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1A Recognise sources of stress in your own job role

The behaviour of people requiring support (clients) and workplace situations can be major sources of stress for workers. On a daily basis, a support worker may deal with people who are emotional, aggressive or noncompliant, or the worker could be managing a heavy workload and feel like they have no support. Other circumstances may be that the worker is providing palliative care support or that they are faced with the sudden loss of a person they had been supporting.



The way a person reacts to a situation will differ from person to person. Some people are calm, cool-headed and do not react to stressful situations in a visible way. However, they may store up their stress and display it in different ways or at a later time. Other people may have difficulty managing their reactions to a stressful situation and feel angry, upset or frustrated. They may exhibit this behaviour by becoming impatient with the people they are supporting, being abrupt or rude to the person and co-workers, or becoming upset.

Recognise stress

In its simplest form, stress is the pressure or tension exerted on a person. Some stress is useful and makes us feel motivated and alive. This type of stress can help us by providing a drive to succeed at the work we do and the support we provide. Other stress can worry us and undermine our ability to cope both physically and mentally. It can drain us, cause illness, absenteeism, accidents, industrial disputes and staff turnover.

What may be a good stress for one person may be a threatening stimulus to another; what one person finds stressful, another may not. Whether or not you react with a stress response and whether the reaction to the stress is useful or draining will depend upon your awareness of how stress is impacting your life and your ability to identify strategies to cope with the stress.



It is important to remember that all stress, even the useful type, is only meant to be a short, time-limited response. Experiencing stress for long periods of time can have serious health consequences.

Sources of stress

While working in the health and community sector, you may be faced with complex client behaviour. This behaviour may vary in people with different forms of dementia, mental illness or cognitive deficiency. In many of the settings where people receive support, there are a number of people with the same behavioural issues all in the one place. Their demands can be constant.

It can be upsetting to see people who are distressed or angry, and it can be frightening to be with someone who is angry or aggressive, even violent. It can be frustrating

Complex noncompliant behaviour

- ▶ Noncompliant behaviour refers to serious and continual refusal to comply with requests or expected behaviours.
- ▶ A person who is noncompliant may continually refuse to obey instructions such as to take medication or attend appointments. It can be extremely frustrating for the support worker and can put the person's health, wellbeing and life at risk.
- ▶ The complex behaviours described above are not necessarily independent of each other. People may often display one or more types of complex behaviour at the same time, further increasing the stress of the support person.

Stress caused by grief and loss

A palliative care environment is one in which there may be much suffering, pain, distress, anger and grief. The person may suffer pain and before their death, when their family members and friends place their own demands on the worker. This can be upsetting for workers who have come to know the person and have provided support over a significant period of time. This would also apply to workers who may support a person at risk of suicide or self-harm.

Dealing with ethical issues such as ending a person's life by taking them off a life support system or not providing further treatment is very emotional. In the same way, a person taking their own life while under your care is also very stressful. For these reasons and more, workers must be trained to cope with death and bereavement.

Stressful working conditions and incidents

A lack of resources, support and training can cause stressful working conditions. Support workers may be required to work in adverse conditions; for example, in private homes that may be cramped or not properly cleaned. They may be required to work alone or with limited facilities and may need to deal with people other than just the person they support.

In your work you will probably have a set number of tasks to achieve in a certain amount of time. If you work in people's homes, you may only have an hour to complete your work, before you need to move to the next person you are supporting. If you work in a residential facility, you may have a list of support tasks that must be completed for a number of residents before a certain time of day.

As discussed earlier, people with complex behaviours can have difficulty understanding simple instructions or concepts; they may be argumentative or refuse your support. All these things can slow you down and may cause stress, especially if your supervisor expects you to complete work to a fixed timetable.

Additionally, extraordinary incidents can cause stress as the support worker may not be experienced enough or trained to deal with them. These incidents are those that happen unexpectedly and/or rarely. In most workplaces, extraordinary incidents will be followed with a debriefing. You will learn more about debriefing later in this unit.



Recognise responses to stress

Many people experience the symptoms of work-related stress at some stage in their working lives. You should never ignore the signs of stress. It is important to learn to recognise your reactions and responses to stress and understand what has caused that stress.

Here are some examples of questions to ask yourself when reflecting on triggers to stress at work.

