

impact hr toolbox talk

Understanding and Managing Stress

This Toolbox Talk aims to raise awareness of stress, its potential effects on health and performance, and how to recognise and manage it both personally and within the workplace.

What is Stress?

Stress is the body's natural response to pressure. A small amount of pressure can be positive and help us perform well. However, when pressures become excessive or prolonged, they can cause harm to physical and mental health.

The Health & Safety Executive (HSE) defines stress as:

"The adverse reaction people have to excessive pressures or other types of demand placed on them at work."

Why It Matters

- Stress affects everyone differently, but if left unmanaged, it can lead to anxiety, depression, physical illness, or absence from work.
- High levels of stress reduce concentration, increase the likelihood of accidents, and negatively impact morale and productivity.
- Employers have a legal and moral duty under the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 to protect employees from harm, including stress-related ill health.

Common Causes of Stress

- Excessive workload or unrealistic deadlines
- Lack of control over work tasks or environment
- Poor communication or unclear expectations
- Conflict with colleagues or managers
- Job insecurity or change in work conditions
- Personal or financial issues impacting work life

Signs and Symptoms

Stress may show itself through a combination of physical, emotional, and behavioural indicators:

- **Physical:** headaches, fatigue, muscle tension, digestive issues
- **Emotional:** anxiety, irritability, low mood, loss of confidence
- **Behavioural:** withdrawal, poor timekeeping, increased errors, reliance on alcohol or caffeine

If left unmanaged, these signs can escalate and result in work-related ill health or long-term absence.

Managing Stress

For Individuals

- Identify the main sources of stress and seek practical ways to reduce them.
- Maintain a healthy work-life balance.
- Take regular breaks and ensure adequate rest.
- Speak to your line manager, HR, or a trusted colleague if you feel overwhelmed.
- Seek professional advice or support through your GP or wellbeing services.



For Managers and Supervisors

- Promote open communication and encourage staff to speak up about workload or pressures.
- Be alert to changes in behaviour/performance.
- Ensure workloads are reasonable and that staff have the necessary resources to do their jobs safely.
- Offer flexibility where possible and signpost employees to support resources.

Remember

Stress is not a sign of weakness — it is a natural human response to pressure. Recognising it early and taking appropriate action helps maintain wellbeing, morale, and safety at work.

Always consult your GP if you are concerned about your health.

Discussion Points

- What are some early signs of stress you have noticed in yourself or others?
- What practical steps can we take within our team to reduce stress levels?
- How can we support colleagues who may be struggling?

Your next step to safer, smarter workplaces

For tailored advice, call **0330 236 9866** or email hello@impacthr.co.uk. Alternatively, explore more Toolbox Talks in the Impact Hub at [impacthr.co.uk](https://www.impacthr.co.uk).