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A guide to managing stress, burnout & absenteeism in the workplace.

Supporting your employees mental and emotional health.





Mental Health problems are often invisible to the naked eye, making it hard to recognise when someone is suffering. If left unattended, these problems can become debilitating, leading to further problems such as stress, burnout and absenteeism.

Over recent years, many organisations have reported a spike in mental health problems within their workforce. This increase is echoed by the current demand for mental health support.

Here at Health Assured, we've seen a 26% increase in calls to our mental health helpline from 2019-2022.

As an employer, you have a responsibility to support the health and wellbeing of your employees. That's why we've created this guide. To help your organisation tackle these issues, specifically stress, burnout, and absenteeism.

We'll start by describing each of these issues, how they impact your employees - and how your organisation can work to manage and even prevent them from occurring.



What is stress?

Stress is the body's natural response to pressure. This pressure can originate from any life situation or event – and the associated response can be physical or emotional. Even positive life changes such as a promotion, purchasing a new house, or the birth of a child can produce stress.

Stress can develop in any job, even if you love your work. The workplace is full of potentially stressful situations, with deadlines, busy periods and big projects being a standard part of work life.

A build-up of stress can have negative consequences for employees ranging from fatigue to lack of motivation and anxiety. Your organisation must not overlook workplace stress, as it can undermine employee engagement and impact your employee's ability to work effectively.

As an employer, you need to create a working environment that inspires employees to work hard and enjoy coming to work every day. As a result, your organisation must work on counteracting stress, giving your employees a chance to feel motivated and re-energised.

Common signs of work-related stress

Continued high-stress levels can seriously impact your employees' physical and emotional health. And while stress is a common problem in the workplace, the symptoms vary from person to person. With that in mind, it's imperative that you can recognise some of the common signs/symptoms of stress. These include:

- ✓ Reduced focus and concentration
- ✓ Lack of confidence
- ✓ Mood swings
- ✓ Tightness in the chest
- ✓ Gaining or losing weight
- ✓ An increase in alcohol and drug intake
- ✓ Increased fatigue

These issues are not exclusively work-related - employees may experience them because of external factors. However, regardless of the source, stress can affect every aspect of the individual's life: personal and professional.



How to reduce employee stress in the workplace?

When an employee is dealing with stress, it can be hard to provide the right help. From time to time, nearly all people will have experiences with unwanted stress. While stress is nothing to be ashamed of, it is necessary to help your employees cope with and manage it. Here are some tips to help reduce employee stress:

1. Stress management training

These workshops are designed to educate your employees about stress. After a stress management workshop, your employees will be able to identify the physical and emotional symptoms such as increased irritability, lack of concentration, loss of appetite, regular headaches etc. By recognising these signs earlier, your managers can offer stress relief activities to help resolve these issues.

2. Introduce workplace wellness schemes.

Exercise and a healthy lifestyle are imperative when combating work-related stress. Employee wellness schemes, such as gym classes or promoting healthy eating, are a great way to help employees unwind and feel better about their health and wellbeing.

3. Create social activity.

Employees spend a lot of time with their co-workers, so it's important that they get along with each other. The more people enjoy their time at work, the better the atmosphere will be – and a better office atmosphere leads to higher levels of productivity, creativity and collaboration. Setting aside an hour to bring your team together in a fun environment can help reduce employee stress and boost team morale.

4. Communicate with employees

Open communication is critical in leadership; keeping employees up to date regarding changes, expectations, and performance not only keeps them on track but also reduces feelings of stress and anxiety.

Open communication is a two-way relationship; the more employers converse with employees, the more likely employees are to share concerns, ideas, and thoughts. This communication helps create stronger working relationships and a healthier overall company culture.

5. Celebrate awareness days

By arranging staff fundraising for charities on specific awareness days, you are helping your employees manage their stress levels. By taking the focus off their stress-related issues, you're encouraging your workforce to shift their attention to helping others less fortunate than them themselves.



What is burnout?

Burnout is a state of mental, physical, and emotional exhaustion. But these signs aren't always easy to spot, especially if you've been under stress for some time. Burnout affects everyone differently. There's no one cause. But generally, external events tend to trigger burnout. Some potential causes include:

- ✔ Job demands
- ✔ High-pressure environment
- ✔ Too many responsibilities
- ✔ Emotionally demanding situations
- ✔ Neglecting own needs (sleep, healthy diet, hydration)

The signs and symptoms of burnout

The symptoms of burnout can creep up on you when you least expect them. But when you can recognise the early signs, they are easier to address. So, keep an eye out for the below signs/symptoms in your employees:

- ✔ Feelings of emptiness
- ✔ Trouble sleeping or fatigue
- ✔ Becoming irritated easily
- ✔ Changes in appetite
- ✔ Difficulty concentrating
- ✔ Sense of failure and self-doubt
- ✔ Loss of motivation
- ✔ Isolating from others
- ✔ Headaches

At its worst, burnout can leave employees out of action for weeks, needing time to rest, recuperate and recover. And one of the trickiest parts about it? Burnout tends to hit employees like a brick wall. Suddenly, they are exhausted and unable to go on anymore. That's why you need to try and stay attuned to your employee's mental-emotional state and become aware of what you need to do to support them.



How to prevent employee burnout?

You can do many things at work to prevent your employees from burning out: vary the work type, monitor workloads, and offer help with work/life balance – these are all effective measures.