Things to consider about triggers for stress:

- ▶ Think about how you are feeling, and how you are interacting with others.
- ▶ Are you less open with people? Do you feel you don't have the time or 'headspace' to deal with people?
- ▶ Look at the way you are interacting with the people you support. Are you running out of patience and getting angry?
- ▶ Consider your health. Are you unusually unwell or tired? Do you often get headaches?

Responses to stress

A worker can learn to manage stress by firstly being aware of the causes, triggers, symptoms and their effects, as listed below.

Causes

- ▶ Excessive or demanding workload
- ▶ Insufficient organisational support or resourcing
- ▶ Client behaviour
- ▶ Conflict with co-workers or management
- ▶ Constant change
- ▶ Job insecurity
- ▶ Harassment, bullying or discrimination
- ▶ Inadequate job training

Symptoms

- ▶ Anxiety or feelings of being unable to cope
- ▶ Decrease in work performance
- ▶ Depression
- ▶ Absenteeism
- ▶ Sleeping difficulties, such as insomnia
- ▶ Cognitive difficulties, such as a reduced ability to concentrate or make decisions
- ▶ Fatigue
- ▶ Increased aggression

1C Identify strategies to effectively prevent, reduce and manage stress

Once you have identified that you are experiencing stress, it is important to manage your stress. Unmanaged, prolonged stress can cause serious physical and mental health issues. There are many ways to manage stress, and everyone does so in different ways. It is important that you find the strategy that works best for you.



Stress management strategies

There are three steps to managing stress:

- ▶ Prevent the stress – can the stressor be removed to prevent the stress?
- ▶ Reduce the stress – can the situation be changed to reduce the stress response?
- ▶ Manage the stress – if the situation can't be changed then you need to manage the stress.

Naturally prevention is the best solution; however, as we have learnt, many job roles and workplaces are inherently stressful. This is where strategies to build resilience to stress and

Strategies to prevent stress

Being proactive about preventing stress is up to the individual.

Here are some techniques or activities you can use to prevent stress.

Get plenty of rest and take breaks

You cannot function properly at work or deal with issues that are causing you stress if you are tired. It is important to make sure you get enough sleep and take your allocated breaks when at work. A rested mind and body will cope better with stressful situations.

Eat properly

Eating a well-balanced diet keeps you healthy as it provides you with the energy you need. Being well and having energy will help you deal with stress. Make sure you take your meal and tea breaks when working. Have a healthy snack or meal at these times to maintain your energy levels.

Limit alcohol intake

Alcohol is a known depressive and although some people like to have a drink at the end of the day (ironically, to deal with their stress or relax) too much alcohol can heighten anxiety. Additionally, going to work with a hangover can cause you to be tired, agitated and grumpy, and make you more susceptible to stress.

Strategies to manage stress

In some cases, the situation that is causing you stress cannot be changed. It may be necessary for you to remain in a stressful situation in order to fulfil your work role. If you are unable to reduce stressors or decrease the stress you are experiencing, it is important to find some way to reduce the negative effect the stress has on you. Some techniques for this include: meditation, yoga, exercise, self-talk and relaxation training. Other strategies can include undertaking professional development so you have more information about the situation.

It is important to ask for help when you are unable to control stressors or manage your stress alone. You can ask your supervisor for help to manage stress and stressful situations.

Example

Identify strategies to effectively prevent, reduce and manage stress

Eric works in a community services environment and is a hardworking and supportive member of his team. Lately there have been a lot of people on Eric's team who have been off sick. Some days, Eric finds himself feeling like he is the only one still working and as though he is doing the job of three people.

Yesterday Eric had so much work to do that he did not know how he could possibly get it all done. To make it worse he had to provide care to a lady with memory loss who took forever to do even the simplest things. By lunchtime Eric was so far behind that he felt overwhelmed. Unfortunately, at the same time, a fellow support worker named Carla asked Eric if he could show her how to do something. It felt like the last straw for Eric and he yelled 'Am I the only person on this team with a brain? Can't anyone else do anything for themselves around here?'

Carla burst into tears and said not to worry and that she would work it out herself.

Later that afternoon, Eric felt terrible about his behaviour and spoke to his supervisor Elliot about what had happened, and how he was feeling. Eric told Elliot that he had not been sleeping very well and noticed that he was always worrying about work and no longer had the energy to spend time on the things he enjoyed. Elliot arranged for Eric to have a mentor at work to help him find ways to cope with stress. He also recommended that Eric spend more time on things he enjoyed doing, as well as getting enough rest and eating a well-balanced diet.

