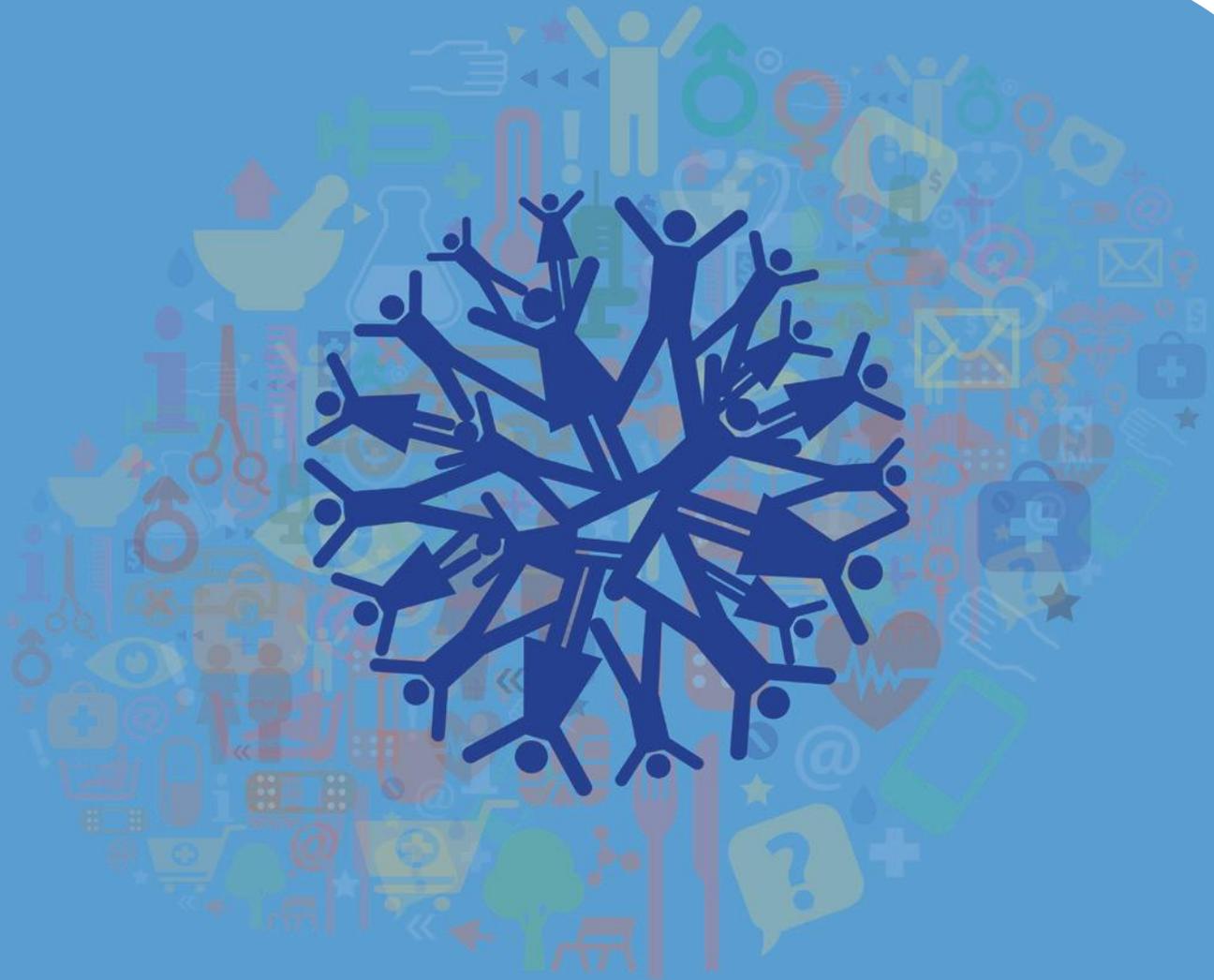


HLTWHS006

Manage personal stressors in the work environment

Release 1



Learner guide

HLTWHS006

Manage personal stressors in the work environment

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Learner guide

Aspire Version 1.2



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Version control and modification history

Version	Release date	Modification
Release 1, version 1.1	April 2017	First release.
Release 1, version 1.2	December 2018	Minor corrections as part of our continuous improvement program.

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HLTWHS006 Manage personal stressors in the work environment, Release 1

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Before you begin

This learner guide is based on the unit of competency *HLTWHS006 Manage personal stressors in the work environment*, Release 1. Your trainer or training organisation must give you information about this unit of competency as part of your training program. You can access the unit of competency and assessment requirements at: www.training.gov.au.

How to work through this learner guide

This learner guide contains a number of features that will assist you in your learning. Your trainer will advise which parts of the learner guide you need to read, and which practice tasks and learning checkpoints you need to complete. The features of this learner guide are detailed in the following table.

Feature of the learner guide	How you can use each feature
Learning content	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Read each topic in this learner guide. If you come across content that is confusing, make a note and discuss it with your trainer. Your trainer is in the best position to offer assistance. It is very important that you take on some of the responsibility for the learning you will undertake.
Examples and case studies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Examples of completed documents that may be used in a workplace are included in this learner guide. You can use these examples as models to help you complete practice tasks and learning checkpoints. ▶ Case studies highlight learning points and provide realistic examples of workplace situations.
Practice tasks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Practice tasks give you the opportunity to put your skills and knowledge into action. Your trainer will tell you which practice tasks to complete.
Video clips	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Where QR codes appear, learners can use smartphones and other devices to access video clips relating to the content. For information about how to download a QR reader app or accessing video on your device, please visit our website: www.aspirelr.com.au/help <div data-bbox="1163 1328 1353 1608" style="text-align: right;">   <p style="font-size: 8px; margin-top: 2px;">V1234</p> </div>
Summary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Key learning points are provided at the end of each topic.
Learning checkpoints	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ There is a learning checkpoint at the end of each topic. Your trainer will tell you which learning checkpoints to complete. These checkpoints give you an opportunity to check your progress and apply the skills and knowledge you have learnt.

Foundation skills

As you complete learning using this guide, you will be developing the foundation skills relevant for this unit. Foundation skills are the language, literacy and numeracy (LLN) skills and the employability skills required for participation in modern workplaces and contemporary life.

