Staff wellbeing & Stress Management

Participants’ Handout

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This manual has been prepared for workshops participants of L4C partner organizations and institutions.

Each chapter consists of two elements:

“Background information”: Here you find short explanations and concepts that help you better understand psychosocial wellbeing and stress management

“Practical tools”: These are activities you can do with your colleagues to raise their awareness on psychosocial wellbeing at the workplace. You can do them in short sessions, e.g. during staff meetings, or in a longer workshop. The activities were developed for The that were developed for sessions with max. 25-30 participants
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Understanding our work environment

A. Introduction to Staff Wellbeing

The time we spend at work is a huge part of our lives. Therefore, the workplace has become a major factor in our general health and well-being. Our experiences at work are important because they affect, inter alia:

- Our self-esteem – how we feel about ourselves and others
- Our relationships – how we interact with our work colleagues, families and friends
- How we use our leisure time and
- How anxious we are about the future

At the same time, staff health and well-being have a significant effect on organizational performance, employee engagement, staff retention and the general work environment or culture.

Human beings have various needs that affect their well-being. These needs are also relevant in the working context. Organizations and institutions need to consider the rights and needs of staff in order to enhance their wellbeing and to help staff with different working styles, to work together in both the healthiest and most productive way possible. Staff needs include:

- Physical needs e.g. food, shelter, health office space, health care, safety, etc.
- Emotional needs e.g. love, affection, appreciation, acknowledgement, comfort, etc.
- Social needs e.g. friendship, interaction, acceptance, family, community and work related networks/structures, recreational activities for social bonding, etc.
- Spiritual needs e.g. belief/value systems, instilling good moral values and affiliation, etc.
- Economic needs e.g. absence of extreme poverty, assured means of livelihoods, etc.
- Political/Association needs e.g. participation in decision-making, tolerance, equality, etc.
- Mental needs e.g. education, cognitive development Promoting and improving staff emotional health and well-being is about more than healthy living initiatives, staff benefits or staff counseling.

In brief, staff well-being is a subjective state that takes into account a range of needs that a person may experience - physical, social, emotional, environmental etc. - within the context of the workplace.
Staff health and well-being should be part of organizational priorities and objectives and be thought about and taken into account during day-to-day activities and decision making.

The well-being agenda needs to be firmly embedded across all levels and aspects of the organization, with shared responsibility: Leadership has an important role in shaping the organizational structure and culture; teams in improving relational aspects; while the individuals need to practice self-care. (Working differently working together)

B. Consequences of a negative working environment

Job uncertainty, pressure to meet deadlines and high work expectations are some of the things that we can experience in our daily work life.

They can affect the wellbeing of the organization, teams and individuals, with a potential negative impact on:

- Staff motivation and productivity
- Client relations (i.e. with staff, partners, impact group members, other stakeholders etc.).
- Staff relations
- Job performance
- Efficiency of leadership
- Work-life balance

Anyone who experiences the physical, social, and emotional reactions above could benefit from some sort of psychosocial support. People who have experienced difficulties, such as the loss of dear ones, jobs or property; who experience job insecurity, physical and sexual violence or other rights violations; who endure high stress living conditions, for example in challenging duty stations far from their families, require particular attention.

Many times organizations address physical symptoms. Body pain complaints, loss of energy, sleep problems, sicknesses and the like can be tended to. They can be screened and managed. Social, psychological and emotional reactions, however, are more difficult to demonstrate and to address. Even if they are identified, they are often given low or no priority. Yet they negatively affect the well-being of the individuals, teams and organizations, thus depriving an individual of his/her right to enjoy life to the greatest extent.
Below is a list of possible consequences of a negative working environment on individuals.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PHYSICAL</th>
<th>SOCIAL</th>
<th>EMOTIONAL/ PSYCHOLOGICAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Headaches</td>
<td>• Inability to relate well with others</td>
<td>• Depression</td>
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<td>• Loss of energy</td>
<td>• Risk-taking behaviors, such as alcohol</td>
<td>• Anxiety</td>
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<td>• Loss of appetite, which may lead to ulcers</td>
<td>or substance abuse</td>
<td>• Nightmares</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Irregular menstrual cycles</td>
<td>• Feeling of isolation</td>
<td>• Irritability or outbursts of anger</td>
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<tr>
<td>• General body pain</td>
<td>• Increased risk of and number of conflicts</td>
<td>• Frustration</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Psychosomatic complaints, i.e. physical complaints such as body pains, headaches, appetite problems, and weight loss or weight gains that cannot be medically explained</td>
<td>• Rejection by peers (social stigma)</td>
<td>• Low self esteem</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Physical complaints, i.e. physical</td>
<td>• Feelings of guilt and shame</td>
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<td></td>
<td>complaints such as body pains, headaches,</td>
<td>• Difficulties in concentrating</td>
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<td></td>
<td>appetite problems, and weight loss or</td>
<td>• Fear, hopelessness and helplessness</td>
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<td></td>
<td>weight gains that cannot be medically</td>
<td>• Mood swings</td>
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<td>• Sleep problems</td>
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<td>• Psychosomatic complaints, i.e. physical</td>
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<td>weight gains that cannot be medically</td>
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<td></td>
<td>explained</td>
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</table>

If there is no relief or support to serious psychosocial reactions, a vicious cycle might start and reactions might intensify, as illustrated by the graph below:

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C. Key terms of psychosocial support work

There are a few key terms, which are frequently used in psychosocial support work. This chapter provides some of the key definitions.