Eric has noticed that since implementing these self-care strategies he feels calm and in control at work even though the work environment has not changed.



stress and other aspects of their lives. This can include amenities such as provision of bright and spacious tea rooms with tea, coffee and healthy snacks, or quiet rooms for relaxing during breaks.

Some organisations also provide health and wellness programs that include benefits such as financial planning sessions, workplace massage, walking groups, exercise classes and discount gym memberships.

Debriefing sessions

After an extraordinary incident or particularly stressful event, a workplace may hold a formal or informal debriefing session.

Formal opportunities may include meetings with a social worker and/or regular team meetings.

Here is some more information about debriefing.

Formal debriefing

- ▶ Formal debriefing provides the support worker with a safe and supportive environment in which to share their feelings and emotions in relation to a specific incident. Specific debriefing meetings may be scheduled, or debriefing may occur at team meetings to allow staff to express emotions and concerns on an ongoing basis in an atmosphere that is supportive of the team member. Everyone is then permitted to talk about other difficult or stressful incidents involving people in their care. Finally a discussion of how to manage a similar incident may occur.

Informal debriefing

- ▶ Informal debriefing occurs on a more ad hoc basis outside a scheduled debriefing time. It may occur after an event when talking with co-workers or supervisors at the end of a shift, or even in the lunchroom.

Timely debriefing

- ▶ Timely debriefing can assist in stabilising a workplace and ensuring that anyone requiring specific support receives the assistance they need. Organisations may also provide one-on-one support by arranging professional counselling for colleagues through an Employee Assistance Program where workers have access to independent and confidential counselling and support to work through issues that are causing them stress at work.

External support options

There are many options for managing stress outside the workplace. The actual providers will vary per location but come under the following categories:

Categories of external support options include:

- ▶ general practitioners (who are the first point of contact for referral to a psychologist or other professional, and may also be able to provide information about other suitable programs)
- ▶ community health centres
- ▶ psychologists and counselling
- ▶ relaxation classes including yoga, guided meditation, laughing groups.

1E Develop a personal stress management plan that responds to identified stressors and triggers

There can be many sources of stress in the workplace and everyone reacts to stress in different ways. By recognising the sources of stress and our own reactions, we can develop strategies to help us prevent, reduce and manage the effects of stress.

Documenting a stress management plan is a practical tool to help manage stress. It is important, when developing a plan, that it is suitable and appropriate for our own circumstances, and that it is practical, effective and suits the person's lifestyle and financial situation.



Create a stress journal

A stress management plan is a document where the sources of stress and ways to manage stress are documented. It could be seen as a work in progress because strategies are added or deleted as required and when new strategies are created and others didn't work as well. By reviewing your journal you have useful information that you can refer to when developing your plan.

When creating a plan, consider what you are trying to achieve. For example, if you are aiming to prevent, reduce or manage stress. You may be doing all three, in which case, there will be several sections to your plan.

Before developing a stress management plan, it can be useful to start a stress journal or diary where each time you experience stress you write down the following:

Items for the stress journal or diary:

- ▶ The date and time of the occurrence
- ▶ The situation (what caused or was the source of the stress)
- ▶ How you felt emotionally (e.g. frightened, overwhelmed, nervous, angry)
- ▶ How you reacted physically (e.g. you raised your voice, vomited, punched a wall)
- ▶ What you did to manage your reaction (e.g. kept working, smoked a cigarette)
- ▶ What you will do next time (e.g. go for a walk, deep breathing, have a cup of tea)



Topic 2

In this topic you will learn how to:

- 2A Use strategies from your stress management plan that address personal triggers and stressors**

- 2B Organise your own workload to minimise stress, and inform relevant personnel of any variations and difficulties**

- 2C Identify and adopt strategies to balance work-life priorities**

Implement stress management strategies

Once strategies to manage stress have been identified, they need to be implemented and trialled. Stress management strategies are varied and the person has a large range of options from which to choose, and should use those that are suitable and appropriate for them. A personal stress management plan needs to consider the particular and personal triggers and stressors that occur at work or remind the person about the stress at work.

There are many specific options that allow for organising a person's workload to make it more efficient and therefore less stressful. With adequate planning and prioritisation of work tasks and time management, stress can be reduced and the person can feel more in control of their workload.

