

## Managing Stress During a Pandemic

Many employees will be facing additional stresses at home. Organisations are not expected to resolve everyone's personal issues, but it is important to keep aware of a team member's situation and how a pandemic might create enhanced stress levels.

Organisations can help reduce pressure caused by the current situation around COVID-19 by:

- Establishing regular, open communication
- Rotating job roles through high and low-stress activities
- Allowing flexible working or adjusting work patterns so that those caring for others can juggle home and work responsibilities
- Using a buddy system to provide support
- Listening to concerns and suggestions from employees (both operational and personal) and feedback actions
- Making sure staff are aware of mental health support services or employee assistance programmes provided by the organisation
- Encouraging breaks, and leading by example
- Maintaining a sense of purpose, calm and normality wherever possible — when people face a lot of uncertainty, having a clear direction and some certainty is reassuring
- Helping staff stay positive by recognising the situation, acknowledging what staff are managing to achieve and providing encouragement
- Being mindful of those who have had to change tasks — consider teaming them up with a more experienced member of staff and check that they feel they have had enough training

Remember managers are not immune from stress. Leadership should set realistic expectations. A caring and understanding mentality at board level will filter down.

Measures include having fair and consistent HR policies, supporting and providing positive, honest and regular communication, acting to keep employees safe, and re-appraising priorities and targets.

## Staff working from home

Many people who are office based will currently be working from home, which can cause additional pressures:

- *Isolation* - When people are not used to working away from the workplace, or live on their own, loneliness can be an issue
- *Distractions* — People need a continuous period of time in which to work. This is not always understood by others, who might not appreciate the impact of small distractions. Employees trying to manage home schooling or caring duties might find this aspect of home working particularly difficult.
- *Lack of structure* — an absence of boundaries about when to stop and start working can be hard for people to manage at first. They may feel like they have to be available all the time to prove that they are working. Some may also work well into the night, which can cause disruption to sleep due to not having enough time to “switch off” and too much blue light exposure

Consider the following actions:

- Help team members establish a routine. Agree a clear work schedule that fits in with their needs and keep this under review
- Understand the difficulties faced by team members; “business as usual” is unlikely to be an option for everyone.
- Agree with team members how to communicate, bearing in mind individual requirements as well as your needs as a manager — for teams usually working together in an office, a daily conference call is a good starting point
- Talk team members through finding a suitable place to work that allows them to avoid distractions. This could be included as part of any display screen equipment check
- Encourage team members to stay connected