Psychosocial

The term ‘psychosocial’ underlines the interdependent relationship between psychological and social effects of an event:

**Psycho** refers to the psyche or the «soul» of a person.
It has to do with the inner world – with feelings, thoughts, desires, beliefs and values and how we perceive ourselves and others.

**Social** refers to the relationships and environment of an individual.
It includes not only the material world but also the social and cultural context in which people live, ranging from the intricate network of their relationships to manifold cultural expressions to the community and the state. The inner world (psycho) and the outer world (social) influence each other. In short, «psychosocial» deals with the well-being of individuals in relation to their environment.  

**Psychosocial**: A change in our social world or environment produces an emotional and behavioral response in us. This influences how others interact with us as well as how we relate to our environment and those in it. There is a dynamic relationship between psychological and social effects of experiences. They are continually influencing each other:

![Psychosocial diagram]

The term ‘psychosocial’ is used to explain the way psychological and social aspects of a person are inseparable, with each continuously influencing the other so that it is impossible to isolate one from the other.


3 Ibid, p. 18.
**Psychosocial Support (PSS)**

Psychosocial support is the total help given to an individual or communities which takes into account the psychological (or unseen aspects) of a person and his or her social life. It gives the individual skills to cope with stress or difficult situations, but also the emotional intelligence/energy to act which is usually a precondition, inter alia, for participation. Psychosocial Support (PSS) can be described as an integrated ongoing process of meeting a person’s physical, social, emotional, economical, mental, and spiritual needs, all of which are considered essential for meaningful, positive human development and co-existence.

Psychosocial support allows individuals to develop a sense of self-worth, belonging and helps them acknowledge that they are valuable individuals who can develop life skills, participate in society, and have faith for the future. Psychosocial support strengthens individuals and communities in dealing with the challenges they may face and ensures their continued wellbeing, in times of difficulty.

**Psychosocial support interventions and programs**

These are activities, or services organized and provided in order to strengthen the everyday care and support provided in trusting relationships.

Psychosocial support interventions can include activities like:
- Counseling, or supportive relationships
- Support groups, male mentorship groups, women’s support groups, Village or counseling groups, church groups etc.
- Succession planning and memory work, e.g. to deal with death and losses
- Recreational engagement groups
- Groups like Savings and Loans Associations (VSLA) can also be for a for psychosocial support

**Psychosocial wellbeing**

Psychosocial wellbeing is about the connections between the individual, family, community and society (“social”). It is about how an individual feels and thinks about him/herself and about life (“psycho”). It is often linked to the African concept of “Ubuntu” – “I am, because we are and we are because I am”. Such wellbeing includes many different aspects of life, such as physical and material aspects, psychological, social, cultural and spiritual aspects. The focus of psychosocial wellbeing is not just on the individual, but also on households, families and communities.

Key elements of psychosocial wellbeing at community level have been defined as:

*from: CARE Österreich 2013: To be Well at Heart: Conflict-Affected Women’s Perceptions of Psychosocial Well-Being*
PRACTICAL TOOLS FROM THE WORKSHOP TO SHARE WITH YOUR COLLEAGUES

The following activities will help your colleagues to:

- Understand the work environment
- Understand psychological and social needs of individuals, especially in the work place.
- Appreciate the importance of organizational psychosocial wellbeing
- Understand psychosocial well-being and how it relates to individuals, teams and organizations
- Reflect on psychosocial support terminologies.

Understanding our environment of work (Role Play, 1h)

Organize the participants in 2 groups and give them 10-20 minutes to prepare a role play on

- Group A: a difficult work environment (what behaviors, conditions manifest in such an environment? What would make it difficult?)
- Group B: a positive work environment (what behaviors, conditions manifest in such an environment? What would make it positive?)

After the role play, ask the groups to go back in their groups to discuss the individual, collective and organizational aspects that make up the work place. Share the results in the plenary and discuss the connection between the three levels (organization – team – individual).

Understanding our environment of work! (Story Telling, 45min)

The participants sit in a circle. Start a story about a stressful day at work and ask the participants to contribute to it. You can start for instance with: “One morning, I run into the office, still sweating and swearing because, as usual, I got stuck in the traffic jam. I throw my bag in the corner and start to work glued on the computer without even looking left or right…..” Then ask the person next to you to continue so that everybody in the circle makes a statement. If participants cannot find ideas of how to advance the story, you can always introduce a new thread, for instance: “At the same time I am still worrying about personal obligations, my parents are sick and need my attention ….” Or: “Sitting in the 4th meeting of the day, my back hurts, my eyes pain…”

How you start the story depends on the participants. For participants working in the field, for instance, you could start as follows: “In the morning as I report to work, I am worried of the situation of a very sick and desperate client I met yesterday. The whole evening I was distracted thinking about what to do about her. So I start work early but very tired.”