Stress felt at work inevitably runs over into stress at home, and may affect family and personal relationships. Work towards improving the work-life balance by incorporating self-care techniques and strategies as a way of life. These strategies may also allow for the development of resilience skills to better deal with stressful situations and reactions to stressful circumstances as they occur in the workplace.

Stress management strategies

- ▶ Stress management strategies are those you use after you have finished work to help you de-stress and relax. They include massage, yoga, meditation and taking holidays.

Strategies to prevent stress

Two of the most basic things everyone can do to prevent stress are eating well and getting enough sleep. Keeping physically healthy will in turn affect other aspects of a person's health including their mental and social health.

Eating well

Eating well is about more than putting healthy food in your mouth. You need to ensure you have healthy food available.

Strategies may include getting up 10 minutes earlier to have a proper breakfast, or making your lunch the night before work rather than buying something from the local café. You may also need to schedule a regular trip to the supermarket to make sure you have nutritious ingredients on hand. Consider menu planning for the week ahead if there will be any late shifts or a busy week has been scheduled.

Getting enough sleep

The amount of sleep a person needs varies, but the average person needs 8 hours per night to function well. Sleep does not always come easily, especially when a person is stressed. Strategies for a good night's sleep include to not eat for at least two hours before going to bed; to go to bed at the same time each night and have your alarm set at the same time each morning; to turn off computers and electronic devices half an hour before you go to bed; and to do some exercise or read a book to relax before you go to sleep.

Strategies to reduce stress

When at work, it is difficult to just stop and have a massage because you are feeling stressed. Similarly, taking a yoga class is a great stress reliever but not practical in the middle of your shift. Both are excellent strategies for managing stress but they are not practical strategies to use while at work.

The following are some strategies you can use at work to reduce stress.

Have a laugh

Take a moment and look at a funny picture on your phone or a video on YouTube. Humour distracts you from feeling stressed and can defuse these feelings.

Time out

Time out involves removing yourself from the situation for a few minutes; for example, going for a brisk five-minute walk, preferably outside. Removing yourself from the stressful environment gives you time to refocus. While you are walking, look around you and try to take note of your surroundings to focus your attention elsewhere.

Exercise

The benefits of exercise on stress are well known, but the trick is finding out what type of exercise works for you. Some people like to go for a run, or hit a ball around a squash court, while others prefer a walk, a swim or a yoga class.

Meditation and mindfulness

Meditation involves focused breathing, and mindfulness involves clearing our thoughts and focusing in the moment, not dwelling on the past or future. Meditation can be done alone or in a guided group session.

Mindfulness involves focusing one's awareness on the present moment, while calmly acknowledging and accepting one's feelings, thoughts and bodily sensations. It is an effective therapeutic technique and the skills can be learnt with practice.

Counselling

Counselling is a more formal way of managing stress and may be available through your workplace Employee Assistance Program or independently. Having a regular session with a professional counsellor or a mentor provides the opportunity to talk, debrief and discuss strategies.

Example

Use strategies from your personal stress management plan that address triggers and stressors

Marla lives alone and works full time on day shift at a residential facility. Her job, which involves caring for people with high needs, can be very stressful. By the time she gets home at night, she is too exhausted to cook so she usually orders a meal from the local takeaway shop and watches something on TV until she goes to bed.

Sanja, Marla's supervisor notices that recently Marla is always tired and that her patience is starting to wear out. She has an informal chat with Marla who agrees she is always exhausted and feeling worn out. Sanja makes an appointment for Marla to see a counsellor through their workplace Employee Assistance Program.

With the help of the counsellor, Marla develops a stress management plan to prevent, reduce and manage her stress. As part of preventing stress, Marla focuses on eating well. She make a commitment to do a weekly shop and make meals for the next two weeks, putting them in the freezer so she can just heat them up when she gets home. She also tries time out when she feels stressed at work and goes for a brisk five-minute walk around the building, combined with focused breathing. To help manage her stress, Marla makes a monthly appointment for a massage, which she pays for with the money she saves from not buying takeaway dinners.



By using a schedule properly, you can:

- ▶ understand what you can realistically achieve with your time
- ▶ plan to make the best use of the time available
- ▶ leave enough time for things you absolutely must do
- ▶ preserve contingency time to handle the unexpected
- ▶ minimise stress by avoiding over-commitment to yourself and others.

