

# Talks **ZONE**

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TZ5013

## Coping with workplace stress

**J**ob-related stress is very common, some of it good and some bad. It can motivate or it can interfere with productivity and damage a person's physical and emotional health.

You can't control everything in your work environment, but that doesn't mean you're powerless—even when stuck in a difficult situation. Often, the best way to cope with negative stress is to find a way to change the circumstances — the 'triggers' — that are causing it. Common causes of negative workplace stress include rising performance expectations, difficult workloads, bullying by co-workers or superiors, fear of layoff and personal problems.

It's also important to recognize the typical signs and symptoms of workplace stress, bearing in mind that they can have other possible causes:

- Feeling anxious, irritable, or depressed.
- Apathy, loss of interest in work.
- Problems sleeping.
- Fatigue.
- Trouble concentrating.
- Muscle tension or headaches.
- Stomach problems.
- Social withdrawal.
- Loss of sex drive.
- Using alcohol or drugs to cope.

When you consider the trigger factor, look first at your work habits and attitude. Analyze your responsibilities and daily tasks. Are you scheduling things back-to-back or trying to fit too much into one day? Perhaps you can drop tasks that aren't truly necessary to the bottom of the list or eliminate them entirely. If possible, work with colleagues and superiors to set realistic expectations and deadlines.

Trusted co-workers or friends might be able to provide insights or offer suggestions for coping with the issues you're facing at work. Sometimes simply talking about a



stressor can be a relief, especially if you're talking to someone with a positive attitude.

Other task management strategies include breaking projects into smaller steps, delegating responsibility to others who could help ease the load and tackling the most difficult or unpleasant tasks as early in the day as possible.

If you're always running late, set your clocks and watches fast and give yourself extra time. If your desk is a mess, file and throw away the clutter. Just knowing where everything is saves time and cuts stress.

Lifestyle adjustments also can help. Here are some suggestions:

- Make the most of workday breaks and take time off when you can, whether it's a two-week vacation or an occasional long weekend.
- Be vigilant about taking care of your health. Include physical activity in your daily routine, get plenty of sleep and eat a healthy diet.
- Learn relaxation techniques, including how to breathe deeply through the nose.
- Engage in enjoyable activities when you're not working. Hobbies help maintain a balance between work and play.

• Listen to enjoyable music while you work or during breaks. It also helps to listen to something soothing on the way to and from work.

• Drink alcohol in moderation and avoid excessive use of stimulants such as caffeine, which can add to stress levels.

The behavior of others can be among the most difficult stressors. Bullying and other forms of harassment are considered in many jurisdictions to be workplace

violence, and as such are illegal. However, dealing with it can be problematic. There should be a policy in place that outlines clear expectations and consequences for employee conduct. It must also apply to managers and supervisors, who in turn must have the training and skills required to deal with issues immediately as they arise.

Resolving conflict in healthy, constructive ways can strengthen trust between people and relieve workplace stress and tension.

When handling emotionally-charged situations, stay focused in the present by disregarding old hurts and resentments. If a conflict can't be resolved, choose to end the argument, even if you still disagree.

Emotions can be contagious and stress often has an impact on the quality of a person's interactions with others. The better you are at managing stress, the more you will affect those around you positively, and the less their stress will affect you negatively.

If your efforts fail to reduce job stress or feelings of burnout, it may be necessary to seek professional help, either on your own or through an Employee Assistance Program offered by your employer.

## The Quiz

These questions are meant to help you remember what was discussed today — not to test your patience or challenge your intelligence. The answers are at the bottom of the page. Cover them up, and complete the quiz as quickly as you can.

1. Not all workplace stress is bad.  
TRUE \_\_\_\_ FALSE \_\_\_\_
2. Can personal problems contribute to stress on the job?  
YES \_\_\_\_ NO \_\_\_\_
3. Which of these are among the signs of workplace stress:
  - A. Feeling anxious, irritable or depressed.
  - B. High fever.
  - C. Trouble concentrating.
  - D. Stomach problems.
  - E. All of the above.
4. Adjusting work schedules is one way of dealing with stress on the job.  
TRUE \_\_\_\_ FALSE \_\_\_\_
5. Which of these are task management strategies that can help ease stress:
  - A. Break projects into smaller steps.
  - B. Delegate portions of a project to someone else.
  - C. Keep your work area as tidy as possible.
  - D. All of th above.
6. Regular physical activity, adequate sleep and a healthy diet can all help reduce stress.  
TRUE \_\_\_\_ FALSE \_\_\_\_
7. Which of these can reduce or eliminate stress caused by harassment in the workplace :
  - A. A call to the police.
  - B. Physical retaliation.
  - C. A code of conduct that is enforced properly by managers and supervisors.
  - D. Criminal charges.
8. Does your workplace have an Employee Assistance Program that can provide counseling to those who may be experiencing job-related stress?  
YES \_\_\_\_ NO \_\_\_\_ DON'T KNOW \_\_\_\_

ANSWERS: 1. True, 2. Yes, 3. A., C., and D., 4. True, 5. D., 6. True, 7. C., 8. Your answer

## Hold These Thoughts

Dysfunctional and inefficient management can be a major contributor to stress in an organization. On the other hand, there are numerous things managers and supervisors can do to reduce workplace stress.

It starts with good communication, sharing information with employees to ease uncertainty about their jobs and futures, and clearly defining their roles, responsibilities and performance expectations.

Here are some more stress-busting suggestions:

- Give workers opportunities to participate in decisions that affect their jobs.
- Consult employees about scheduling and work rules.
- Be sure the workload is suitable to employees' abilities and resources; avoid unrealistic deadlines.
- Show that individual workers are valued.
- Offer rewards and incentives.
- Praise good work performance, both verbally and officially, through schemes such as Employee of the Month.
- Provide opportunities for career development.
- Promote an 'entrepreneurial' work climate that gives employees more control over their work.
- Provide opportunities for social interaction among employees.
- Establish a zero-tolerance policy for harassment.
- Make management actions consistent with the organization's stated values.

## For the Record

Date of Meeting: \_\_\_\_\_

Topic: \_\_\_\_\_

Location: \_\_\_\_\_

Department: \_\_\_\_\_

Start Time: \_\_\_\_\_ Finish Time: \_\_\_\_\_

Meeting Leader: \_\_\_\_\_

In Attendance:


## Tips for Safety Meeting Leaders

**Vary the format.** Invite outside experts when possible. Vendors are often happy to come in and talk about safe use of their equipment. Some organizations rotate leadership responsibility for the meeting. A roundtable discussion of safety case studies can be energizing. Breaking a large group down into sub-groups of three or four to brainstorm safety recommendations can generate a higher level of energy and involvement. In a group of 20, usually only a few actively participate; in a group of four, all usually participate.

**Follow up** issues identified in the meeting. A common complaint of ineffective safety meetings is “We bring stuff up but nothing gets done about it.” Don’t

spend every safety meeting rehashing the same hazards and poor practices.

**Keep it consistent.** Safety is day-long and year-round. Resist the temptation to avoid holding safety meetings or training sessions during your organization's busiest periods. Consistency is an important factor in the effectiveness of safety talks. Schedule meetings for about the same time each week, two weeks, or month, whichever best suits the degree of hazards.

By choosing a consistent day and time, employees will know when to expect the meetings and will view them as a normal and valuable part of their job.

**Note:** *TalksZone* safety meetings are not intended to take the place of your own safety procedures. Always consult and/or review your procedures before attempting any work.