After the story ask participants to split into three groups. One group will discuss ‘individual’, the second ‘collective’ and the third ‘organizational’ aspects that make up the work place. Let them share the results in the plenary. Share the results in the plenary and discuss the connection between the three levels (organization – team – individual).

What are consequences of a difficult work environment? (Speed Dating, 45min)

Ask your colleagues to sit in an inner and an outer circle, both circles facing each other. Tell them that they will have about 4 minutes to talk about their experiences on a specific topic. The persons in the outer circle should start, then after about 2 minutes you will indicate that the inner circle should share their point of view. Ask the participants to share in pairs about: “Imagine a situation where you experienced challenges at the workplace. Share what happened. What physical reactions did you have?” Then ask the outer circle to move one seat to the right and ask the participants to share in pairs about: “Imagine a similar or different situation where you were exposed to challenges at the workplace. Were there any social consequences you experienced?” Finally, ask the outer circle to move again one seat to the right and ask the participants to share in pairs about emotional reactions they may have experienced or witnessed as a result of challenges at the workplace. Allow 2-3 couples to share their insights after each round,
but without going into details of the story and only with their partner’s permission to share. Later, discuss the different consequences identified in the smaller groups in the plenary.

**What measures to take? (Brainstorming, 15min)**

Based on the reflections above, ask your colleagues to brainstorm on measures that can be taken to improve wellbeing at the workplace. What can you do as individuals, what can teams do, what would be measures to be taken at organizational and structural level?

**Psychosocial Vocabulary (Group work, 45min)**

Form three groups. Each will get one term:
- Group 1: Psychosocial well-being
- Group 2: Psychosocial
- Group 3: Psychosocial support and care
The groups will have 10 -15 minutes to discuss definitions of the term and how they can be applied to the workplace. Then, they share and discuss the definitions in the plenary.
A. Introduction to stress

We spend much of our lives at work, so it is perhaps unsurprising that the workplace is a key source of stress. Workers at all levels feel stressed out, insecure, and misunderstood. Many people feel that the demands of the workplace, combined with the demands at home, have become too much to handle. This session explores the causes of such stress, and suggests general and specific stress management strategies that people can use every day.

Staff working in humanitarian or certain development contexts are particularly susceptible to stress. Humanitarian aid workers can be exposed to severely stressful situations which include human rights atrocities and violence and working under conditions of hardship combined with high work demands. In recent years, aid workers have increasingly become the direct targets of intentional violence, and numerous reports have documented the escalating risks to the security of aid workers in many countries. Similarly, development workers’ interaction with victims of GBV abuse or other life-threatening situations can take a profound emotional toll.

**Stress** is a condition or feeling experienced when an individual perceives that demands exceed his or her personal and social resources to meet them.

**Work-related stress** is “a pattern of reactions that occurs when workers are presented with work demands not matched to their knowledge, skills or abilities and which challenge their ability to cope”.

In short, we experience stress when we feel ‘out of our depth’.

Everyone encounters stressful situations on an almost daily basis, from minor pressures that we hardly notice, to occasional traumatic situations, which can cause ongoing stress. Stress is our mental, physical, and behavioral

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4 Raising Awareness of Stress at Work in Developing Countries, World Health Organisation (WHO), 2007, p. 13
response to something that could threaten our safety or wellbeing. Too much stress can result in serious physical, psychological, interpersonal, or performance problems. Too little stress, however, can also lead us to be being passive and unproductive.

This also means that different people handle stress differently in different situations: you will handle stress better if you are confident in your abilities, if you can change the situation to take control, and if you feel that you have the help and support you need to do a good job.

A “stressor” is something that puts real or perceived demands on your physical, emotional, or spiritual self. Stressors can be positive or negative. Often, we are not aware of which form our stress takes.

**Positive Stress** is experienced when a stressor leads to an improvement in your overall performance and productivity.

**Positive stress** is usually the outcome of a positive attitude towards a stressor (being proactive), good time management practices, and effective prioritizing of one’s activities (putting first things first). Good news, or an unexpected benefit, can also lead to a positive stress experience. Positive stress can have several benefits include: increased creativity, higher productivity, improved self-esteem, and better health.

Whilst positive stress has excellent benefits for your life, it is important to note that positive stress depletes the body’s reserves just as much as negative stress does. Over-exposing yourself to positive stressors without effectively managing your stress, can transform positive stress into negative stress, thereby inducing exhaustion.

**Negative Stress** occurs when individuals’ stress thresholds are exceeded, thereby inhibiting or destroying individuals’ overall performance and productivity.

Negative stress is usually the outcome of a poor attitude towards a stressor (being reactive), poor time management practices, and failing to prioritize one’s activities. Sometimes, traumatic events can also lead to negative stress. Because you are over-stressed, your body’s ability to cope with the stressor declines at a much faster rate. This leads to an early onset of exhaustion.

