



# Unit 9

## Supporting People with Mental Health Issues

### Learning Outcomes

**By the end of this unit the learner will be able to:**

- ✓ Understand the importance of good mental health in the workplace
- ✓ Identify the potential signs of excessive stress and take action accordingly
- ✓ Discuss the potential consequences of workplace stress and mental health issues

## Unit 9

### Supporting People with Stress and Mental Health Issues

#### The Prevalence of Mental Health Problems in the UK

- Half of all mental health problems have been established by the age of 14, rising to 75% by age 24.
- One out of every ten children aged 5 to 16 has a diagnosable problem, such as conduct disorder (6%), anxiety disorder (3%), attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) (2%), or depression (1%). (2 percent).
- Children from low-income families face three times the risk as those from higher-income families.
- Those with conduct disorder, which is defined as persistent, disobedient, disruptive, and aggressive behaviour, are twice as likely to drop out of school without a diploma, three times more likely to become a teenage parent, four times more likely to develop a drug addiction, and 20 times more likely to end up in prison.
- In 2015/16, the average wait time for routine psychological therapy appointments was 32 weeks.
- During pregnancy or the first year after childbirth, one out of every five mothers experiences depression, anxiety, or psychosis. After cardiovascular disease, suicide is the second leading cause of maternal death.
- People who suffer from severe and long-term mental illness are at risk of dying 15 to 20 years earlier than the general population.
- People with mental health problems also have limited access to physical healthcare; less than a third of people with schizophrenia in hospitals received the recommended assessment of cardiovascular risk in the previous year.
- Depression affects one out of every five older people in the community, and 40 percent of older people in nursing homes.
- People from marginalised groups, such as black, Asian, and minority ethnic (BAME) people, lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) people, disabled people, and those who have dealt with the criminal justice system, are more vulnerable.
- In England, suicide rates have steadily risen in recent years. The increase is most noticeable among middle-aged men. Suicide has overtaken car accidents as the leading cause of death among men aged 15 to 49.
- Men are three times as likely as women to commit suicide, accounting for four out of every five suicides in 2013.
- In the week leading up to their death, a quarter of people who committed suicide had contacted a health professional, usually their GP. Within a month of their deaths, the majority of them were in contact with their loved ones.

## Stress and Personal Safety in the workplace

While a little pressure is necessary for success, too much pressure can lead to unhealthy levels of stress. A little stress can provide you with the energy and motivation you need to meet work challenges, goals, and deadlines. Stress motivates you to achieve goals that provide you with feelings of fulfilment and happiness. However, excessive stress can lead to exhaustion, frustration, dissatisfaction, and even mental and physical health issues, as well as total burnout.

Unrealistic job demands and a lack of control over job tasks and situations frequently result in unhealthy levels of stress. Job insecurity, such as the fear of being laid off or increased demands for overtime, are also common sources of negative stress. Pressure at work, as well as a lack of encouragement and praise, can lead to stress, burnout, and a decrease in job satisfaction. A buildup of stressors has the potential to result in negative and unhealthy stress. Factors such as degree of responsibility, conflicting job demands, and working too much or too little, which can lead to boredom, can all cause stress. Work pace and variety, personal feelings about work's meaning, level of autonomy, or the ability to make decisions about your job and tasks are all factors that can lead to stress. Noise, light, room temperature, and air quality are all factors that can contribute to physical and emotional stress. Shift work and long work hours, both of which can cause sleep deprivation, are common stressors that contribute to burnout.

In the United Kingdom, one in every four people will experience a mental health problem at some point. While mental health issues are common, the majority are mild, short-term, and can usually be treated successfully by a doctor with medication.

Mental health is concerned with how we think, feel, and act. The most common mental health issues are anxiety and depression. They are frequently a response to a traumatic life event, such as bereavement, but they can also be triggered by work-related issues.

This guidance addresses work-related stress in general, but prolonged stress can cause physical and psychological harm, including anxiety and depression. Workplace issues can exacerbate pre-existing conditions, and workplace issues can trigger symptoms or worsen their effects.

Whether work is causing or exacerbating a health problem, employers have a legal obligation to assist their employees. Workplace mental health issues must be assessed in order to determine the level of risk to employees. Once a risk has been identified, steps must be taken to eliminate or reduce it as much as possible.

Some employees will have a pre-existing physical or mental health condition when they are hired, or they may develop one as a result of factors other than work.

Equalities legislation may impose additional legal obligations on their employers to make reasonable adjustments.

## Review of Stevenson Farmer's 'Thriving at Work'

Lord Stevenson and Paul Farmer (Chief Executive of Mind) were commissioned by the government in 2017 to conduct an independent review of the role employers can play in better supporting employees with mental health conditions in the workplace.