The following table outlines specific foundation skills noted for your learning in this learner guide.

Foundation skill area	Foundation skill description
Learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Understanding your job role, organisational procedures and legal responsibilities ▶ Managing your work and seeing how well you are going and making goals for yourself at work ▶ Seeking professional development opportunities for continuous improvement
Reading	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Understanding how documents are presented and being able to navigate through documents ▶ Understanding industry- and job-specific terminology ▶ Interpreting key information in relevant documents ▶ Understanding routine workplace checklists and documentation
Writing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Planning, drafting and writing reports and documents ▶ Communicating through written letters, email and online ▶ Recording progress; reporting incidents
Oral communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Clarifying instructions ▶ Providing information ▶ Supporting others through encouragement, negotiation and conflict resolution ▶ Using body language to model desired behaviour and responding to others' body language
Numeracy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Calculating costs, weights, measurements of height and distance ▶ Interpreting measurements
Teamwork	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Working well with other people by cooperating, collaborating, encouraging and building rapport
Planning and organising	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Planning your workload and commitments ▶ Implementing tasks ▶ Completing work on time ▶ Knowing how to deal with hazards and risks
Making decisions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Understanding and applying decision-making processes ▶ Reviewing the impact of your decisions
Problem-solving	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Identifying problems ▶ Working out how to fix a problem using problem-solving processes and reviewing the outcome
Innovation and creation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Recognising opportunities to develop and apply new ideas ▶ Generating ideas by thinking of new ways to do something ▶ Making suggestions to improve work

Foundation skill area	Foundation skill description
Technology and digital literacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Efficiently using digitally based technologies and systems correctly and safely ▶ Accessing, organising and presenting information ▶ Using equipment correctly and safely

What do you already know?

Use the following table to identify what you may already know. This may assist you to work out what to focus on in your learning.

Topic	Key outcomes	Rate your confidence in each section
Topic 1 Develop strategies to manage personal stress	1A Recognise sources of stress in your own job role	<input type="checkbox"/> Confident <input type="checkbox"/> Basic understanding <input type="checkbox"/> Not confident
	1B Recognise triggers and your own response to stress	<input type="checkbox"/> Confident <input type="checkbox"/> Basic understanding <input type="checkbox"/> Not confident
	1C Identify strategies to effectively prevent, reduce and manage stress	<input type="checkbox"/> Confident <input type="checkbox"/> Basic understanding <input type="checkbox"/> Not confident
	1D Identify internal and external options and resources for additional support	<input type="checkbox"/> Confident <input type="checkbox"/> Basic understanding <input type="checkbox"/> Not confident
	1E Develop a personal stress management plan that responds to identified stressors and triggers	<input type="checkbox"/> Confident <input type="checkbox"/> Basic understanding <input type="checkbox"/> Not confident
Topic 2 Implement stress management strategies	2A Use strategies from your stress management plan that address personal triggers and stressors	<input type="checkbox"/> Confident <input type="checkbox"/> Basic understanding <input type="checkbox"/> Not confident
	2B Organise your own workload to minimise stress, and inform relevant personnel of any variations and difficulties	<input type="checkbox"/> Confident <input type="checkbox"/> Basic understanding <input type="checkbox"/> Not confident
	2C Identify and adopt strategies to balance work–life priorities	<input type="checkbox"/> Confident <input type="checkbox"/> Basic understanding <input type="checkbox"/> Not confident

Topic	Key outcomes	Rate your confidence in each section
Topic 3 Evaluate stress reducing strategies	3A Monitor and review the effectiveness of stress management strategies	<input type="checkbox"/> Confident <input type="checkbox"/> Basic understanding <input type="checkbox"/> Not confident
	3B Adjust strategies not meeting the desired outcome and recognise when additional resources and/or support is needed	<input type="checkbox"/> Confident <input type="checkbox"/> Basic understanding <input type="checkbox"/> Not confident
	3C Access internal or external options and resources for additional support to meet desired outcomes of the stress management plan	<input type="checkbox"/> Confident <input type="checkbox"/> Basic understanding <input type="checkbox"/> Not confident



Topic 1

In this topic you will learn how to:

- 1A Recognise sources of stress in your own job role**
- 1B Recognise triggers and your own response to stress**
- 1C Identify strategies to effectively prevent, reduce and manage stress**
- 1D Identify internal and external options and resources for additional support**
- 1E Develop a personal stress management plan that responds to identified stressors and triggers**

Develop strategies to manage personal stress

Working in the community services sector can expose workers to stress as a part of their job. Unless properly managed, stress can represent unnecessary risk factors to workers. Every worker needs to know how to deal with their own reactions to stressful situations, and how to use stress management strategies to assist them to respond appropriately. They also need to be aware of the type of support available and how they can cope with stress.

If you feel yourself becoming stressed or fatigued you should raise this with your supervisor or health and safety representative so strategies can be developed and implemented to address this issue. It is important that you regularly review how you are dealing with stress in your workplace and seek help if you are not coping. Supervisors and coordinators also need to provide support to team members, the person requiring support and family members.

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

when people fail to understand or cooperate with an instruction or request. It can be exhausting having to constantly provide support to others, and work in situations where distress is common, and where you may need to deal with challenging ethical issues.

Complex behaviour

The people you support may behave in ways that are challenging or worrying. Part of a support worker's role is to monitor and manage the environment, and to use particular strategies to minimise or manage challenging behaviour when it occurs. This means being constantly aware of what is going on around the person or people you are supporting. It means thinking about how each change in the environment may affect a person, and it may mean dealing with people who are angry, upset or violent, or depressed.

Worrying about what may happen, and dealing with these things when they do happen, can cause stress.

Here are some examples of complex behaviour exhibited by some people requiring support.

Complex emotional behaviour

- ▶ Complex emotional behaviour can take many forms; for example, it may be changing or erratic moods, or a dependency on one carer to the exclusion of all others.
- ▶ People who are losing their independence or physical or mental attributes often become emotional. This may present as depression, anger, resentment, agitation or paranoia. This behaviour is typically found in people who are ageing and those with a debilitating condition.
- ▶ Some people may display their distress to a support worker and need to talk about how they are feeling. They may cry or express sadness or feelings of being overwhelmed or scared. Workers need to be supportive in these situations, be good listeners, and provide reassurance and comfort.