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**Note**

- We tend to think of stress as a negative phenomenon that relates to pressure. In fact, stress is a neutral reaction to any change or challenge that requires one to do something in response. Varying life histories, work experience, personalities, and cultural backgrounds influence how a person reacts to new demands.
- We experience stress when we feel threatened, and when we believe that we do not have the resources to deal with a challenging situation. Over time, this can cause long-term health problems; and it can also affect the quality of our work and our productivity.
- The first requirement in supporting staff to manage stress is to acknowledge that their work is inherently stressful, and that feelings of distress are legitimate reactions to their experiences, rather than signs of personal weakness or lack of professionalism. It should also be noted that bottled-up feelings lead almost inevitably to burnout, and individuals need to feel confident to express doubts and distress and seek timely help without fear of affecting their jobs or reputations. They will only do so if acknowledgement of the stressful nature of their work is part of the culture of the organization or institution for which they work.

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5 [https://aderoeducation.wordpress.com/2012/05/30/positive-stress-negative-stress/](https://aderoeducation.wordpress.com/2012/05/30/positive-stress-negative-stress/)
B. Causes of Stress

It is important to recognize the causes of stress so that you can take steps to reduce stress levels where possible. Causes of stress can be categorized into three broad levels:

* **There are work-related causes** of stress. Some of these are:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COMMON CAUSES OF STRESS AT WORK</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Excessively high workloads, with unrealistic deadlines making people feel rushed, under pressure and overwhemed.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Insufficient workloads, making people feel that their skills are being under-utilized.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• A lack of control over work activities.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• A lack of interpersonal support or poor working relationships leading to a sense of isolation.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Being asked to do a job for which one has insufficient experience or training for.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Difficulty settling into a new promotion, both in terms of meeting the new role’s requirements and adapting to possible changes in relationships with colleagues.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Concerns about job security, lack of career opportunities, health care, or level of pay.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Bullying or harassment.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• A blame culture within your business where people are afraid to get things wrong or to admit to making mistakes. Lack of appreciation of work results.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Weak or ineffective management, which leaves employees feeling that they do not have a sense of direction. Or micro-management, which can leave employees feeling undervalued and with lower self-esteem.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Multiple reporting lines for employees, with each manager asking for their work to be prioritized.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Failure to keep employees informed about significant changes to the business, causing them uncertainty about their future.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• A poor physical working environment, e.g. excessive heat, cold or noise, inadequate lighting, uncomfortable seating, malfunctioning equipment, inadequate space for privacy or social spaces etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Conflict at work can also be a common area of stress.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Lack of flexibility in regard to working conditions, e.g. working hours</td>
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</table>

* **Personal life stresses** can also have a big impact. Examples of personal life stresses are:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COMMON CAUSES OF PERSONAL LIFE STRESSES</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• The death of a loved one</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Divorce</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Loss of a job</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Increase in financial obligations</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Getting married</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Moving to a new home</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Chronic illness or injury</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Emotional problems (e.g. depression, anxiety, anger, grief, guilt, low self-esteem)</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Taking care of an elderly or sick family member</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Traumatic event, such as a natural disaster, theft, rape, or violence against you or a loved one.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Defiant behaviors among family members</td>
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</table>

http://www.employment-solicitors.co.uk/Stress-at-Work-An-employers-guide#.W-mEqOKNy00
Sometimes the stress comes from the individual, rather than from external factors. All of these factors can lead to stress:

**COMMON CAUSES FOR STRESS FROM THE INDIVIDUAL**

- Fear and uncertainty. These feelings might be caused by work-related worries like upcoming deadlines or personal ones like the bills that need to be paid. However, also external risks like the threat of terrorist attacks, global warming, and political developments can cause you to feel stressed, especially when you feel like you have no control over those events.
- Attitudes and perceptions. How you view the world or a particular situation can determine whether it causes stress. For example, people who feel like they are doing a good job at work will be less stressed out by a big upcoming project than those who worry that they are incompetent.
- Unrealistic expectations.
- Change. Any major life change can be stressful -- even a happy event like a job promotion or winning the lottery. More unpleasant events, such as a major financial setback, or death in the family can be significant sources of stress.

C. Potential symptoms of stress at individual and team level

Stress impacts our ability to do our jobs effectively, and it affects how we work with other people. This can have a serious impact on our careers, and well as on our general wellbeing and relationships. Long-term stress can also cause conditions such as burnout, cardiovascular disease, stroke, depression, high blood pressure, and a weakened immune system.

Stress can cause changes in those experiencing it. It is important that everyone looks out for changes in a person's or a group's behavior. It may be that some action taken at an early stage will ease the stress and reduce or stop the symptoms.

In some cases there are clear signs that people are experiencing stress at work and if these can be identified early, action can be taken before the pressure becomes a problem. This may make it easier to reduce and eliminate the causes. Stress can show itself in many different ways. You are particularly looking for changes in the way people behave that could be linked with excessive pressures. However, everyone reacts to stress differently. Besides, some of the items in the list below may not be signs of stress if people always behave this way. Managers need to consider this and manage staff exhibiting signs of stress differently.

However, in many cases the changes may only be noticeable to the person subject to the stress. So it is also important to look at how you are feeling yourself and try to identify any potential issues you may have as early as possible and take positive action to address them. If you find that work or aspects of your work bring on or make these symptoms worse, raise the matter with a line manager, the HR department, a colleague or even a counselor for support. Mindfulness exercises can help you become aware of potential stress symptoms.