Make a 'to do' list

Prioritising what needs to be done is especially important. Without it, you may work very hard, but not achieve the results because what you are working on is not important and have been incorrectly prioritised.

Most people have a 'to do' list of some sort. The problem with many of these lists is they are just a collection of things that need to get done. There is no structure. To work efficiently it is recommended that the most important, highest value tasks are completed first thing and given a high priority. This way, important or even critical work can be done well and not hurried; for example, if a deadline is required.

Prioritising tasks:

- ▶ Write down all the tasks that need to be completed.
- ▶ If some are too large, break them down into smaller individual tasks.
- ▶ If these still seem too large or contain several parts, separate them again into smaller parts.
- ▶ Review the tasks and allocate priorities from 1 (very important) to 6 (unimportant).
- ▶ If too many tasks have a high priority, demote the less-important tasks.
- ▶ Rewrite the list in priority order.

How to schedule

There are many good scheduling tools available, including diaries, calendars, paper-based organisers, the calendar on your smartphone, and integrated software suites for computers and other devices including phones. The scheduling tool chosen will depend upon the work role, the structure of the role, personal preference and budget.

The key things are to be able to enter data easily, and to be able to view an appropriate span of time in the correct level of detail. Scheduling is best done on a regular basis; for example, at the start of every week or month. A good strategy is to arrange for your supervisor to review your time management strategies. They should be able to offer advice about the time required to do tasks. It may be necessary to look back over your original job description to determine those tasks that should be prioritised as a part of your work role. Remember if you don't speak up and seek help about workload and time management issues, a supervisor or manager can't provide support, as they are not aware that there is an issue causing you stress.

Steps for preparing a schedule

- ▶ Start by making a 'to do' list of all the tasks for the day, week or month.
- ▶ Review the list, and schedule any tasks that need to be done at a specific time; for example, client care or appointments. Include travel or preparation time.

2C Identify and adopt strategies to balance work–life priorities

If a person experiences stress at work, then it is likely they will experience stress in other areas of their life such as at home, in relationships or with others. The effects of stress can overflow into and affect all aspects of our lives and upset the balance between work and non-work time. An example is when a person works long or excessive hours and doesn't have time to catch up with friends or just wind down after a busy and stressful day at work.



In addition to using strategies to prevent, reduce and manage stress in the workplace, there are other strategies that can be employed to make sure we maintain a healthy work–life balance.

Self-care techniques

Self-care strategies aim to teach you how to cope with stress, reduce the effects of stress and help you to regain control of how you respond to certain situations.

As a general rule, self-care focuses on having a well-balanced lifestyle, being mindful of how you are feeling and responding to different stimuli, and being able to identify when you should seek help.

There are many types of self-care strategies and no single type will meet everyone's needs. It is important to determine what works best for you. Consider the self-care strategies listed below.



Get plenty of rest

You cannot function properly at work, or deal with issues that are causing you stress, if you are tired. It is important to make sure you get enough sleep, and take your allocated breaks when at work. A rested mind and body will cope better with stressful situations.



Ask for a mentor

Having an experienced person to talk to about the way you handle your work and deal with stressful situations can be very helpful. You can talk through situations that have caused you stress and discuss ways you can better handle situations. This will help to address future stressors. For example, role-playing or practising the way you talk to people with dementia, who are causing stress through their behaviour, will help you to think of ways you can communicate with them calmly and effectively. If you feel you need this kind of support, ask your supervisor to help you connect with a mentor.

Exercise also needs to suit your budget and does not need to involve expensive equipment or memberships. Gyms memberships and group classes can be expensive but walking, running or swimming at the beach are free.

Before starting any exercise program, always check with your doctor first.

Work–life balance strategies

We don't always have the time to do everything we would like to, so by choosing what is most important to us, we can prioritise our free time to make sure we are doing what is important to us. Just like a schedule can be used to manage and prioritise a workload, it can also be used to manage personal time. Make sure also it includes space for relaxing or free time with no activities/tasks scheduled.

Here are some things to consider to allow for better use of free time.

Combine tasks to save time

- ▶ Try to combine things to give more time. For example, you may make an agreement to meet your best friend for a walk every Saturday at 9 am. This combines exercise with catching up and maintaining an important friendship.
- ▶ You could also spend quality time with the family while teaching your children to cook, and at the same as filling the freezer with healthy meals.