The 'Thriving at Work' report lays out a framework of actions, known as 'Core Standards,' that reviewers recommend employers of all sizes implement. The core standards were created to assist employers in improving the mental health of their workplaces and enabling people with mental illnesses to thrive.

Employers will meet parts of the core standards framework by taking action on work-related stress, either through the HSE Management Standards or an equivalent approach, as they will:

- be a part of a workplace mental health strategy
- encourage open dialogue and communication by raising awareness and lowering stigma
- establish a system for tracking actions and outcomes

## Workplace stress and how to Deal with it

### What exactly is Stress?

The Health and Safety Executive defines stress as "people's negative reaction to excessive pressures or other types of demand placed on them."

When employees are unable to cope with pressures and other issues, they experience stress. Employers should match employee skills and knowledge to demands. Employees, for example, may become stressed if they believe they lack the skills or time to meet tight deadlines. Providing planning, training, and support can help to relieve stress and pressure.

Stress has different effects on different people; what stresses one person may not stress another. Skills and experience, as well as age and disability, can all affect an employee's ability to cope.

Workplace design can have an impact on stress levels in six ways. You should take proper care of these. They are as follows:

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

To manage stress in the workplace, employers should assess the risks in these areas.

## Stress Symptoms

Although stress is not a disease, it can make you sick. Employers who recognise the signs of stress can take steps to prevent, reduce, and manage stress in the workplace.

It's possible that employees' behaviour has changed as a result of their stress. Managers should be on the lookout for the following signs of stress in their teams and employees. Consider whether your stress is related to your job demands.

Early intervention can lessen the effects of stress and make it easier to reduce or eliminate the causes. If a manager is concerned that an employee is exhibiting some of these symptoms, the employee should be encouraged to see their doctor. These signs could be signs of something else. Managers should take action if something is wrong at work and it is the cause of the problem.

## Signs of Stress in Teams

In a team, there may be signs of stress, such as:

- Arguments
- A higher employee turnover rate
- A rise in stress reports
- More absences due to illness
- A drop in performance
- An increase in the number of complaints and grievances

Employers must evaluate the risks of work-related stress in their workplace and take steps to protect their employees.

## Signs of Stress in an Employee

Someone's behaviour may change as a result of stress, for example, they may:

- Take more vacation time
- Be on time for work
- Become jittery or nervous

A shift in how someone thinks or feels, for example, can be a sign of stress:

- Mood changes
- Withdrawing from society
- A lack of motivation, commitment, and self-assurance
- Increased emotional reactions (tearfulness, sensitivity, or aggression)

## Managing Workplace Stress

Because workplace stresses and levels of stress vary widely, strategies for reducing or preventing stress must also be diverse. Noise control, poor lighting, and ergonomics are examples of environmental stressors that must be addressed, but it is up to you to report these stressors to your boss or management. If you feel you have too much responsibility and

not enough authority, are subject to unfair labour practises, or have an inadequate, undefined job description, talk to your boss first, then your union, other organisations, grievance or personnel offices. Request that your job description be clarified, and don't stay in a job that you despise and don't believe you'll ever change your mind about.

The old adage holds true: "Find a job you love and you'll never work another day in your life." While changing jobs may not be an option, you can talk to your boss about your concerns and ask for stress-management training; you can also use your employee assistance programme (EAP) if one is available; this will improve your ability to deal with difficult work situations. Practice the following stress-reduction techniques in your daily life to keep stress at bay:

1. Make sure you get enough sleep (make sleep a priority).
2. Create a support system with which you can share your feelings and receive validation and encouragement.
3. Stick to a regular exercise routine.
4. Consume a well-balanced and nutritious diet.
5. Caffeine and sugar consumption should be reduced or eliminated.
6. Don't self-medicate with alcohol or drugs.
7. Schedule some "Me" time each day.

### **Beyond Stress**

Burnout is a state of extreme emotional and physical exhaustion brought on by long periods of high stress. It can happen when you're feeling overwhelmed and unable to meet constant demands. As the stressors increase, a person's interest and motivation to pursue their job or take on their current role will wane. Burnout drastically reduces productivity, causes fatigue and apathy, and makes you feel powerless, hopeless, cynical, and resentful.