**Please note:**
It is not up to you or your managers to diagnose negative consequences of stress. If you or they are very worried about a person, recommend they see a counselor. Take care not to over react to small changes in behavior but if you recognize relevant changes take note of them. You and your managers need to act when these behavioral changes continue.
Signs of stress in individuals

If you are suffering from some of the following symptoms or observe that a colleague is experiencing them it may indicate that you are or she or he is feeling the effects of stress.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EMOTIONAL SYMPTOMS</th>
<th>PHYSICAL SYMPTOMS</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Negative or depressing feelings</td>
<td>- Frequent headaches</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Increased sensitivity - more tearful or sensitive or aggressive</td>
<td>- Low energy and fatigue</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Loneliness and isolation</td>
<td>- Stomach pain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Loss of motivation, commitment and confidence</td>
<td>- Cold or sweaty hands and feet.</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Mood swings</td>
<td>- Heartburn</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Irritability and angry episodes.</td>
<td>- Nausea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Difficulty concentrating.</td>
<td>- Panic attacks and agitation.</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Obsessive or compulsive behaviors.</td>
<td>- Excessive sleeping or insomnia.</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Confusion, indecision, poor memory</td>
<td>- Fatigue</td>
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</tbody>
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<tr>
<th>CHANGES FROM NORMAL BEHAVIOR</th>
<th>SIGNS OF STRESS IN A GROUP</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Changes in appetite</td>
<td>- Disputes and disaffection within the group</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Increased smoking, drinking or drugs</td>
<td>- Increase in staff turnover</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Mood swings affecting your behavior</td>
<td>- Increase in complaints and grievances</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Changes in sleep patterns</td>
<td>- Increased sickness absence</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Agitated, nervous behavior</td>
<td>- Increased reports of stress</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Changes in attendance such as arriving later or taking more time off.</td>
<td>- Difficulty in attracting new staff</td>
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<td>- Poor performance</td>
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<td>- Customer dissatisfaction or complaints</td>
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<td>- Social withdrawal or isolation.</td>
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D. Coping strategies

Although it is not possible to give one specific prescription for preventing work-related stress, it is possible to offer guidelines for the prevention of stress in organizations. As a basic foundation of an effective and productive workforce, organizations and institutions should aim at creating a work environment that allows staff to feel motivated, and satisfied by their work, with a sense of ownership over it, and a feeling that their job is secure. Leadership, teams and individuals can all contribute to an enhanced staff wellbeing.

Self-care is an important responsibility of every individual. It is most effective when approached proactively, not reactively. The basic elements of self-care can be summarized in form of an ABC:

- **Awareness** on one’s own feelings, emotions and reactions to stress
- **Balance** between work and life, allowing ourselves the time to rest and relax
- **Connection** with others and ourselves, cherishing and using social interactions
Prevention of work-related stress, however, is also an important task of each organization and institution. Since individuals have very personal ways of dealing with stress and organizations work in different contexts, the following coping strategies are just some suggestions and do not represent an exhaustive list.

**Personal Coping Strategies**

- Have awareness and acceptance of the existence of stress. Awareness and acceptance lead to positive coping with the situation.
- Take care of yourself – Take time out and be good to yourself, sleep enough, eat well, engage in physical exercise and/or restful and meditative activities, hobbies etc.
- Make work-life balance a priority – Set clear boundaries between home and work and look for real life satisfaction away from work. Make the necessary changes to enjoy quality time beyond work.
- Nurture supportive relationships outside work – connect with community, friends, etc to boost social life.
- Have a connection with other professionals and share professional issues with colleagues and supervisors. Build a network of professional connections.
- Develop a balance of professional skills (upgrade knowledge and skills).
- Guard against negative behaviors such as drug or alcohol abuse, etc.
- Seek guidance from a personal counselor or mentor, as and when necessary.
- Seek spiritual renewal in your life (depending on your own definition).
- Be a role model for others

**Team Coping Strategies**

- Accept that stress is part of our work environment and do not stigmatize team members who experience stress
- Pay attention to obvious changes in a team member’s behavior. Recommend she/he sees a counselor and/or inform the supervisor
- Teamwork and regular meetings with enough space to discuss issues and share problems.
- Strengthen relations and team spirit though team building activities, joint social events etc.
- Strengthen communication and conflict management skills
- Encourage support groups i.e. collegial or peer support