Complex aggressive behaviour

- ▶ Dementia is a major cause of aggressive behaviour in the ageing population, but in the community sector in general, aggression may be caused by other factors such as current or past drug use and alcohol abuse.
- ▶ Aggressive behaviour may be physical (hitting, punching etc.) or verbal (yelling, screaming, using bad language or derogatory comments) and presents a real danger to the support worker – physically and emotionally. It is important that there are appropriate facilities, procedures and training provided to those workers who deal with people with aggressive behaviour.

Complex cognitive deficit behaviour

- ▶ Cognitive deficiency refers to diminished intellectual functioning and may be caused by mental illness, as the result of a stroke or other illness, or as a result of substance or alcohol abuse. The deficiency may be mild to profound and require varying levels of care. It may present as an inability to concentrate or follow instructions or antisocial behaviour.

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.



Example

Recognise sources of stress in your own job role

Evelyn works with people with various complex behaviour types. One person she supports, Douglas, is fairly independent and lives in his own home and only requires weekly visits to check on his wellbeing. Douglas is quite resentful of the visits saying he doesn't need checking up on and he doesn't make it easy for Evelyn to do her job.

For third time this week, Evelyn turns up at Douglas's home, to find he has gone out for the day. She feels very frustrated as she has had to re-plan her week three times to visit Douglas and he is never at home when he says he will be.

Evelyn reflects that the source of her stress is Douglas's noncompliant behaviour, which she thinks may be because he fears losing his independence.



Practice task 1

1. List three ways a person who fears (or is) losing their independence may behave.

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2. Provide two examples of noncompliant behaviour.

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3. List three examples of stressful working conditions.

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Click to complete Practice task 1

1B Recognise triggers and your own response to stress

It is important to be aware of your reactions to stressful situations and the feelings you are experiencing, and to monitor your own reactions to the work you do. You need to be aware of how you feel and the impact it is having on the work you do, and your life outside work. It is important to identify and act when your job is causing you significant stress.



Support workers need to recognise when they are feeling stressed and take steps to manage this stress. Not dealing with stress when it occurs can affect your work performance, your health and your relationships both at work and in your personal life. You must take action to maximise your physical and emotional wellbeing so you are in optimum health to manage the demands of your job.

Monitoring your own stress levels can be done by learning to recognise your own physical, emotional and behavioural responses to stress to alert you to the presence of a stressor.

Recognise triggers

You may work in a variety of settings including private homes, day centres and residential facilities. It is important that you are aware of the situations you may find yourself in and the behaviours and incidents you may need to deal with on a regular basis.

You also need to be aware of which situations or aspects of your role you find stressful; that is, that trigger a stress response from you. Remember, we are not all the same and our reactions are unique to us, so, one person may find dealing with a person who is depressed highly stressful, but have no problem working in a time-pressured environment.

By recognising when you feel stressed, you can work backwards to identify the trigger – what was it that happened before you began to feel stressed? For example, you may be feeling uptight and edgy, and when you go back over your day, you may remember that a person you regularly support was behaving in an unusually aggressive way. This may be the trigger that caused your stress response.

Keeping a stress diary can also help to identify triggers. Make notes in a diary, for a week or a month, and each time you feel stressed write this down and work back to identify the trigger. In most cases, there will be a theme.

By recognising triggers, you can better manage your stress responses.

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

Effects

- ▶ More susceptible to workplace or other incidents
- ▶ A deterioration in work and personal relationships
- ▶ Risk of health problems including increased risk of cardiovascular disease or mental and physical illness
- ▶ Difficulty managing workplace relationships
- ▶ Withdrawal or aggression
- ▶ Poor concentration, and continual errors being made
- ▶ Burnout and being unable to continue working
- ▶ General job dissatisfaction and detachment from job role
- ▶ Fatigue
- ▶ Decreased concern for colleagues and clients, diminished care, cynicism
- ▶ Regular tardiness or absences
- ▶ Inappropriate emotions such as crying, fear or anger
- ▶ Depression

Example

Recognise triggers and your own response to stress

Sadiq works with people who have memory loss, and is currently caring for three people who display very challenging behaviours. Lately, he has been feeling tired all the time and feels like he does not have the headspace to deal with people, not even his close friends. Sadiq stops to reflect on how he is feeling, and his attitude to friends and family and realises he is not coping with the stress of the challenging behaviours of the people he was caring for. He makes a time to talk to his supervisor, as a first step to dealing with his work stress.



Practice task 2

Read the case study, then answer the questions that follow.

Case study

Maria is a support worker for people who have early onset dementia and still live at home. Some of the people she works with don't recognise her, or what she does for them, each time she arrives. Sometimes Maria travels all the way to their homes and they refuse to let her provide care and say hurtful things to her.

Last week Maria went to Juan's house to assist him with his shopping, as she had been doing every Friday morning for the past six months. This time, when she arrived he ignored her, became angry and then spat at her when she calmly asked him if he wanted to come to the shops. Maria raised her voice and told him that he was very rude and should be ashamed of his behaviour. Later she felt very regretful of her outburst, as she knows that Juan no longer knows how to behave in a socially acceptable way.

Maria's reaction to Juan made her realise that she needs to be more aware of stressors in her workplace and how to cope with stress.

1. Why is it important for Maria to be aware of the triggers and her responses to stress at work?

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2. What are some potential stressors in Maria's workplace?

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3. How are some of the effects of stress showing up in Maria's dealings with Juan?

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Click to complete Practice task 2

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.

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 handle situations better to help address future stressors. Role-playing or practising the ways you will talk to people who are causing you stress through their behaviour, for example, will help you to think of ways you can communicate with them calmly and effectively.

Exercise

A healthy body equals a healthy mind. Not only is exercise a good way to manage stress but regular exercise also increases the endorphins in our bodies, which are the 'feel good' hormones. As a result, we feel happier and have more resilience in stressful situations. Additionally, regular exercise promotes good sleep so it is a win-win situation.