Burnout can put your job, your health, and your relationships in jeopardy. You're usually aware when you're under a lot of stress, but you might not notice burnout until it's too late. Excessive stress is at the root of burnout, and it's a gradual process, so learn to recognise and address symptoms early on. Among the signs and symptoms of burnout are:

- Feelings of helplessness and frustration
- Hopelessness
- Feeling emotionally depleted
- Isolation, withdrawal, and detachment (both at work and at home)
- Feeling suffocated
- Feelings of inadequacy
- Irritability
- Sadness
- Cynicism

However, the best way to avoid job burnout is to change your work environment, whether that means changing careers or jobs. If neither of these options are available to you, you can still take steps to recover from burnout, such as speaking with your boss about clarifying your job description. You could be unreasonably overworked or doing work you didn't sign up for and aren't being compensated for. Request a transfer to a different department or new or more varied responsibilities.

### **How can Mental Illness And Work-Related Stress Coexist?**

Workplace stress and mental health issues frequently occur together, with symptoms that are very similar.

Workplace stress can exacerbate a mental health issue, making it more difficult to manage. When work-related stress becomes so severe that it triggers an existing mental health problem, it's difficult to tell one from the other.

Common mental health issues and stress can coexist – people can have work-related stress and physical changes like high blood pressure without also having anxiety, depression, or other mental health issues. They can have anxiety and depression even if they aren't stressed. Their cause(s) and treatment(s) are the most significant differences between them.

Stress is a response to events or experiences in one's personal or professional life, or a combination of the two. Bereavement, divorce, postnatal depression, a medical condition, or a family history of the problem are all examples of common mental health problems that can have a single cause outside of work. However, these issues can arise for a variety of reasons. By improving work conditions, you can help manage and prevent stress as an employer. However, you have a role to play in making adjustments and assisting someone with a mental health issue at work.

### **Mental Health, Stress and the HSE's Management Standards**

Despite the fact that stress can cause physical and mental health problems and exacerbate existing ones, the good news is that it can be managed. You can prevent people from becoming ill and those who already have a condition from losing control of their illness by taking steps to remove or reduce stressors.

The HSE's Management Standards approach to addressing work-related stress establishes a framework to assist employers in addressing work-related stress and, as a result, reducing the incidence and negative consequences of mental ill health.

Employers can use the Management Standards approach to put in place processes for properly managing work-related stress. By addressing six key aspects of work design, you can reduce stress, manage potential stressors, and limit the negative impact that your work may have on your employees.

## **Advice for Employees with Mental Health Conditions**

It's difficult to tell when 'stress' starts to affect your condition, making it worse or triggering an episode if you're already feeling stressed. Many of the symptoms of stress and mental illness are the same. The severity and duration of the symptoms, as well as their impact on your daily life, are the main differences.

The majority of people with mental health issues are diagnosed and treated by their primary care physician, and they continue to work productively. In fact, research shows that staying at work can be extremely beneficial to those who are afflicted.

### **Take Action as soon as Possible.**

If you believe you have a problem, the sooner you address it, the better – it may prevent you from becoming more ill. It's best to be cooperative if your line manager approaches you with concerns because line managers and colleagues can play an important role in identifying when colleagues are acting out of character.

### **Help your Manager to Identify Problems and Needs**

It's possible that specific tasks, work environments, times of day, or being a member of a specific team are linked to your problems. If you believe you have a mental health problem, you should discuss it with your boss, HR department, or someone else at work. Scheduled meetings, appraisals, or informal discussions about progress with your manager can provide opportunities for you and your manager to discuss any issues you may be experiencing.

### **Remember**

- Not everyone is affected by stress and mental health issues in the same way.
- Your employer may be able to make changes to help you, but only if you provide them with a better understanding of your situation.
- Conversations can be constructive – you can figure out how your boss can assist you.

### **If you've been out of Work due to Illness**

The majority of people who have been sick will recover and return to work. However, if you have taken time off due to illness, you should speak with your manager and come up with a plan for your return to work before returning.

Before you are completely ready for 'business as usual,' you may reach a point in your recovery where you can return to work. This could indicate that you require assistance or changes in your role or work to make your return more manageable. You should speak with your boss about your requirements and work together to meet them. When you've reached the 'business as usual' stage, a written plan can help you both agree.

If you're still sick despite all of your efforts, you should seek medical help. Request a referral to your company's occupational health department, if one exists, or see your primary care physician. It's possible that the Equality Act of 2010 applies to your situation, requiring your employer to make reasonable accommodations to help you return to work. However, if you don't discuss these concerns openly with your manager, he or she will be unable to assist you.

### **Advice for Managers on Mental Ill Health Conditions**

#### **Talking at an Early Stage**

As a manager, you may encounter employees who are dealing with mental health issues. Talk to an employee as soon as you notice that they are having problems; early intervention can help them avoid becoming more ill.

If the person refuses to speak with you, suggest that they speak with someone else, such as a member of your employee assistance programme, your occupational health team, or their own GP.