**Organizational Coping Strategies**

- Establish a culture that acknowledges stress as being part of work life
- Create a supportive work environment e.g. code of conduct, government policies, human resource policy etc. Human Resource policies, for instance, can have a big impact by ensuring adequate and equal pay, opportunities for home office, flex-time, parental leave, care leave, health provisions etc.
- Promote a responsive leadership style whereby leaders are able to both listen to and identify staff concerns / issues / problems
- Provide adequate supervision and consultation for staff (including access to critical incident stress management)
- Adopt an attitude of open communication/ transparence
- Culture of appreciation, acknowledgement and celebration of successes. Such recognition needs, of course, to be timely as well as accurate
- Set realistic goals and share vision/mission
- Clear roles and responsibilities (job description)
- Demonstrate how everybody contributes to the organization’s/institution’s successes
- Organize periodic annual retreats for staff with socialising activities
- Have an effective voice for staff in decisions that affect them.
- Provide resources for the comfort of staff e.g. incentives, teaching-learning materials, leave time, retreats, continuing education and forum for discussing work-related issues, sports activities, healthy work environment, breast-feeding or social corners.
- Make use of the existing knowledge in the organization. Managers and work groups, for instance, can turn to health-trained colleagues for advice on healthy eating choices at a given work site.
- Ensure that annual leave is given and taken by staff
- Initiate a Buddy System. People at all levels in the organization can be encouraged to pick a congenial and trustworthy colleague, discuss how each of them typically exhibits stress and fatigue, and agree to keep an eye on each other.
- Provide capacity development on technical skills but also for soft skills like communication, conflict management and resolution etc.
- Prepare a plan of action for critical incidents
- Ensure effective management of employee bereavement.

PRACTICAL TOOLS FROM THE WORKSHOP TO SHARE WITH YOUR COLLEAGUES

The following activities will help your colleagues to:

- Understand stress and how it manifests itself in everyday life. Understand that stress is an unavoidable part of everybody’s life.
- Explain factors that facilitate stress at workplace and in our personal life.
- Explore ways to manage work related stress
- Create an action plan for work, home, to help reduce and manage stress

How do you react to stress? (Speed dating, 45min)

Ask your colleagues to sit in an inner and an outer circle, both circles facing each other. Ask the participants to spend about 4 minutes, sharing details of a specific life experience scenario, in pairs. The persons in the outer circle should start, then after about 2 minutes, you will indicate that the inner circle should share their point of view. After each scenario, ask at least 2-3 teams to share their discussion in the plenary. Then, ask the outer circle to move one seat to the right so that they face another person. Possible scenarios could be (feel free to adapt or come up with a common stressful situation in your context):

- You are stuck in a real traffic tie-up and in 10 minutes you will be late for a really important meeting. The battery in your cell phone is dead. How will you deal with your stress?
- You are at work and it's almost 4:30 p.m. You have two top-priority deadlines to meet today, and it is your turn to pick up your child from school no later than 6 p.m.
- You find yourself going from one project to another and getting very little accomplished. Everyone else has their own time pressures so you can't delegate any part of your work to anyone else. Your boss is putting pressure on you to complete the task at hand, and you feel the muscles in your shoulders and neck beginning to tighten, signaling the onset of another tension headache. How will you cope?
- A party where you do not know many people.
- Starting a new job in a new organization.

After having done approximately 2 scenarios, ask the pairs to share about a stressful situation they personally experienced and how they felt in this situation, how they reacted and how they noticed that they were stressed. Again, ask at least 2-3 teams to share in the plenary.
What are causes and symptoms of stress? (Role Play, 1h)

Ask participants to form two groups and to prepare a role play:

- Group 1: Play a situation with a stressed person: how would s/he look like/behave/feel?
- Group 2: Play a stressful team situation. How would the colleagues react?

Give 20 min for presentation and discussions for each group. In the plenary, discuss the causes and symptoms of stress.

Time Management Tools

To Do List

Keeping a To-Do List helps you get organized, which is essential to balancing the demands of your work, and minimizing stress. When creating a To-Do List, make sure to capture all of the tasks you have to complete, including relevant tasks, which may not directly relate to your work. A To-Do list can be daily or weekly, choose one that best suits you.

Preparing a To-Do List is a three-step process:

1. Start by writing down the tasks that face you, and if they are large, break them down into smaller pieces.
2. Review jobs and allocate priorities from A (very important or urgent) to F (unimportant or not urgent). If too many tasks have a high priority, run through the list again and downgrade the less important ones.
3. Rewrite the list in priority order. Now you will be able to tackle these in order of importance. This allows you to separate important jobs from the many time-consuming unimportant ones.

Prioritization

The following matrix might help you decide on your priorities. It distinguishes between urgent and important tasks:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>URGENT</th>
<th>NOT URGENT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DELEGATE</td>
<td>NOT IMPORTANT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>These are often tasks for others. Re-assess, and if needed delegate to someone else.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DO IT NOW</td>
<td>IMPORTANT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>These are the most critical tasks. Prioritize according to urgency.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DO IT LATER</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>These are non-productive tasks. Delay or delete them.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PLAN</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>These are strategic tasks. Schedule time to plan and execute them.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


7 Most of this section draws from https://socialwork.buffalo.edu/content/dam/socialwork/home/self-care-kit/exercises/time-management.pdf and https://socialwork.buffalo.edu/content/dam/socialwork/home/self-care-kit/exercises/effective-methods-for-relaxation.pdf
Scheduling

In order to schedule efficiently, you need an effective scheduling system. There are a variety of options to choose from including a dairy, calendar, planner, or software such as MS Outlook or google calendar. Keep in mind that self-care as well as important private appointments should be scheduled into your time.

