

THE Advisor

Lead the Way on Workplace Stress



In this Issue:

Lead the Way on
Workplace Stress

Addressing
Workplace Stress

Management
Consultation



When workplace stress becomes unhealthy, it can impact employee wellbeing and the organization's productivity.

Contrary to popular opinion, stress is not always bad. The sense of urgency resulting from needing to perform a task or address a conflict may be a catalyst for positive change. Stress may also be a motivational factor in prioritizing, managing deadlines, and solving difficult problems.

So why does stress have such a bad reputation, particularly in the workplace? Often it is because people are coping with one or more of these factors:

- An unsafe or unhealthy physical environment

- Inconsistent or conflicting direction from management, especially related to priorities
- Too much work and too little time
- Lopsided work-life balance
- Emotional distress related to harassment, verbal abuse, intimidation, or deliberate humiliation
- Uncertainty about the stability of the workplace or a change on the horizon

A steady diet of workplace stress, especially when it is the result of uncertainty or negativity, may have an impact on both individual employees and the workplace as a whole. Persistent workplace stress may:

- Contribute to the development of or exacerbate preexisting mental health conditions, including depression and anxiety
- Create a “pressure cooker” effect that contributes to unhealthy coping behaviors, increased conflict, and decreased employee satisfaction
- Result in an employee deciding to look for a new job or make a plan to change jobs as soon as their personal circumstances allow

THE Advisor



Managers are in a unique position to recognize workplace stress and address its impact.

An overall strategy comprised of maintaining a respectful workplace and prioritizing wellbeing will help protect both your team and the organization from the corrosive effects of stress. Key components of this strategy include:

- **Self-manage.** Employees who feel that you will “blame the messenger” may react by avoiding you or withholding key information. Remember that stress management in the workplace starts with you.
- **Lead by example.** If you work a lot of extra hours or engage in unhealthy behaviors, your team may feel obligated or even empowered to do the same. Model the behavior you want your team to emulate.

- **Listen.** Talk to your employees about their workplace experiences. Ask what they like about their jobs, what they find stressful, and what they recommend for improving morale.
- **Learn about common causes of workplace stress.** The LifeMatters Management Consultation Service can recommend helpful resources.
- **Encourage growth.** Feeling “stuck” is a common source of workplace stress. Create opportunities for employees to cultivate new skills and grow in their careers.

LifeMatters is available 24/7/365 to help you lead your team through a stressful time or cope with personal stress. Please call.



The LifeMatters Management Consultation Service is available to assist with any management concern. Call 24/7/365.

How Do I Say That? Addressing Workplace Stress

Are you noticing increased conflict, poor decision making, or uncertainty about how to solve problems within your team? While it is possible these behaviors will decrease once that big project is done or that new hire is in place, it's best to take action now. These steps may help you to address workplace stress or mitigate its impact:

1. Determine the source of the stress.

Sometimes, a specific issue or event is responsible for increased stress. In other situations, it may be a confluence of factors. Talk to your team or individual employees to determine the cause.

2. Consult with Human Resources.

Once you have concrete information about why your team is struggling, talk to HR about possible solutions. The LifeMatters Management Consultation Service can offer suggestions as well.

3. Schedule a team meeting.

Review the challenges your team faces and brainstorm solutions. Thinking outside the box (with a dash of humor) may be just what your team needs to break the tension and focus on problem solving.

Sample language: "Let's look at these challenges from a different angle. No idea is too off the wall."



The LifeMatters Management Consultation Service can suggest options for addressing workplace stress and its impact on your team.

4. Make a plan.

Implement suggestions that will improve communication and decrease stress. If an idea will need more time and resources, make it a long-term goal.

5. Address performance issues.

Schedule a private meeting to discuss concerns with any employees who may be having difficulty maintaining performance standards.

Sample language: "I've noticed (state behavior). This behavior is having an impact on our team's ability to function effectively. In the future, I would like to see you (outline performance expectations)."



LifeMatters offers 24/7/365 assistance with management concerns. We're here to help.

6. **Refer to LifeMatters.** LifeMatters can assist employees with personal and workplace stress. If performance issues are a concern, consider making a performance referral.

Sample language: “LifeMatters can help you get back on track. I hope you’ll call.”

7. **Follow up.** Check in with your team as a whole, as well as any individual employees who may be struggling. Outline performance improvements, provide feedback, and consult with HR as needed.

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Whenever you need it, as often as you need it. Reasons to call:

- Confronting an employee about performance issues
- An employee’s personal problem
- Suspected drug or alcohol use on the job
- Interpersonal conflicts between team members
- Establishing expectations for performance
- Addressing crisis situations, such as a violent incident, the death of an employee, or a natural disaster
- Your own personal concerns
- Any other work-related issue

LifeMatters®

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