

# Employee stress

## Tips for line managers

### Pandemic stress and uncertainty

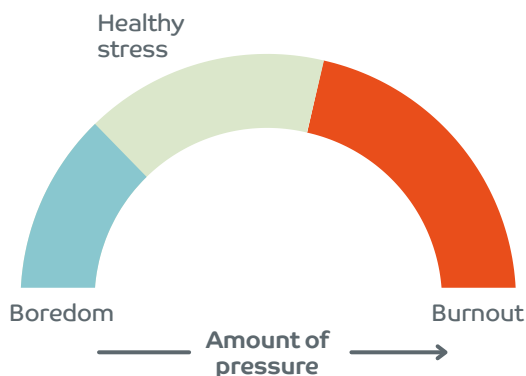
A recent study by [The Stress Management Society](#) found that 65% of people in the UK feel more stressed since Covid-19 restrictions began in March 2020. The main issues reported were feelings of disconnection, uncertainty and a worrying loss of control.

In the workplace, employees continue to face daily challenges that were previously unheard of. Simply going into work carries a heightened sense of risk, and 28% of employees are still worried that their workplace isn't Covid secure.

For others, remote working has blurred the boundaries between work and home, making it more difficult to switch off at the end of the day. With lifestyle changes and restrictions still in place, and health worries on top of that, how can managers reduce the impact of stress on their people?

### Pressure vs performance

It's natural to feel a little stressed at times, and a little pressure can help keep us focused on our goals.



The stress curve shows that people perform best when working at – or slightly beyond – their comfort level. However, sustained stress can impact performance and eventually lead to burnout.



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### Dealing with change

Research by organisational psychologist Jim Bright suggests a third of us would avoid change if we could.

Our brains are wired to expect familiarity, but the pandemic has disrupted our usual habits, creating a sense of unease and constant uncertainty.

While employees may appear keen to get back to 'normal', the easing of lockdown bring a new set of changes – and challenges – for managers to guide their people through.

To help your team cope with change, encourage them to focus on the things they can control and allow them to have a say in any organisational changes along the way.



## Spotting the signs of stress

While a little pressure can help us be more productive, it shouldn't negatively impact our behaviour at work.

It's important to check in with those who may be showing signs of stress. Those closest to the employee are best placed to do this, so line managers should be aware of the symptoms and know how to respond.

Look out for these common red flags within your team which may signal that it's time to step in:

- Difficulty concentrating
- Forgetfulness
- Trouble with decision making
- Booking last-minute days off
- Worrying about routine tasks
- Feeling overwhelmed
- Short-temperedness
- Increased use of alcohol or cigarettes

## Five tips to reduce workplace stress

1. Ensure managers are trained to offer support and feel confident doing so. Our [health leadership training webinars](#) offer a useful introduction, suitable for all levels.
2. Encourage employees to take time out, whether it's a long weekend or simply a lunchtime stroll to recharge.
3. Where possible, allow people time to plan ahead. This healthy habit makes it easier to deal with new situations.
4. Be honest about your own stress levels and reassure employees that they can approach you for support without judgement.
5. Keep in touch with your team and ask direct questions about their workload and stress levels in your regular catch ups.

## Some conversation starters to try

- “ How are you coping with the current situation?  
How manageable is your workload at the moment?  
What helps you switch off at the end of the day?  
How do you feel about your current deadlines – are they realistic?  
What can I do to support you? ”

## Useful resources and links

[Stress.org.uk](https://www.stress.org.uk)

The Stress Management Society

[HSE Talking Toolkit: Stress](#)

A comprehensive stress toolkit for managers

[Wellbeing webinars](#)

On topics including resilience and work-life balance

[Mental Health First Aid courses](#)

Certified training to help your people support each other