Strategies to reduce stress

You may find that even though you know certain parts of your role cause you stress, it can be hard to look at the situation objectively and decide on strategies to reduce the stress.

Stress related to the people you support may not be able to be reduced, but the workplace environment, procedures and resources may be able to be changed or modified to reduce the stressful environment, as described below.

Ways to modify the work environment

- ▶ Offer job rotation – share different responsibilities so you are not dealing with the same situation every day
- ▶ Modify jobs – change the procedures or redesign the job role
- ▶ Offer team building – regular activities to bring the work team together to raise morale and resilience
- ▶ Provide sufficient and safe equipment – provide workers with the equipment they need to carry out their tasks properly
- ▶ Have appropriate staffing levels – ensure there are enough staff to do the work, which may reduce time stress
- ▶ Offer professional development – training courses to provide staff with the skills to do their jobs
- ▶ Understand the stressor – learning why the stress is occurring can reduce its impact it

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.



Practice task 3

1. List three things that can be done to prevent feelings of stress.

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2. What can be done in the workplace to reduce stress in workers? Give three examples.

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3. What can you do to manage your stress? Give three examples.

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Click to complete Practice task 3

1D Identify internal and external options and resources for additional support

Stress left untreated can lead to serious health conditions such as anxiety disorders and depression, and can leave a person more susceptible to illnesses and disease. It can also cause people to withdraw from family and friends and participate in antisocial or dangerous behaviour, such as drug use and excessive alcohol consumption.

As society has become more aware of the negative effects of stress, more and more support has become available to manage stress inside and outside the workplace.



In fact, preventing workplace injury and illness is an obligation under work health and safety legislation, and employers have a legal obligation to minimise the occurrence and effect of stress on workers.

Internal and external support options

There are many resources available for support to manage personal stress.

Some are available through your workplace (internal options) and others are outside the workplace (external options). The benefit of internal options is that they are usually provided by the workplace at no cost to the worker; however, not all workplaces have the resources to offer the same support and external options may work better for you.

Internal support options

There are many different forms of internal support available for support workers and they can be formal or informal.

Informal chats with your colleagues or supervisor may be all that is needed to relieve stress. Having someone you can talk to and share your feelings with should never be undervalued. These chats can take place in a staffroom while having a break, or even in the car between home visits.



Some workplaces provide a counsellor or social worker who workers can meet with. These trained professionals can provide support to the worker and refer them to external programs should they feel it will be beneficial. In most cases, counsellors and social workers can be accessed through your organisation's human resources department.

Other support in the workplace includes providing amenities to assist the staff to manage their own

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.

Resource options

Other options for support may include 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. These services are paid for by the employer and usually in medium to larger organisations through the human resources department.

Other community organisations you can contact directly are listed below and offer telephone and face-to-face counselling, referral services and helpful website information.

Community services organisations for support:

- ▶ Lifeline – a national charity providing all Australians experiencing a personal crisis with access to 24-hour crisis support and suicide prevention services
- ▶ SANE – a mental illness help centre providing information, guidance and referral
- ▶ beyondblue – a support service for people with depression and anxiety

Legal rights and the Fair Work Act

The Fair Work Commission is Australia's national workplace relations tribunal. It is an independent commission that operates under the *Fair Work Act 2009* (Cth).

The Fair Work Ombudsman provides information on encouraging a balance between work and family life with the benefit of reducing absenteeism, improved productivity and job satisfaction. These practices also reduce stress for workers where the employer and worker would work together to find suitable solutions to stress.



Working long hours under stress and not taking leave are known stressors for workers. It is the employer's responsibility to encourage workers to take their leave and not 'store stress up' for the future. Holidays and breaks from work are necessary for relaxation, stress release and time away from work. Family-friendly entitlements for workers include flexible working arrangements, leave entitlements such as compassionate leave or carers leave. There is also the opportunity to take time in lieu instead of overtime, and working from home options. In most instances, the employer and worker would work together to find a suitable solution, but it is important to note that the employer has the right to refuse an option on reasonable business grounds such as cost, impracticality or loss of productivity.

You can read more about the work and family best practice information at:

- ▶ <http://aspirelr.link/fair-work-work-and-family>

Example

Identify internal and external options and resources for additional support

Daryl works with people who have moderate to severe dementia. He works with the same people consistently and gets to know them and their family members well. Daryl acts as a constant support to the families as they grieve the loss of their loved ones with the progression of dementia.

Lately Daryl has been feeling exhausted and developed a sense of hopelessness that he can't do anything to stop the dementia and improve the situation of the people he is supporting.

Daryl recognises that he is having a negative response to the stress of distress and decides that he too may need to debrief with someone about how he is feeling. He approaches his supervisor who refers him to their Employee Assistance Program for counselling. He is also owed some long service leave and he is considering applying for a well-earned break from work.



Practice task 4

1. List three internal options of support for workers experiencing stress.

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2. List three external options of support for workers experiencing stress.

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3. Explain how debriefing can be a useful additional support to manage personal stress.

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Click to complete Practice task 4

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)

Personal stress management

It is very important that not only do the strategies you have chosen work for you, but also that they are practical, achievable and financially affordable. Remember, everyone responds differently, so it is important that a stress management plan is individualised for your specific needs and circumstances.



For example, if one of your strategies involves managing stress by attending relaxation retreats but you have a young family that you can't leave or you can't afford the cost, then it is not realistic for you. On the other hand, if it is affordable and there is nothing in your home-life to prevent you going then it may be an excellent strategy.

Strategies also need to be able to be applied when they are needed. For example, you may be dealing with a person displaying complex aggressive behaviour in a residential facility. You may want to shut yourself in a quiet room to meditate for five minutes to de-stress but this isn't practical as there are other people in the immediate area who could be at risk. A better strategy may be controlled breathing and self-talk.

Stress management plans

There are many sample templates available to assist in documenting a stress management plan. Here is an example stress management plan template, which can be modified as required.

