

**Wellbeing Advice – Managing Stress**

Southampton City Council is an organisation that is committed to providing a safe and healthy working environment, which includes managing pressures and promoting wellbeing. We are an organisation which is positive about mental wellbeing.

**What is Mental Wellbeing?**

* All about psychological health;
* A state of wellbeing where there is a balance between the demands in your life and ability to cope;

In the same way that Southampton City Council is concerned about the physical wellbeing of employees, we recognise the need to take steps to help our employees manage their mental wellbeing too.

There are clear benefits for both, you the employee, and the organisation as a whole if the issue of mental wellbeing can be managed successfully.

**What is Stress?**

* Stress occurs when perceived demands or pressures exceed an individual’s ability to cope;
* Triggers ‘fight or flight response’ or ‘red alert’;
* Release of hormones including adrenaline – heart beats faster, muscles tense, breathing quickens;
* Emotional changes occur making us more alert & aggressive;
* Useful reaction for survival when the state of stress is for a short time only;

These days the pressures of life and work are often harder to resolve and can result in a state of stress lasting for longer periods of time with fewer chances for our bodies to return to a resting state. This can become detrimental to health.

**How Do We Recognise Stress?**

There are a number of physical, emotional and behavioural signs that could indicate that you or a colleague are having difficulty coping. It is important for you to take responsibility for managing your mental wellbeing and part of that is knowing how to recognise the symptoms in yourself and others. This way you can work together with your employer to address the issues affecting your wellbeing.

**Physical**

* Increased sweating
* Raised heart rate
* Headaches
* Shortness of breath
* Palpitations
* Dizziness
* Blurred vision
* Aching neck & shoulders
* Skin rashes/cold sores

**Psychological**

* Poor concentration & memory
* Feeling trapped
* Losing interest in appearance
* Irritability
* Feelings of anxiety, panic, indecisiveness
* Mood swings
* Low self-esteem/self confidence

**Behavioural**

* Tears
* Comfort eating
* Sleeping problems
* Tendency to smoke or drink more alcohol or use drugs
* Becoming accident prone or making lots of mistakes
* Having difficulty socialising
* Loss of libido

Not coping can become an illness. Additionally, unresolved stress can have an effect on work and relationships.

There can be work-related and non-work-related causes of stress but often it is a combination of the two.

Stress should not be confused with natural highs and lows which are a natural part of life.

**Are You Increasing Your Own Stress Levels?**

Attitude and behaviour play an important part in maintaining mental wellbeing and reducing the effect of pressurised situations along with personal characteristics, personality, family life, availability of support, work environment and health or lifestyle behaviours.

**Learning To Cope & Reducing the Risk**

Know yourself, time and priority management, saying ‘no’, learning to negotiate, setting realistic goals, communicate, be honest, take control, be assertive!

**Hobbies**

Many people find that a hobby which has no deadlines, no pressures, that can be picked up or left easily takes the mind off stresses. Southampton City Council offer employees a variety of benefits, which are beneficial towards keeping active and maintaining an healthy lifestyle [Employee Benefits](http://staffinfo.southampton.gov.uk/supporting-our-staff/empbens/health.aspx)

**Personal Support and Dealing with Stress in Others**

* Offering support is vitally important;
* Discuss your concern with your manager – it might be that they are not aware of your situation. They can refer you to Occupational Health for advice and support if appropriate;
* Open lines of communication – if you or the individual cannot talk to your line manager advise the individual to talk to someone in Occupational Health or to call the Employee Advisory Resource Service (EAR) and reassure them that this will be confidential;
* If they do not wish to do this, suggest that they talk to their GP;

**Further Reading and Advice**

* [Occupational Health](http://intranet.southampton.gov.uk/hrpayroll/occupational_health/)

**Specialist Support**

* [Managing Wellbeing at Work Micro Site](https://staffinfo.southampton.gov.uk/health-safety/safety-information/microsites/managing-wellbeing-at-work.aspx)
* Refer to [Health and Safety Executive webpage](http://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/) for a useful, online management and risk assessment tool.
* Other sources – [NHS Choices](http://www.nhs.uk/Conditions/Stress/Pages/Introduction.aspx)