Be efficient with your time

- ▶ Minimise the jobs you need to do to keep the house running. For example, order groceries online or perhaps a neighbour's teenager can mow your lawns or wash your car for pocket money.

Make a list and plan

- ▶ Always make a shopping or errand list to minimise having to go out on weekends and having to go out again for missed items.

Try saying no

- ▶ Learn to say no. For example: it's okay to say no to going out for dinner with a group of friends because you would rather be at home relaxing with a book. It's also okay to say no to high maintenance friends who sap your energy, and to put the needs of yourself and your family first.

Consider a change in work hours

- ▶ It may be possible to change working hours to suit personal commitments. For example, on Thursday afternoons at 5 pm, your daughter plays netball and you would love to be there, but you don't finish work until 5 pm. It may be possible to negotiate with a manager to start half an hour earlier on Thursdays so you can leave earlier on that day.



Topic 3

In this topic you will learn how to:

- 3A Monitor and review the effectiveness of stress management strategies**

- 3B Adjust strategies not meeting the desired outcome and recognise when additional resources and/or support is needed**

- 3C Access internal or external options and resources for additional support to meet desired outcomes of the stress management plan**

Evaluate stress reducing strategies

It is not enough to develop and follow a stress management plan and assume it is working. Not every strategy works for every person and every situation. It is therefore important to monitor and review the effectiveness of your strategies, adjust them when required and seek additional support if necessary.

Reducing stress is an ongoing process as new stressors and triggers may develop as work circumstances change and new people requiring support may need different supports. An awareness of staff and managers needs to develop where reflective practice means that there may be better ways of dealing with stress in the workplace, and new ways of reducing stress are considered. This is important for the workplace but also for a person's home life to maintain a healthy work-life balance. Too much stress can have a major impact on mental health.

3A Monitor and review the effectiveness of stress management strategies

By monitoring the effectiveness of a stress management plan, a person can gather the information they require to make changes, add or delete strategies, seek additional support or keep on the same track. It is important that the results are reviewed to look for patterns in the sources of stress, the triggers, the person's response to the stress and the effectiveness of the strategies.



Once a proper review has been done, any required adjustments to improve the effectiveness of the stress management plan can be implemented.

Monitor stress

Monitoring a stress management strategy is an ongoing process. It can be as simple as keeping a record of stressful situations or rating levels of stress from one to ten. Another alternative may be to meet with a professional to discuss triggers, particular stressors and actions to reduce stress. Often a combination of monitoring methods produces the best outcome.

Keep a record

Keeping a record of stress management is as simple as filling out a document that keeps a record of the details of when, where and how you reacted to an event, with a review of strategies that were tried to reduce stress and the reactions to it. There are other more-detailed ways to document stress, which involve more-detailed information including a full description of the situation and how it was managed.

Here is an example of a more-detailed form of monitoring.

Check stress levels

You can monitor your stress levels using a rating scale. To do this, you need to 'check in' with yourself and rate how you are feeling at set times throughout the day. It is important to always check in at approximately the same time each day so when you look back you may be able to identify patterns of thinking or particular triggers that produced a severe stress reaction.

You can choose the times you want to check in, and the following is an example.

Possible check-in times to rate stress

- ▶ As soon as you wake up
- ▶ An hour after you get to work
- ▶ During your lunch break
- ▶ Just before you leave work
- ▶ An hour after you get home
- ▶ Just before bed

Rate stress levels

The scale you used to rate stress levels is not important as long as it is meaningful to the person using the rating. It is advisable, however, to use even numbers so you allocate a firm score. For example, if a scale is from 1 to 5 (where 1 is highly stressed and 5 is completely relaxed), you can select 3, which is right in the middle. But if the scale is 1 to 6 (where 1 is highly stressed and 6 is completely relaxed), you need to decide whether you are 3 or 4; that is, slightly more or slightly less stressed. The words used are also flexible as long as the person knows what they mean in relation to themselves.

Another way to rate a level of stress is to use words like the following examples.

One example of language to rate stress:

- ▶ 1 = Highly stressed
- ▶ 2 = Fairly uptight
- ▶ 3 = Okay but a bit edgy
- ▶ 4 = Starting to relax
- ▶ 5 = Relaxed
- ▶ 6 = Completely relaxed

Professional care and technology

In situations where a person is highly stressed and/or under the care of a professional, more formal monitoring may occur. This may include taking blood pressure, checking heart rate or doing specific blood tests, and more in-depth and detailed examination of stressors and strategies to assist in reducing stress levels.