The following are sources of my stress: (Write down as many as you like)	This is how I typically feel and react to that source of stress	This is what I will do to reduce stress	This is what I will do to manage my stress
Impatient people	I get flustered and try to work more quickly	Take a deep breath and remember that they are not impatient and annoyed by me but by the system	Speak to my supervisor at the end of each shift to debrief and get tips on how to handle impatient people
This is what I will do to prevent stress in general	Eat well, stop smoking, make sure I exercise at least three times a week		
This is what I will do to reduce stress in general	Take regular breaks, have time out, breathing exercises		
This is what I will do to manage stress in general	Join a yoga class, meditate, take regular holidays		

Example

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

Samuel, a community services worker, starts to keep a stress journal. After a month, he notices a pattern forming: every Friday morning, something triggers a stress response in him. The sources vary, but the time, the day and his reaction don't. And the interesting thing is, that on any other day, he doesn't react at all in the same circumstances.



On Thursday nights, Samuel likes to watch his favourite band play at the local pub. He finds it relaxing and enjoys catching up with his friends. He always orders the deep fried fish and chips and has three or four beers to wash it down. Although the band finishes at 10 pm, he typically gets home after midnight because his friends keep buying rounds of drinks and he loses track of how much he drinks and the time. On Fridays, Samuel is always tired, often has a headache and just wants the day to be over so he can collapse at home on the couch.

Samuel enjoys his Thursday nights and doesn't want to give them up even though he now realises the connections to feeling stressed at work.

As a part of his stress management plan he makes the following changes:

- ▶ He orders grilled fish and salad
- ▶ He stays carefully monitors how much he drinks
- ▶ He leaves when the band finishes

By making these changes, Samuel prevents the stressful feelings he was experiencing the following day at work.

Practice task 5

1. How can a stress management plan be helpful? List two reasons.

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2. Why use a stress journal before developing a plan?

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3. What factors should be considered before choosing a stress management strategy?

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Click to complete Practice task 5

Summary

1. The behaviour of the people you support and workplace situations can be major sources of stress for workers.
2. The way a person reacts to a situation will differ from person to person.
3. Experiencing stress for a sustained duration of time can have serious health consequences.
4. Not dealing with stress when it occurs can affect your work performance, your health and your relationships both at work and in your personal life.
5. A lack of resources, support and training can cause stressful working conditions.
6. It is important to recognise sources of stress in your workplace and how you respond to stress.
7. By recognising your triggers, you can manage your stress responses better.
8. Strategies to build resilience to stress and manage your responses to stress will help to reduce the effects of stress.
9. There are many strategies available for preventing, reducing and managing stress.
10. There is plenty of support available both internally and externally to the workplace.
11. A stress journal and individual stress management plan can help you to manage your stress.
12. When developing a plan make sure it is suitable and appropriate for our own circumstances; it should be practical, effective and suit your lifestyle and financial situation.

Learning checkpoint 1

Develop strategies to manage personal stress

This learning checkpoint allows you to review your skills and knowledge in developing strategies to manage personal stress.

Part A

1. Describe two sources of stress a community services worker may be faced with in the workplace.

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2. Why is it important to recognise your own triggers and stress responses?

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3. How can knowledge of legal rights assist you to work with your employer to manage personal stress?

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Part B

Read the case study, then answer the questions that follow.

Case study

Sally works with older people with dementia, several of whom often display non-compliant behaviour – refusing to follow instructions such as taking medication, or not going to classes in the aged care centre they originally confirmed they wanted to attend. This work is becoming more and more frustrating for Sally as she has a range of tasks she needs to complete on each shift and the non-compliance really slows her down.

Lately, Sally has been feeling very fatigued and has had several days off from work with the excuse she was sick. She feels unmotivated and often thinks she can't cope with her workload. She has also not been sleeping. Sally's supervisor has noticed a change in her attitude to work and has asked her to meet for an informal chat after her shift on Tuesday.

1. Describe a strategy Sally could use to prevent stress in her work role.

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2. Describe two strategies Sally could suggest to her supervisor to reduce the stressful workplace environment.

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3. Describe two strategies Sally could use to manage stress.

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4. Describe one internal and one external option or resource that Sally may be able to use to help her manage her stress.

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5. What are two things you need to consider when developing strategies in your stress management plan?

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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.

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

When working in a stressful environment, it is important to learn to recognise when stress management strategies and support is needed and take action to receive it so you remain an effective team member. A worker should not continue to work when under extreme stress or when their behaviour impacts negatively on others.

While it can be difficult to talk about personal emotions or clearly articulate a problem, the important thing is to recognise and acknowledge your feelings and seek help. Having a personal stress management plan in place provides you with the tools to manage your stress because it outlines the strategies that have been identified as most useful to you.



Use strategies

Having a stress management plan is a start, but knowing how and when to use the strategies in a plan is vital for it to be useful in managing stress. We all have different triggers and stressors and the strategies that work for each individual will vary. Additionally, it can be difficult when in a stressful situation to remember what to do because stress can alter our thinking and affect how we react to situations. Having a plan on hand can assist by reinforcing the options available and helps you keep to the tasks and strategies outlined and agreed to in the plan.

For example, a plan may suggest 'time out'. You know that time out has worked effectively in the past situations and during stressful times it can be easier to refer to the plan than becoming more stressed through inaction. This is when stress levels are likely to escalate.

When to use strategies

As discussed previously, there are three strategic approaches to dealing with stress. These three strategies work together in a stress management plan to provide coping strategies and ideas to deal with the triggers and stressors a person may identify in their workplace.

Stress prevention strategies

- ▶ Stress prevention strategies are those used to build your resilience and resistance to stress and decrease your stress responses. They include healthy eating, getting enough sleep and exercise.

Stress reduction strategies

- ▶ Stress reduction strategies are used during or immediately after a stressful situation. They help to reduce your stress responses and enable you to function normally.

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.

Quiet time

Quiet time may simply involve going into a quiet room, so sit for a few minutes, or picking up a book. Or, you can close your eyes and think of a happy place or a happy memory.

Have a drink (not alcohol)

Take a few minutes to make yourself a cup of tea (preferably herbal) and drink it slowly. Or, get a large glass of water and do not start working again until you have finished it. Apart from giving you something else to focus on, drinking plenty of herbal tea and water keeps you hydrated and functioning well.

Releasing emotions

Cry – sometime you just need to let it out. While it may not be a good idea to cry openly in the workplace, you may be able to find a quiet room or place outside where you can let it out.

