



## IDENTIFYING AND MINIMISING THE IMPACT OF STRESS ON YOURSELF AND YOUR TEAM MEMBERS

Stress is a common part of everyday life with most people experiencing some form of stress in their day, and typically this is seen to be healthy if managed appropriately. Stress however becomes of concern when an individual is not able to cope with the demands of their environment i.e. when stress turns to distress.

There are a number of warning signs and symptoms that may allow you to spot when someone is suffering from stress. These include changes in the person in one or more of the following ways;

### Cognitive Symptoms

- ✓ Memory problems
- ✓ Inability to concentrate
- ✓ Poor judgement
- ✓ Seeing only the negative
- ✓ Anxious or racing thoughts
- ✓ Constant worrying – stuck on “what ifs”

### Emotional Symptoms

- ✓ Moodiness
- ✓ Irritability or short temper
- ✓ Agitation, inability to relax
- ✓ Feeling overwhelmed
- ✓ General unhappiness

### Physical Symptoms

- ✓ Aches and pains
- ✓ Diarrhoea or constipation
- ✓ Nausea, dizziness
- ✓ Chest pain, rapid heartbeat
- ✓ Loss of sex drive
- ✓ Feeling sick

### Behavioural Symptoms

- ✓ Eating more or less
- ✓ Sleeping too much or too little
- ✓ Isolating yourself from others
- ✓ Procrastinating/neglecting responsibilities
- ✓ Using alcohol, cigarettes, or drugs to relax
- ✓ Nervous habits

The first port of call for all team leaders and managers is to identify and attend to their own distress first. Think of the “oxygen mask rule” when flying – it tells you to remember to put on your own mask first before trying to assist others. The rule is the same when experiencing distress. You can only support others if you are actually OK yourself.

So how are you rating on the distress scale? If you were to rate yourself on a 10 point wellbeing scale – where would you be sitting? If you are identifying higher levels of distress for yourself – then you need to take action. You need to:

- ✓ Make sure you have support from a peer; or manager above you.
- ✓ Consider what, if any support you may need from the workplace.
- ✓ Drink plenty of water and eat well (try to maintain the 5+ a day rule).
- ✓ Take regular breaks and get out of the office at lunch, even if it’s just a quick 5 minute walk.
- ✓ Exercise and avoid alcohol.
- ✓ Try to get enough sleep (typically 8 hours or more a night is recommended for most people)
- ✓ Develop and keep to routines.
- ✓ Keep perspective – and refrain from catastrophising.
- ✓ Identify the presenting problems – then consider and act on the solutions.
- ✓ Keep connected to people and reach out when you are struggling.
- ✓ Watch your thought patterns – and interrupt negative and self limiting thoughts.
- ✓ Talk to EAP Services (0800 327 669) or friends about your feelings and things that are worrying you.
- ✓ Consult with your GP if the stress reaction does not reduce.

With regards to your team; it is good to keep an eye out for any signs of distress they may be exhibiting.

Have regular check-ins with each of your team members; and ask them how they are coping with what’s going on. If you are worried about the stress levels a member of your team may be experiencing, then talk to them about your concerns, indicating the signs of distress you have noticed; and find out if there is anything that you or the company can do to help/support them. Encourage them to access EAP for support to better manage the impact of the situation on them; or where you think it is warranted; make a Manager Referral.

It is also a time of keeping the team close and together. To help achieve this; it is important to have good structure; and clear communication. It is also a time where positive feedback about the teams’ attitude; behaviour and performance is beneficial. Creating a workplace environment that is positive and supportive is crucial; and engaging in small acts that reward; care for and demonstrate that you value the team will all help to boost the morale of the team in this difficult time. And of course; don’t forget to create moments of fun and connection.