The trained professional may monitor stress levels, through weekly appointments, to discuss strategies and management. This feedback then allows the person to identify patterns and the effectiveness of their stress management plan.

3B Adjust strategies not meeting the desired outcome and recognise when additional resources and/or support is needed

When reviewing your stress management plan, you may discover that some strategies are not working as well as others, or that some strategies only work in specific situations.

If a plan is not helping to reduce stress levels, then it is important to adjust it to produce a better outcome. The point of a stress management plan is to manage a person's stress, so if the plan isn't working, stress levels will remain the same, at best, or elevate, at worse. As previously discussed, ongoing stress can have a major impact on physical and mental health.



Adjusting a plan may mean moving or adjusting strategies or implementing new ones. It is also important to recognise when a person may need additional resources and support.

Make adjustments to strategies

The information gained by monitoring and reviewing a stress management plan will show what is and isn't working. Quite simply, if something isn't working it needs to change.

It may be a case of trial and error, and when adjustments are made, monitoring and reviewing should continue to assess the effectiveness of new strategies. The first change to make may not be the right one, so it is important for a person to be encouraged and not accept a strategy that isn't working. If a person feels like giving up, they require support and assistance, and may also require additional support.

Consider the following examples as to why a particular strategy is not working.

Look for ways to achieve the same result

- ▶ A time out strategy may not work for you if you need to take a lift down three floors and walk through a crowded lobby before you get outside to talk a short walk. In this situation, going to a quiet room and doing controlled breathing could work better.

Change schedules

- ▶ Fitting in an aerobics class straight after work may add to stress levels because it is too rushed with public transport or traffic to get there on time. This may be the case particularly if you to feel more stressed towards the end of the day. Perhaps an early morning class would be better suited.

Look for alternative activities

- ▶ Some people find meditation challenging and prefer to relax by going for jog or sweating it out at the gym.

Supervisors

- ▶ Supervisors can act as a listening ear (see above) and should be the first port of call to access other internal support. A supervisor can refer to other internal resources such as counsellors, EAPs or stress management programs.

Mentors

- ▶ Some workplaces will appoint a senior or more experienced colleague as a mentor. This person can help identify new strategies, monitor the effectiveness of strategies and help make adjustments when needed. They can also provide on-the-job support to help the person through stressful situations.

Counsellors

- ▶ Some workplaces have counsellors on staff. Generally, workers can make their own appointments to see the counsellor or their supervisor may refer them. The benefit of a workplace counsellor is that they will be very familiar with the specific sources of stress in that workplace and are likely to have lots of effective strategies to teach you. Counsellors are also trained to identify when more critical intervention is required such as referral to a medical professional.

Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs)

- ▶ For those who prefer to meet with a counsellor independent to their workplace, but still paid for by their workplace, then EAP is appropriate. This confidential counselling service aims to support workers' wellbeing in the workplace and in their personal lives. Counsellors who work for an EAP will not be as familiar with a specific workplace as staff counsellors but still have the tools available to assist. These programs may offer face-to-face or telephone sessions and are completely confidential.

Debriefing

- ▶ Regular debriefing sessions may be held for any and all staff who would like to attend, and are also often held after a major event/stressful incident. Workers will be told about debriefings by their supervisors, human resources staff or colleagues. Debriefing sessions are also likely to be advertised by flyers and email.

External support options

Some of the external options for support are described here.

Community health centres

Community health centres – many suburbs/regions have a community health centre that provides inexpensive or government-funded counselling services, mental health programs and wellbeing aids. They can be accessed directly or through the local council.

Practice task 11

1. How can your colleagues be a support in the workplace?

2. What is an EAP?

3. What is the main difference between a psychologist and a psychiatrist?

[Click to complete Practice task 11](#)

Summary

1. It is important to monitor and review your stress management plan to ensure it is effective.
2. Reducing stress is an ongoing process as new stressors and triggers may develop as work circumstances change and new people requiring support may need different supports.
3. You can monitor your stress levels using a rating scale.
4. If your strategies are not working, you need to modify or change them, or try something new until you get the result you want.
5. When some people are highly stressed it can be difficult for them to acknowledge that they need help and the idea of seeking help can seem overwhelming.
6. There are many internal and external resources available to help you manage stress.