Breathing exercises

Focused breathing – we are rarely aware of our breathing unless we are struggling to breathe or have a cold or chest infection. Some people hold their breath when they are stressed, which stops oxygen getting to their brains and increases the stress. Focused breathing is when you concentrate on each breath you take: inhale, exhale. You can count; for example, inhale one, two, three; exhale one, two, three. Focused breathing takes your mind off the stress and has the added benefit of providing more oxygen to your brain.

Positive self-talk

Positive self-talk means reminding yourself that you are okay, that the person is not behaving in a particular way because of you, and remembering they have a condition, and are not choosing to act in a certain way. You can use self-talk at any time, during time out, quiet time, focused breathing or even while you are dealing with a stressful situation.

Ways to manage stress

Away from the workplace, you need to ensure you use strategies to reduce any stress you are feeling so you can, for example, get a good night's sleep and be ready for work again the next day feeling positive and productive. The community services sector provides valuable work for people in need of support and assistance, and empowers them to take control of their lives. Every worker owes it to the people they support to provide the best possible service on every occasion.

Some popular stress management strategies may include those listed below.

Relaxation massage

When we feel stressed, our bodies tighten and our muscles become tense and stiff. A massage not only relieves the physical tension in our bodies, but also increases blood flow and has a soothing and calming effect.

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.



Practice task 6

1. List two strategies to use to prevent stress.

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2. List two strategies to reduce stress while in the workplace.

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3. List two strategies you could use to manage stress.

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[Click to complete Practice task 6](#)

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

Sometimes it is not the actual work you are doing but the way the workload is organised that causes you stress. By modifying procedures or rotating stress in the workplace may be reduced. It is important that any concerns or ideas are discussed with your supervisor or the person who can authorise changes and modifications.



Previously, time stress was mentioned as a stressor; that is, stress caused by lack of time and/or time pressures.

Organising workloads can cause or alleviate this source of stress. There are many tried and tested strategies to manage time and workload better. Using and making the most of technology helps many people at work.

Workload planning and prioritising

One of the biggest causes of stress in the workplace is attempting to do too much. If you do not have a clear idea of what tasks need to be done, in what order and how long each task will take, we can't know if we have enough time. Often this also means there are too many tasks planned and the person can often feel overwhelmed, contributing further to their levels of stress, because what they have set out to do is unachievable.

By planning and prioritising, it can be clearly seen what is and what is not achievable and adjustments can be made. This is an essential part of efficient time management.

Effective scheduling

Successful time management comes down to effective scheduling of time. When a list of tasks is prioritised, then a schedule can be created to keep the person on track, which can alleviate the stress of not being able to get tasks completed in a timely manner.

For scheduling to work well, there needs to be an understanding of the factors that affect the time available for work. After prioritising tasks, then it is usually always necessary to leave room for interruptions and contingency time for those unexpected events that can occur. It is important not to design a schedule that has too many tasks and is not flexible enough to provide time for tasks that present themselves at the time and cannot be scheduled for.

A useful schedule should reflect priorities as well as support personal goals. This means one that will allow you to control your time as well as keep your life in balance with work and other activities such as family life.

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.

- ▶ Schedule the most challenging tasks for the time of day when energy levels are highest. That way, the work should be of better quality, and it should take less time to complete.
- ▶ Block in appropriate contingency time. Experienced workers can assist with this. Usually, the more unpredictable the task, the more contingency time is required. Many people find there are often interruptions that count as contingency time.
- ▶ Leave time for the flexibility to rearrange the schedule to react effectively to issues as they arise.
- ▶ Review the to do list and schedule again. Check that tasks are achievable with the time available and tasks are being given the correct priority.
- ▶ Eliminate or delegate tasks that aren't part of your job role. These may include tasks that someone else in the organisation should be doing or personal activities such as sending non-work e-mails or surfing the internet.
- ▶ If the schedule still appears overwhelming, have your supervisor read it over and comment. It may be that a new negotiation of the workload is required with the supervisor or manager. Discuss whether all tasks are necessary or whether they can be done differently.

Example

Organise your own workload to minimise stress

Jasmine loves her job and the people she works with; however, she often finds herself feeling overwhelmed by everything she needs to do each day, and on most days she stays back to finish tasks and complete her paperwork. The additional hours at work are starting to affect her home-life and cause her to feel stressed both at work and at home. She can't work out how her colleagues manage to get everything done and leave on time.



Jasmine decides to ask one of the more experienced staff members how they manage everything. Her colleague explains that she uses a schedule to plan her day and she shows Jasmine what it looks like and how it works. She suggests that Jasmine develops one the same.

Taking her colleague's advice, Jasmine creates a to do list and starts to schedule her time, but soon realises there aren't enough hours in the day to complete all her listed tasks. Jasmine meets with her supervisor who helps her identify tasks that she can give to others, such as cleaning and making cups of tea for the people requiring support. Her supervisor also assists her to prioritise her tasks, delete the time wasters and manage her workload so Jasmine can get home on time to have some family time.

Practice task 7

1. How can using a schedule help with time management?

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2. Why is it important to plan and prioritise a workload to improve time management?

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3. What should you do if you find your workload is overwhelming?

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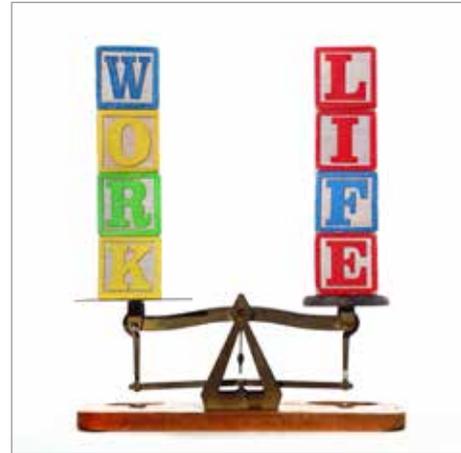
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Click to complete Practice task 7

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.



Seek support

You may find that even though you know that certain parts of your role supporting people with dementia are causing you stress, it can be hard to look at the situation objectively and decide on strategies to manage your stress. Sometimes you may not be able to control the situations that are causing you stress. 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. Your workplace may have an Employee Assistance Program where workers have access to independent and confidential counselling and support, to work through the issues causing them stress at work.

