

# Stress risk assessments: the need-to- knows





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Don't get stressed about stress!

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) says that stress is an adverse reaction someone might have to excessive pressure or other demands. It's important to remember that pressure can be a good thing and create a bit of a buzz – or diamonds, as they say – but when that pressure becomes a bit too much, stress can set in.

Work-related stress is sadly really common among the UK working population, and it's not exclusive to any particular sectors, jobs or industries.

Around **11 million working days are lost per year due to stress, depression and anxiety** – which can cause major financial losses, low morale, a decline in productivity, more accidents and make workplace disputes more likely.

So, what do you need to do as an employer to fight stress head on? Let's take a look...

## What does the law say?

Employers have a legal duty to protect employees from stress at work. This is covered in several pieces of Health & Safety Legislation:

- **The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999** – to assess the risk of stress-related ill health arising from work activity.
- **The Health and Safety at Work Act 1974** – measures to control the risk of stress.
- **The Safety Representatives and Safety Committees Regulations 1977** and **The Health and Safety (Consultation with Employees) Regulations 1996** – by law employers must consult employees on Health & Safety matters.

### Did you know?

Employers have a **legal duty to protect employees from stress** at work by doing a risk assessment and acting on it.



## Important

Under the **Equality Act 2010**, if a physical or mental condition causes “substantial and long-term adverse effect on an individual’s ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities” it’s considered a disability.

## Stress risk assessments

When it comes to spotting the signs of stress and doing everything you can to mitigate the risk of stress in your business, conducting a thorough stress risk assessment in consultation with your employees and then implementing control measures is essential.

As with other types of risk assessment, if you have fewer than five employees you don’t have a legal obligation to write down your stress risk assessments. But it’s best practice to do this so they’re easy to review if something ever changes, and keeping written record makes it easy for your people to access the information.

If you have five or more employees, you are required by law to write the risk assessment down.



## HSE’s Management Standards

The HSE has developed six Management Standards, which categorise sources of stress into groups to help employers where the stress risks in their business may be. They are:



**Demands** - this includes issues such as workload, including tight deadlines, work patterns and the work environment.



**Control** - how much say someone has in the way they do their work.



**Support** - this includes the encouragement, sponsorship and resources provided by the organisation, line management and colleagues.



**Relationships** - does your business promote positive working to avoid conflict and how effectively do you deal with unacceptable behaviour.



**Role** - do people understand their role within your business?



**Change** - how do you manage organisation change? Do you communicate and manage this effectively with your people?

You can use the HSE’s Management Standard as a guide to help you easily spot sources of workplace stress. You then need to decide who might be at risk in your organisation, record your evaluation in a stress risk assessment and create a plan to tackle those risks.



# Spotting the signs of stress

People feel stress when they feel overwhelmed by the range of pressures they're facing. However, stress affects people differently - what might be stressful to one person, might not affect another. However, by learning to recognise the most common signs of stress, you will be able to take steps much earlier to manage stress in your workplace.

## Common signs of work-related stress include:

- ✓ Loss of motivation, commitment and confidence
- ✓ Arriving late for work
- ✓ Being more tense or even nervous
- ✓ Mood swings
- ✓ Taking more time off work
- ✓ Change in appearance
- ✓ A general change in attitude and behaviour
- ✓ Increase in emotional reactions e.g. more tearful, sensitive or reactive

## How to help employees dealing with work-related stress

If an employee confides in you or one of your managers that they're suffering from work-related stress, there are a few things you need to consider as an employer:

Do you have an **up to date stress risk assessment** that both you and your employee can refer to?

Are your managers **trained to spot the signs of stress** and are they comfortable discussing the issue with your employees?

Can you **make changes to their role, working environment, hours, job role etc** to help them through a period of stress?

If an employee is currently off work with stress, can you facilitate **a phased return to work** to help them settle back in at a manageable pace?

When an employee returns, will you conduct **a return-to-work interview**? Can you update your risk assessment to reflect any changes in how you manage stress in your workplace, and communicate that with your wider team?