – think it through - will what stresses you now still be an issue in a month or a year or five years? It makes no sense to worry about tomorrow's problems today, some of which may never become reality.
- Learn to live with what you can't change – the best you can do is prepare for situations to the extent possible but accept the fact that some situations are outside your control. You may not be able to change a situation, but you may be able to change how you view it.
- Put your situation into perspective – people who can put their anxieties into perspective are less likely to be overwhelmed by them. Focus on the big picture and not stress over details. Choose your battles and channel energy into dealing with priorities.
- Talk to someone – a parent, friend or supervisor who might be able to help you find practical solutions or suggestions to reduce your stress.

When anxiety is severe

Some people may, as a result of anxiety suffer a constant headache, lack of focus, not be able to sleep properly for days or be unable to eat or drink normally. Small problems seem like mountains.

When anxiety is prolonged or excessive it is always advisable to get a medical check-up. With treatment, you may handle things better and have control over anxiety. The company uses occupational therapy consultants to help employees cope with harmful stress.

The company risk assessment for COVID related stress in the workplace is available to view in the works communication folder in the canteen and is posted on the company website.

Please do not hesitate to speak to your manager or another responsible person within the company if you have been or are currently affected by stress or COVID related stress in the workplace.