The impact of diet and nutrition

Regular exercise, a healthy diet and good nutrition are essential for a healthy body and



mind. Without proper nutrition, through a well-balanced diet, our brains do not function as well as they could and we are more susceptible to stress, illness, mood swings and general lethargy. Eating a well-balanced diet keeps you healthy, and eating well provides you with energy. Being well and having energy will help you deal with stress. Additionally, if our bodies are not receiving enough nutrients, we may experience weight gain or loss and muscle deterioration.

A well-balanced diet includes plenty of fresh fruit and vegetables, protein and fibre. It does not include highly processed food, food high in sugar or fat, and fried food. It also includes drinking lots of water and avoiding sugary drinks. There is lots of information on the internet about healthy eating and good nutrition. Visit <http://aspirelr.link/eat-for-health> for information and advice on the amount and kinds of food to eat for health and wellbeing.

Make sure you also take your meal and tea breaks when working, and have a healthy snack or meal at these times to maintain your energy levels.

Impact of exercise



We know that regular exercise can help to manage stress and also improve physical health. Regular exercise is an important way of strengthening our heart and lungs, building strong muscles, slowing down bone degeneration and reducing excess fat. It also releases endorphins – the hormones that make a person feel good, and counteract the feelings of stress they may be experiencing.

It is recommended that you do at least 30 minutes of exercise three times a week. The type of exercise you do should be one that you enjoy, that you have time for and that you can afford. For example, if you only have 20 minutes, you may choose to go for a jog rather than attend a one-hour cross training session. Or if you love swimming, you may do laps instead of running on a treadmill. Leaving the workplace to walk during a lunch break is recommended to have a break from the office or workplace to clear your head and re-energise and re-set before returning to work.

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.

Complementary and alternative health options



There are many complementary and alternative health options that people enjoy because it helps them to relax, and they enjoy the mindfulness that comes with concentrating on exercises or activities that require different skills from those required at work. Options such as yoga, meditation, tai chi or qi gong combine some exercise with mindfulness and focused breathing.

Other relaxation therapies include several types of body work like chiropractic treatments or specific types of massage such as shiatsu (Japanese pressure massage). These can assist in the release of tight or tense muscles and bring about relaxation and a feeling of wellbeing. In addition, some people find the use of oils in aromatherapy helpful in relieving stress and for relaxation.

Example

Identify and adopt strategies to balance work–life priorities

Ross is finding it hard to fit in all the things he wants and needs to do on weekends and often comes to work exhausted. As a single dad, he has to look after the kids, do shopping, housework, walk the dog, mow the lawns and try to find some time for exercise. He rarely has time to see his friends and is starting to feel quite overwhelmed and lonely.



Ross realises he is probably not the only one of his friends feeling this way and organises a regular catch up with his friends at the local park. They each bring their kids, dogs and a cricket bat to the local park for a fun game of cricket. This gave him time with his friends and his kids, the dog loves running around and they all get some exercise.

While the kids play, Ross chats with his friends and this is how he finds out about online grocery deliveries that can save him some time. Ross is happy as he's just saved himself a few hours a week by not having to go shopping, find a parking spot, manage the kids and try not to forget anything!

Practice task 8

1. What is the definition of self-care?

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2. Describe two work–life balance strategies.

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3. List two alternative or complementary health strategies.

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Click to complete Practice task 8

Summary

1. Having a personal stress management plan in place provides you with the tools to manage your stress when you need to because it outlines the most useful strategies for the individual.
2. We all have different triggers and stressors and the strategies that work for each individual will vary.
3. Every worker owes it to the people they support to provide the best possible service on every occasion, so managing stress and being healthy at work is vital to perform this important job.
4. It is important to organise your workload so you can manage your time effectively and reduce stress.
5. Modifying procedures or rotating tasks may help reduce stress in the workplace.
6. It is important that any concerns or ideas are discussed with your supervisor or the person who can authorise changes and modifications.
7. A robust schedule should reflect priorities as well as support personal goals.
8. Maintaining a healthy work–life balance is a very important part of stress management
9. The effects of stress can overflow into and affect all aspects of your life and upset the balance between work and non-work time.
10. 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.

Learning checkpoint 2

Implement stress management strategies

This learning checkpoint allows you to review your skills and knowledge in implementing stress management strategies

1. A stress management plan is a useful strategy to help manage stress. Provide two examples of how personal triggers and stressors can be addressed in a plan to balance work–life priorities.

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2. When creating a work schedule you find that you have too many things to do in the time frame given. What should you do?

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3. List three self-care strategies that may help you achieve a work–life balance.

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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.

Date and time	Source (what happened)	How I reacted	How I felt	Strategy I used	Result
Monday 6/9/16 9.15 am	Colleague rang in sick (again!) and I had to take on her clients as well as my own.	I said that this is ridiculous and it's not fair. I raised my voice to my supervisor (which is not good).	Annoyed and frustrated – she is always calling in sick on Mondays and they should have called in agency staff. Also I was overwhelmed by the amount of work I had to do. I don't feel like anyone realises what I have to do in this job.	I took time out – I went for a walk around the block then spoke to my supervisor to work out a schedule for the day. I apologised for being rude to her and explained what I was feeling.	The walk gave my time to breathe and realise I can't do everything. I decided on my walk to ask my supervisor to help me plan my day better. I felt more in control after having a moment to clear my head and think.

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 but 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.

Technology also now offers several options for monitoring stress. There are apps (applications) that can be used, or monitors that can be worn that link to software programs that measure stress responses throughout the day. Data collected can then be presented in a graph to easily show where stress levels peak and trough.

Review stress management strategies

After monitoring your stress levels over a period of time, there will then be enough information to review the effectiveness of your personal stress management plan. The review process simply asks the following questions:

Reviewing a stress management plan:

- ▶ Are there any patterns to when stressful situations occur?
- ▶ Are the strategies to reduce stress working?
- ▶ Are the preventative strategies working?
- ▶ Has my stress response improved?
- ▶ Has my stress management improved?
- ▶ Which strategies work best?
- ▶ Am I you coping better?
- ▶ What needs to be improved?