Scheduling is then a five-step process:

1. Identify the time you have available.
2. Block in the essential tasks you must carry out.
3. Schedule in high priority urgent tasks and vital "house-keeping" activities.
4. Block in appropriate time to handle unpredictable situations, events and/or circumstances.
5. In the time that remains, schedule the activities that address your priorities and personal goals.

Relaxation Exercises

Research on the relaxation response has shown that this simple technique can: increase energy, responsiveness from a drowsy state and decrease fatigue. It can increase motivation, productivity, and improve decision-making. The relaxation response lowers stress hormone levels and lowers blood pressure. You can get your body to relax just as well without drugs while remaining conscious and aware at the same time. To be physically relaxed and mentally alert is the goal of the relaxation response.

There are many ways of achieving the relaxation response. Some of these techniques are called:

- Progressive Muscle Relaxation (tense and relax)
- Visual Imagery
- Deep Breathing
- Meditation
- Yoga
- Biofeedback

It is helpful to practice these exercises at first with guidance of a trainer. However, there are also apps who can guide you through some of those exercises.

Find a relaxation exercise that suits you the best. They can all work equally well.

- Develop a routine to fit at least one technique into your day (at whatever time you prefer) to practice it.
- Use something in your environment as a reminder to fit relaxation into your day.
- Over time, as you use a relaxation exercise on a daily basis, you can expect to get better at the skill.

Breathing Exercise

1. Start the exercise by getting comfortable. Make yourself as comfortable as possible in a seated position. Try and sit up straight with good posture with your hands resting in your lap. You can keep your eyes open or shut. Most people prefer to close their eyes. If you are wearing glasses or contact lenses, you may want to remove them before starting the exercise. Try not to fall asleep.
2. Inhale for a count of four.
3. Hold for a count of four.
4. Exhale for a count of four.
5. Wait for a count of four.
6. Repeat until you feel calm and centered again.
Progressive Muscle Relaxation (Tense & Relax Technique)

Everyone has a resting level of muscle tension. Some people have a great amount of tension at rest, others less. When people are under acute stress, their muscles tend to have higher levels of resting tension that can be painful and tiring. After you tense and relax muscles, the tension level not only returns to the original level, but will automatically drop below the original level, producing even greater relaxation to the muscles.

1. Start the exercise by getting comfortable. Make yourself as comfortable as possible in a seated position. Try and sit up straight with good posture with your hands resting in your lap. You can keep your eyes open or shut. Most people prefer to close their eyes. If you are wearing glasses or contact lenses, you may want to remove them before starting the exercise. Try not to fall asleep. Continue to breathe deeply and regularly throughout the exercise.

2. Begin deep breathing.

3. Tense the different muscle groups from toe to head and then relax them. As you perform this exercise, you will tense different muscle groups above their normal level of tension. When tensing, you need not tense to the point of pain—simple tensing for 2 seconds is generally sufficient.

4. Focus on how the tension feels. Then, let the tension go.

5. Focus on the sensations of relaxation.

6. After having tensed and relaxed all important muscle groups from toe to head, focus on relaxation flowing from the crown of your head, over your face, down the back of your neck and shoulders, down your body through your arms and hands, over your chest and abdomen, flowing through your hips and buttocks, into your thighs, your knees and calves and finally into your ankles and feet.

7. Continue to take deep breaths for several minutes in silence

8. Finish the Tense & Relax Exercise by becoming aware of your surroundings (location, people, noises). Then, move your feet, legs, hands, and arms, rotate your head and open your eyes feeling re-energized, refreshed, and relaxed

Visual Imagery

While some people like tensing and relaxing, others can often become more relaxed by simply imaging a beautiful place.

This technique uses your mind to distract you from pain, tension, or problems. It asks you to create images in your mind that are so captivating, so rich in detail, and so all-consuming for your mind, that you get lost in the images your mind creates.

1. Start the exercise by sitting or lying in a comfortable position and deep breathing. Unlike the tense-relax technique, the focus is not on your body but on a pleasant image. You will want to decide where you want to go in your image before starting. Your image can take you anywhere of your choosing. Whatever you choose, try to make it peaceful, and calming. You can leave your eyes open or you can shut them. Most people prefer to close their eyes when creating a mental image.

2. In creating your image, use all of your senses. For example: If imagining a woods try to imagine:
   a. Vision: the moss, the trees, animals, the sun, the soil, leaves
   b. Smell: smell the moist earth, the heavy scent of green vegetation
   c. Sounds: hear the birds, sticks cracking, animals moving, creeks
   d. Feel: the cool moist air, the cool soil, the warm sun in a clearing
   e. Taste: the fresh water from a creek, a ripe berry, a sweet apple

3. Before you start to return home, notice how your body feels and try to recall the best aspects of your journey and of your private place. You will want to return to these in the future.

4. Prepare to leave by counting backwards from 3 to 1. Then, become aware of your surroundings (location, people, noises). Move your feet, legs, hands, rotate your head. Open your eyes feeling re-energized, refreshed, and relaxed.
Body Awareness

Each day before you go to work spend just 10 minutes visualizing and rehearsing your day. Find a comfortable place where you will not be disturbed, sit with your back straight, hands on your stomach and breathe slow, deep, relaxing breaths.