Instead of focusing on understanding the diagnosis, managers should focus on making reasonable adjustments at work. Their primary care physician, medical support, or occupational health should be able to advise you on what you can do to assist them.

If an employee is absent due to illness, their manager's lack of communication or involvement may cause them to feel isolated, forgotten, or unable to return. You can lower the chances of them not returning to work by doing the following:

- keeping them up to date on current events, including social gatherings
- assuring them from the beginning and throughout their absence

To identify and address problems or needs, use routine management tools.

To learn more about any problems an employee may be having, use scheduled work meetings, appraisals, or informal progress conversations. Meetings could include a health and safety agenda item. This can be used for stress or mental health issues, as well as things like display screen equipment assessments.

If you have specific concerns about someone's health, bring them up as soon as possible. Ask open-ended, exploratory, and nonjudgmental questions. People are affected differently by these conditions, so making adjustments to their job may help to alleviate symptoms. While investigating the issues and determining how you can assist, you should be upbeat and supportive.

If someone has been absent due to illness, you should talk to them about their return to work and reintegration into the workplace ahead of time. A written plan can be beneficial. When

they've reached the point of 'business as usual,' you should both agree. You can now review their performance, needs, and work plan using existing management processes.

### **Supporting an Employee Who is Tearful and Upset**

If an employee becomes upset, talk to them, reassure them, and assure them that you will provide all possible assistance and support. Explain that things will move at their own pace. If you're in a meeting with them, see if they'd like to bring someone else.

Try to be aware of the person's ability to process information. They may not be able to think clearly or absorb complex information in the midst of a crisis. Try to maintain your composure. Problems can accumulate over time, and while you may feel pressed to act, it may be better to take your time and carefully consider your options. Determine which issues are the most pressing with the person.

If the session isn't helping the person or you, reschedule it for a time when they're not as upset. If the problem persists, you should encourage them to seek assistance, such as from occupational health or their primary care physician.

More severe anxiety or depression will affect a much smaller percentage of people. These can be linked to 'mania' episodes, which can include:

- High-intensity, high-intensity activity
- Psychosis
- Disconnection from reality
- Hallucinations
- A sense of disorientation

In these rare cases, an employee may act in a way that affects coworkers or clients, and you must remember your responsibilities to all employees.

Take the person to a quiet location and speak calmly to them. Suggest that you call a friend or relative, or that they go home and call their GP or a mental health professional, if necessary. If they want you to, you may be able to make an appointment and accompany them to the surgery.

If you're talking to someone who's having hallucinations or mania, they might not understand what you're saying. They will require immediate medical assistance in this case. If an employee is causing a disturbance and refuses to accept assistance, seek advice from:

If an employee is causing a disturbance and refuses to accept assistance, seek advice from:

- Your workplace health care provider
- The person's primary care physician
- The National Health Service (NHS) – dial 111.

Alternatively, call an ambulance.

### **Taking care of someone who has a Chronic Illness**

The majority of people who have long-term mental health issues are still able to work successfully. When someone requires assistance, however, managers can work with them to ensure that they have the flexibility they require to meet their health needs.

Unless they ask for help or show clear signs that they need it, people with mental health issues should be treated the same as any other member of staff. Making assumptions about people's abilities, promote ability, or the amount of sick leave they may require due to their illness is discriminatory.

### **Coping Strategies**

As part of their treatment, most people are encouraged to develop a coping strategy. This often entails recognising warning signs of a relapse and taking preventative measures, such as reducing work hours, avoiding alcohol, exercising, and finding time to relax. At this early stage of the warning, it's critical that you support the employee. Small, low-cost changes could help you avoid a more expensive illness.

### **Advance Statements**

Some people find it helpful to write an "advance statement" outlining how they want to be treated if they become ill. The statement can include practical details such as contact information for people who need to be contacted or given information.

It may be beneficial to prepare an advance statement that is relevant to the workplace. It could consist of the following:

- Warning signs that the person is becoming ill
- Who should be contacted (perhaps a close relative, care coordinator or GP)
- What kind of assistance is beneficial and what is not

If an employee draughts a contract with you, you should follow through on the agreement to maintain trust.

### **Further Reading:**

- ✓ Essential Oils to Boost the Brain and Heal the Body: 5 Steps to Calm Anxiety, Sleep Better, and Reduce Inflammation to Regain Control of Your Health Hardcover – March 16, 2021 by Jodi Cohen , Terry Wahls M.D.
- ✓ Beneath the Surface: A Teen's Guide to Reaching Out When You or Your Friend Is in Crisis Paperback – September 10, 2019 by Kristi Hugstad , Nancy Guerra