



# A **Mental** **Health Guide** for New Zealand Leaders

**Government**  
**Health & Safety Lead**

New Zealand Government

# Government Health & Safety Lead

## A mental health guide for New Zealand leaders

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### ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The Government Health and Safety Lead would like to thank the New Zealand Defence Force for their permission to reproduce their resources.

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## INTRODUCTION

Mental health is about how we think, feel and act as we deal with life's ups and downs. The state of our mental health helps determine how we handle stress, relate to others, make decisions and go about our daily lives. Like physical health, looking after our mental health is important at every stage of life.

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Being mentally healthy is not necessarily about being free from problems. Everyone feels worried, anxious, sad or stressed at various times in their lives; this is perfectly normal. However, sometimes these thoughts and feelings do not go away, and are severe enough to interfere with daily life.

Our mental health, at any particular point in time, is shaped by individual life circumstances, environmental factors and resilience levels. The cumulative impact of events in our lives, our relationships, physical health, jobs and family wellbeing, can be challenging and can sometimes erode our mental health, even in circumstances where we previously thrived. Some stress in our lives is good and can help us perform at our best. Resilience is about being able to bounce back from life's setbacks, and even grow as a result of dealing with challenges.

NZ health research suggests that around one in six adults will experience some form of psychological distress or mental illness in any given year during their lifetime. As subsets of the broader New Zealand population, it can be expected that most organisations will reflect similar trends, and in some organisations the nature of certain roles may come with demands that aren't typical of those in the broader community.

Research also indicates that less than half of the people who would benefit from treatment will seek help. Some of the barriers to seeking help include a lack of understanding about mental health, the negative stigma associated with

mental illness, and concerns about the impact that seeking help may have on employment and career advancement.

According to the Mental Health Foundation of New Zealand, workplaces are arguably the third biggest mental health support sector across the country, after the formal mental health system and primary care.

Every day many employers provide access to Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) services and support staff through mental health crises. Employers are increasingly building psychological health awareness into their health and safety plans.

Work can be of major benefit in people's recovery from mental health problems. As well as improving life outcomes for employees, improved mental health in the workplace can lead to higher productivity and better business results. However, workplaces can also cause distress and mental illness. Supportive, healthy workplaces can have a significant positive impact not only on staff, but on their families, friends and the wider community.

There are three broad actions employers can take to improve mental health in the workplace.<sup>1</sup>

1. Building a positive, psychologically healthy workplace environment.
2. Taking a proactive, fair and empathetic approach to distress, addiction or mental health problems in the workplace.
3. Supporting employees to adopt behaviours that boost positive mental health and wellbeing.

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1 Mental Health Foundation of New Zealand, Working Well Guide & Resources  
[www.mentalhealth.org.nz/home/our-work/category/44/working-well-guide-and-resources](http://www.mentalhealth.org.nz/home/our-work/category/44/working-well-guide-and-resources)

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Leaders at all levels have an important role to play in maintaining positive mental health in the workplace, including building awareness and responding appropriately to potential mental health issues. It is important to manage your own wellbeing alongside that of your people; increasing levels of responsibility usually bring greater complexity, increased work demands and psychological pressures, and as a leader you are not immune to shifts in your own mental health.

### How to use this guide

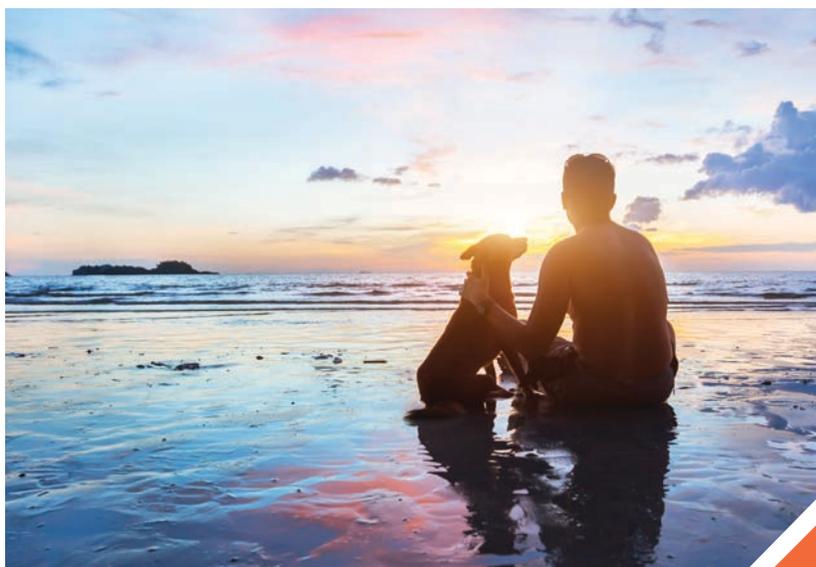
This guide provides information that will help you to enhance and protect the mental health of yourself and your people. **Section 1** contains information that will help you keep yourself and your employees well. It provides information about what happens when people are

placed under stress, sources of stress, common reactions, some tips and tools for recognising and managing mental health issues, and where to go for help.

