

Preventing work-related stress – examples of risk control measures

Work-related stress is a health and safety hazard with far-reaching implications for individuals and organisations. Implementing measures to prevent work-related stress can benefit employees and the workplace by creating a safe and healthy working environment.

This document provides information for employers, employees and health and safety representatives (HSRs) on the types of measures that can be used to control the causes of work-related stress.

Consultation and controlling the risk of work-related stress

Employers must consult employees and must involve HSRs on a range of OHS matters, including when making decisions on how to control risks and when proposing workplace changes that may affect employees' health and safety.

Use this document in conjunction with the *Preventing work-related stress in the private sector* information sheets for employers (and all workplace parties), health and safety representatives (HSRs) and employees.

Causes of work-related stress	Examples of risk controls
<p>Task design</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a mismatch between qualifications/experience and the demands of the job • fragmented or meaningless work • lack of variety 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • provide training, mentoring and performance evaluation, review job responsibilities • review and improve/change recruitment practices • provide job/task rotation, job expansion • increase workplace interaction • communicate how tasks and roles fit within the organisation's structure • ensure employee participation in job design
<p>Workload/work pace</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • lack of control over work methods, pace and/or rate • work overload or underload • high work rate or time pressures 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • consult on work methods and schedules and the pace and rate of work • set realistic work loads and work schedules • equitable (fair/reasonable/balanced) distribution of work • ensure adequate resourcing (including staffing) • review work methods • provide rest breaks
<p>Role in the organisation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • role or task uncertainty • role conflict • responsibility beyond the individual's capacity to cope 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • match people to roles • provide position descriptions • seek and provide regular feedback from/to staff in relation to roles and responsibilities • consult on the development and implementation of operating procedures • use strategic planning and communication
<p>Work context</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • hazardous work • poor communication on workplace issues • dealing with difficult clients/customers • violence and threats of violence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • control workplace hazards • provide communication skills training • provide manager/supervisor support and training • address issues that cause customer/client aggression • implement system to identify and address customer/client aggression • provide security measures

(Continued overleaf.)

More information about Preventing work-related stress – examples of risk control measures

Causes of work-related stress	Examples of risk controls
<p>Physical work environment and equipment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • poor workplace layout • lack of space • inadequate equipment • excessive noise and/or other environmental stressors, eg vibration, extreme heat/cold 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ensure appropriate workplace design and workspace • ensure equipment is adequate and accessible • ensure ongoing preventative maintenance of equipment • provide training in use of equipment • implement environmental controls <p>For further information on risk controls for physical work environment and equipment, refer to <i>Officewise – A Guide to Health and Safety in the Office</i>, and the <i>Workplace Amenities and Work Environment Compliance Code</i>.</p>
<p>Degree of control</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • low participation in decision-making • lack of control over work methods and scheduling of work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • include employees in decision-making in relation to work methods, job design, work pace and rate and amenities • implement processes, eg issue resolution, suggestion box, employee surveys, contact officers, to enable employees to raise work problems and other concerns at higher levels in organisation
<p>Organisational function and culture</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • poor management of organisational change • poor communication within the workplace • rigid work practices – people unable to work out their own solutions to the day-to-day problems they encounter in the workplace • a non-supportive work culture where concerns and requests are dismissed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • communicate, plan and consult in relation to organisational change • review and address the impact of organisational changes • ensure team meetings are effective and participative • encourage and promote a positive work culture • ensure management actively encourages employees to raise workplace concerns • ensure management actively considers and responds to concerns raised by employees
<p>Work schedule</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • shift working – disruption to body processes • inflexible work schedules • unpredictable working hours • long or unsocial hours 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • consult and plan in relation to proposed changes to work schedules • ensure adequate notice is provided to employees in relation to any proposed changes to work schedules <p>For further information on risk controls for work schedule and shift working, refer to <i>Fatigue Prevention in the Workplace</i> (pages 11/12).</p>
<p>Management of work</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • poor leadership • supervision arrangements • performance management arrangements • inadequate information, instruction and/or training 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ensure managers and supervisors develop skills and competencies • provide training and mentoring for managers and supervisors • provide support and role clarity for managers and supervisors • ensure equitable (fair/reasonable/balanced) distribution of work • provide adequate information, instruction and training • ensure new and poor performing managers and supervisors are mentored and supported • recognise and acknowledge skills, competencies and abilities of staff <p>For further information on risk controls for negative leadership styles, refer to <i>Preventing and Responding to Bullying at Work</i> (page 9).</p>
<p>Employment status</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • job insecurity • career uncertainty or stagnation • lack of reward, recognition, status • low social value of the work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • provide employees with certainty on employment arrangements (where possible) • provide career development opportunities (where possible) • recognise and acknowledge work-related successes • consult on ways to provide recognition to employees • provide ongoing recognition of the role of employees in organisational success
<p>Relationships at work</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • bullying and harassment • poor relationship with co-workers and superiors • interpersonal conflict • physical or social isolation • lack of opportunity to be consulted • lack of social support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • provide policies/clear guidelines on appropriate workplace behaviour • encourage and promote a positive work culture • develop and implement a conflict management process • ensure fair discipline and investigation procedures are in place • encourage early reporting and ensure action is taken to resolve issues • increase opportunities for workplace interaction between employees • implement consultative arrangements (ensure organisation-wide coverage) <p>For further information on risk controls for bullying and poor relationships at work, refer to <i>Preventing and Responding to Bullying at Work</i> (page 9).</p>