But in the current circumstances, the best way is to remind employees of the time they're entitled to spend on themselves and their families. After all, 2023 continues to bring stressors from virtually everywhere, not just work.

1. Promote rest and recuperation

Though it may seem counterintuitive, promoting deliberate rest has been shown to enhance creativity and innovation in the workplace. By encouraging employees to take annual leave, you can help prevent burnout and exhaustion. Even just taking a week off to sit in the garden, exercise or watch your favourite television show. These small moments of relaxation offer opportunities for your employees to refresh, recharge, and reset. So, they can then return to work feeling rested and more optimistic.

2. Prioritising workloads

In a busy office environment, stress often occurs because of situations that fall beyond the employees' control, for example, a deadline moving forward. In this instance, employees tend to adopt a frantic approach to their work to get everything done at once. To prevent this, you can encourage your workers to focus on things they can control and create to-do lists that prioritise their workload rather than becoming overwhelmed.



3. Set realistic deadlines

In a recent survey, we asked employers what they expect to have the biggest impact on employee mental health in 2023. 91.8% of people are concerned about rising prices, listing it as the biggest threat to employee mental health in 2023. This was followed by workload/working long hours (53.4%).

As a result, setting realistic deadlines is essential to looking after the mental health of your workforce. By setting realistic deadlines, employees can complete their work during office hours, preventing employees from working longer hours or taking work home, thus reducing the chance of employee burnout.

4. Recognise success

Research shows that a toxic workplace culture can lead to an increase in employee burnout. As a result, your organisation must create an environment where staff feel valued for their hard work.

Employee recognition involves praising and acknowledging employees for their hard work and dedication. The importance of employee recognition in the workplace often gets underestimated, but many positive outcomes occur, such as increased engagement and improved team morale. As a result, regular employee recognition helps your staff feel valued and reduces the threat of burnout.

5. Encourage self-care

Self-care can help cultivate feelings of self-compassion and release tension in the body. It's important to encourage your employees to take care of themselves by promoting healthy habits such as exercise, healthy eating, and mindfulness techniques. These moments of self-care offers employees a chance to relax and reconnect, It can also help challenge negative thinking and prevent future worries.



Absenteeism

Do you have an employee who seems never to be around? One that's conveniently sick every Monday or has many unplanned days off? That's absenteeism - meaning someone who habitually avoids work for no reason.

There are many different potential causes - the absentee could suffer low morale. They may not be enjoying the job. The environment could be chipping away at their mental health. There are countless potential reasons. And not everyone knows how to address them or how to reduce absenteeism.

What are the causes of absenteeism?

It's different for everyone. But some common causes are:

- ✔ Illness and injury: specifically when the absence isn't reported beforehand.
- ✔ Bullying: no one wants to spend time in a place with their aggressor.
- ✔ Lack of engagement: boredom and dissatisfaction are distracting.
- ✔ Childcare issues: these can be unpredictable.
- ✔ Stress: along with anxiety, a major cause of absence.
- ✔ Burnout: working too hard can backfire.

How to manage absenteeism in the workplace?

Of course, if absenteeism is high in your organisation, you'll want to tackle it. There's no one way of knowing how to reduce absenteeism at work. But there are a few things you can do:

- ✓ Measure it: record all unauthorised absences and highlight this to senior leadership.
- ✓ Offer flexibility: if people know they can take the working patterns they need, you can help prevent these absences.
- ✓ Have a clear absence policy: if your policy is unclear, people might take advantage.
- ✓ Be understanding: not all unplanned absence is malicious – consider genuine reasons.

If you've taken all the steps you can, and someone is still persistently absent with no justification, you may need to take further measures. Acas is an invaluable resource, which can take you through the steps of disciplining staff for any reason, and they provide a written warning template for absenteeism.

Conclusion

From each of the previous sections, it becomes apparent the importance of protecting the mental health of your employees, not only for their safety but also for the sake of your organisation.

Stress, burnout and absenteeism are closely connected. For example, when employees are dealing with high-stress levels, they are more likely to become tired and thus burnt out. As a result, employees become so overwhelmed that they take unplanned absences.

These unplanned absences cause employees to become even more stressed as they miss deadlines, creating a vicious cycle where your employees suffer - and so does your organisation.

If you wish to create a working environment where employees feel comfortable, secure and able to thrive, you must take these problems seriously. And thus, put the necessary measures in place to prevent them from occurring.

Here's what their HR teams had to say...

"Abigail at Health Assured has been really helpful, thorough and responsive through the set-up of the service. The promotional content is excellent and the EAP looks very comprehensive. We are very much looking forward to launching Health Assured's EAP at Christies." Christies Care Limited

Here's what their employees had to say...

"I was in such a dark place but Jim my counsellor helped me through that dark into the light. I can't thank him enough. I didn't want to do counselling as I thought it was a waste of time, but I'm so glad I did. I'm almost back to myself. Didn't think I'd ever recover from my ordeal, but here I am and I'm smiling. Brilliant service and I will definitely recommend." – Service user

Health Assured can help you tackle employee wellbeing head-on. You can start supporting your employees' mental health for **less than a cup of coffee per month.**

Get in touch with us to start improving workplace wellbeing today:



0800 470 0237



<https://www.healthassured.org/request-a-demo>

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