Allow your attention to sink into a safe, comfortable place deep in the center of your being. From this place of comfort and safety, visualize your upcoming day.

Whenever you notice tension in your body or restriction in your breath relax, breathe and visualize yourself mirroring and joining with the person and/or situation that is causing your tension. Become the skillful participant/observer and allow your creative imagination to discover win/win solutions to every challenge. See and feel yourself in a state of flow as you effortlessly dance through your day!
Developing a wellness plan

Staff wellness is an approach to protecting and enhancing the wellbeing of employees that relies and builds upon the efforts of employers to create a supportive organizational culture and upon the efforts of employees to care for their own well-being. In particular in development and humanitarian work, staff can only provide good, nurturing services to others if they know how to take care of themselves and are given the time and space in which to do so. Staff wellness programs have become a critical requirement in many organizations as a way to attract top talent, keep them happy, productive, and making the work environment fun.

Introducing a staff wellness plan is part of an organizational change process. As such its implementation needs to be well prepared and monitored. Since staff wellbeing affects all staff and requires everybody’s commitment, a participatory process is crucial. Thus, you can also ensure that the different needs of all staff, of women and men of divers backgrounds and with divers roles and responsibilities are adequately considered.

Many ideas for potential measures and activities for a wellness plan were jointly developed during the L4C “Staff Wellbeing and Stress Management” workshop. The suggested activities in the handout facilitate the preparation of similar participatory sessions. Remember: Measures should address systems, policies and processes as well as relations. Some of measures and activities might already be reality in your organization/institution, some might need to be revived and others might need to be added.

A wellness plan has the following components:

**Organizational Wellness Plan**

- Vision & Mission
- Values
- Goals
- Strategies
- Key Audiences
- Sustainability
- SMART Objectives and Activities
- Resources needed
- Indicators of Success
A potential process to prepare and introduce a staff wellness plan successfully could be:

Key success factors for the introduction and implementation of a wellness plan are:

- **Senior Management buy-in**
- **Participatory planning**: Planning needs to be a partnership with the workforce and all levels of staff need to be actively engaged in the management and development of the initiative. However, expectations need to be managed.
- **Ensure focus on**: Diversity in regard to employee needs, recognizing that preferences, conditions and requirements may differ across different groups. Major wellness risks for employees. Multiple components of an individual’s life e.g. lifestyle and work environment. And do not forget: organizational capacity and conformity with workplace procedures and culture.
- **Optimal use of on-site resources**: Optimize use of on-site personnel, physical resources, and organizational capabilities, wherever possible.
- **Integration**: The workplace wellness policy should align with the organizational mission, vision and values, supporting both short and long term goals.
- **Monitoring and evaluation**: Develop a measurement process which quantifies or qualifies wellness plan outcomes both in terms of employee satisfaction and bottom line business benefits. This does not need to be done in a very intense way but should inform about progress and challenges.
- **Long-term commitment**: A long-term commitment will be required to see the benefits of the wellness plan. As such, the plan needs to be institutionalized but, at the same time, it should provide the flexibility to be adapted progressively according to ongoing personal, social, economic workplace changes.
- **Manage expectations of staff**: With regard to how much the wellness plan can achieve for them. The wellness plan at work is a compliment to a bigger effort, including their own personal self-care initiatives, in achieving individuals’ wellness.
PRACTICAL TOOLS FROM THE WORKSHOP TO SHARE WITH YOUR COLLEAGUES

Template of a wellness plan

You can use the following template to reflect with your colleagues on potential activities and measures to be taken in the organization. This can be the basis for a simple staff wellness plan and items/interventions for implementation. The individual column is mostly for individual reflection during the process and not part of the organizational wellness plan:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Individual</th>
<th>Team</th>
<th>Structure/Leadership</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Domains</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social</td>
<td></td>
<td>e.g. teambuilding activities</td>
<td>e.g. annual retreat, coffee corner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environmental</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occupational</td>
<td></td>
<td>e.g. new team meeting structure</td>
<td>e.g. flex-time, HR policies</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Pitch for a wellness plan (30 min)

Once you have reflected on all the different aspects with your colleagues, ask each team/group/department/other to prepare a pitch: “Imagine you have 2 minutes to convince your senior management team or board of the implementation of your wellness plan—what would you say to them? How would you convince them of your ideas?” Ask each group to present in front of the group.
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This Manual has been developed by Learning for Change (L4C).

Learning for Change (L4C) Strengthening Women’s Voices in East Africa is a 3-year regional programme, ending in March 2019, with the aim of promoting the meaningful participation of women in decision-making processes at household, community, local and national levels in Ethiopia, Uganda and Rwanda.

The programme is funded by the Austrian Development Agency (ADA), implemented by CARE Austria in cooperation with CARE country offices in Ethiopia, Uganda and Rwanda, and includes capacity development as well as advocacy components relating to the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda in Austria, at EU level and in the Great Lakes Region. The programme directly contributes to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) especially on Gender Equality (SDG5) and UN Security Council Resolution 1325.
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