Example

Monitor and review the effectiveness of stress management strategies

After Gabriella implements her stress management plan she decides to monitor it for a month to see if it is working. She decides to use a rating scale and notices that over the month, her results gradually change for the better. She also notices that her peak stress times are in the morning after she starts work and that initially she feels stressed until she leaves work for the day. She also didn't completely relax. However, by the end of the month after implementing strategies to prevent, reduce and manage her stress, she not only didn't become as stressed, but was also able to control her responses and feel much more relaxed. Gabriella feels that her stress management plan is having a positive effect so far.

The following shows her average ratings per week:

	Day 1	End of Week 1	End of Week 2	End of Week 3	End of Week 4
Scale: 1 = highly stressed and 6 = completely relaxed					
6.30 am	3	3	4	4	5
9.30 am	1	1	2	3	3
1.00 pm	1	1	2	3	4
5.00 pm	2	2	3	3	4
6.45 pm	3	3	3	4	5
10.30 pm	4	4	5	5	6

Practice task 9

1. List two reasons why you should monitor the effectiveness of your stress management plan.

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2. List three methods of monitoring the effectiveness of a stress management plan.

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3. What should you look for when reviewing a stress management plan?

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[Click to complete Practice task 9](#)

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.

Example

Adjust strategies not meeting the desired outcome

Mehmet was totally committed to his stress management plan. He had made changes to his lifestyle by reducing his alcohol intake, walking each night after work and eating less takeaway food. Although he is feeling better overall, his stress responses haven't improved and it takes him a long time to feel calm and in control again after a stressful incident.



Mehmet tries a few new strategies but a month later, is still not coping any better than before, and now he was starting to feel frustrated as well.

Realising he needs someone else to help him, Mehmet makes an appointment with his organisation's Employee Assistance Program, who refer him for regular counselling sessions. It turns out that Mehmet needs to talk about his feelings instead of bottling them up inside. By having regular sessions, he can 'unload' his emotions and then go to work without feeling weighed down.

A month later Mehmet's stress responses have reduced and he once again feels in control.

Practice task 10

1. Why is it important to adjust strategies in a stress management plan if they are not working?

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2. What does adjusting your plan mean?

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3. What should you do after you make a change to a plan or introduce a new strategy?

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Click to complete Practice task 10

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

We have already discussed internal and external options and resources for additional support. The benefit of internal options include that they are usually provided by the workplace at no cost to the worker. However, not all workplaces have the resources to offer the same support, and external options may work better for some people.

The following are examples of possible internal supports: counsellors or social workers; health and wellbeing programs that include benefits such as financial planning sessions, workplace massage, walking groups, exercise classes and discount gym memberships; Employee Assistance Programs; and debriefing sessions conducted by trained staff.



The external options discussed included community health centres, psychologists, external counselling services and general practitioners (GPs) who may refer to other professionals. A GP may also be able to provide information on other programs in the community such as relaxation classes including yoga and guided meditation.

Access support

If a stress management plan isn't working and several strategies and options have been trialled, it may be time to seek additional support. Similarly, new situations may arise that are causing stress and what has worked before, is not working now. No matter what the situation, there are many options to choose from and there is always help available.

Ironically, 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. Using, monitoring and reviewing a stress management plan will help the person to take control and access the help they require.

Internal support options

Some of the internal options for support are described here.

Colleagues

- ▶ Having a chat with colleagues during work breaks, while working together and sharing feelings can be very therapeutic. Sometimes other colleagues may be experiencing or have experienced similar feelings and may have some new strategies to suggest that worked for them. Even just the act of 'unloading' can help reduce stress.

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.

Psychologists and psychiatrists

Psychologists and psychiatrists – A GP is generally the person who refers to a medical professional such as a psychologist or psychiatrist. The main difference between these two professionals is that a psychiatrist also has a medical degree and can prescribe medication. However, psychologists usually work closely with their patient's GP or psychiatrist so medication can be prescribed, if needed. The cost of seeing a psychologist or psychiatrist can be prohibitive for many people. However, a GP can determine if a person is eligible for a Mental Health Plan where you receive up to 10 free allied health services per year.

Community support organisations

Community support organisations – the internet provides access to many useful websites with information and strategies on how to deal with stress. Here are some such organisations:

- ▶ Lifeline – a national charity providing all Australians experiencing a personal crisis with access to 24-hour crisis support and suicide prevention services
- ▶ Sane – mental illness help centre providing information, guidance and referral
- ▶ beyondblue – a support service for people with depression and anxiety
- ▶ Counselling online – a drug and alcohol counselling online, information, support and referral service

Example

Access internal or external options and resources for additional support

Grace has recently commenced work in a palliative care facility. At morning tea break, she tells Jen, another worker, that she is scared of experiencing and seeing her first death as she has never experienced the death of anyone before.

Grace has been assigned to care for John who is in the final stages of early onset dementia at the age of 53. To prepare Grace, Jen explains what may happen and the feelings and emotions Grace may experience. Jen also explains the type of support that is available if she needs it.

At first Grace is okay when John, who she has been caring for over the last three weeks, passes away, but after a couple of weeks, Grace finds that she often cries when she gets home from work and has difficulty concentrating on other tasks at home. Grace also becomes extremely fearful of other people she cares for dying, and spends a lot of time checking up on them. This causes her to run behind in her other work duties and her colleagues begin to become impatient with her, as it is a rule that all staff leave the shift together. With Grace constantly running behind, the other staff members are having to pick up the load so they can all leave on time.

Grace goes to her supervisor to talk about the experiences she is having. The supervisor refers Grace to their EAP to assist Grace to talk through her emotions. Jen is appointed as a mentor until Grace feels she can manage her emotions and work responsibilities.



Practice task 11

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

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2. What is an EAP?

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

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[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.

Learning checkpoint 3

Evaluate stress reducing strategies

This learning checkpoint allows you to review your skills and knowledge in evaluating stress reducing strategies.

1. What type of information is required when documenting to monitor the effectiveness of a stress management plan?

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2. List three questions you could ask when reviewing the effectiveness of a stress management plan.

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3. If a strategy is not working, what should you do?

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4. What are three options or resources for internal support in the workplace?

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5. What are three options or resources for external support in the workplace?

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