**Section 2** provides a range of specific strategies and tools that have been shown to be effective in managing stress, building resilience and maintaining positive mental health and performance.

**Section 3** of this guide focuses on a leader's role in creating a positive mental health culture, managing workplace demands and supporting people with mental health issues.

Leading others can be personally challenging. It is important that you look after yourself as well as being mindful of others. For an extensive guide on holistic wellness refer to ***A guide for maintaining health and wellbeing***.



# UNDERSTANDING MENTAL HEALTH

## SECTION 1



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# THE MENTAL HEALTH CONTINUUM

Mental health, like physical health, exists on a continuum. It is a dynamic, changing state that can deteriorate or improve depending on life circumstances. Mental health concerns, if identified and treated early, have the potential to be temporary and reversible.

Figure 1 outlines the Mental Health Continuum, which underpins the Resilience Framework. As can be seen from the continuum, and as discussed in more detail below, levels of mental health are reflected in what we do (behaviours), how we feel (emotions) and how we think (cognitions).

Common markers of mental health status are grouped into six themes: **mood, performance, sleep patterns, physical health, social interaction and activities**. The impact of changes in these themes are reflected along the continuum, so you can see how problems increase and functioning decreases as we move towards the right of the continuum.

The model goes from healthy adaptive coping (green), to mild and reversible distress or functional impairment (yellow), to more severe, persistent injury or impairment (orange), to clinical illnesses and disorders requiring more concentrated medical care (red). The arrows on each side of the four colour blocks denote movement in both directions, just as mental health can deteriorate over time with changing life circumstances.

It is possible to return to full health and functioning, particularly when issues are recognised early. It is important as leaders to be able to recognise the behavioural signs indicative of the phases on the continuum. These signs will increase in severity as an individual moves to the right on the Mental Health Continuum.

As the continuum shows, a person can have a mental health problem or concern without having a diagnosable mental illness. However, there may be early signs that all is not well. For example, a person may engage in behaviours which appear to be markedly out of character. In instances where a mental illness is diagnosed, a person's thoughts, emotions, and/or behaviours may be more adversely affected. If untreated, their functioning may be impaired, resulting in a general loss of quality of life. With the right treatment, those suffering from a mental illness can be helped to function more effectively and/or make a full recovery.

## MORE INFORMATION

Information about where to go for help and where to find additional resources is provided in Appendices 1 & 2. More information about types of common mental illnesses can be found in Appendix 3.

	HEALTHY	REACTING	INJURED	ILL
MOOD	Normal mood fluctuations; Calm & takes things in stride	Irritable/impatient; Nervous; Sadness/overwhelmed	Anger; Anxiety; Pervasively sad/hopeless	Angry outbursts/aggression; Excessive anxiety/panic attacks; Depressed/suicidal thoughts
ATTITUDE	Good sense of humour; Performing well; In control mentally	Displaced sarcasm; Procrastination; Forgetfulness	Negative attitude; Poor performance or workaholic; Poor concentration/decisions	Can't perform duties/control behaviour or concentrate; Engaging in behaviours which appear to be markedly out of character
SLEEP	Normal sleep patterns; Few sleep difficulties	Trouble sleeping; Intrusive thoughts; Nightmares	Restless disturbed sleep; Recurrent images/nightmares	Can't fall asleep or stay asleep; Sleeping too much or too little
PHYSICAL HEALTH	Physically well; Good energy level	Muscle tension/headaches; Low energy	Increased aches and pains; Increased fatigue	Physical illnesses; Constant fatigue
ACTIVITY	Physically and socially active	Decreased activity/socialising	Avoidance; Withdrawal	Not going out or answering phone; Changes to appetite (increased or decreased)
HABITS	No/limited drug and alcohol use/gambling	Regular but controlled drug and alcohol use/gambling	Increased drug and alcohol use/ gambling – hard to control	Frequent drug and alcohol or gambling use – inability to control with severe consequences; Out of character decision making e.g. spending

Figure 1: NZDF Mental Health Continuum [Based on work of Keyes 2002 and adapted from the CF Mental Health Continuum with permission].



Where we sit on the continuum at any point in time can shift depending on life experiences, cumulative levels of stress, levels of resilience (natural and learned) and levels of support. By leveraging tools and strategies we can learn to minimise the impact that life experiences can have on mental health.

We can then strive to maintain positive mental health and performance over time. It is important to be aware of what the signs are that may indicate the need to use additional coping strategies, or to seek assistance to maintain performance and mental health.

NORMAL FUNCTIONING	COMMON AND REVERSIBLE DISTRESS	PERSISTENT FUNCTIONAL IMPAIRMENT	CLINICAL DISORDER; SEVERE FUNCTIONAL IMPAIRMENT
Continue to strengthen resilience and build peak performance. The same tools we can use to buffer in times of challenge will also help us to thrive & perform to our potential every day.	Use self management and support strategies to build mental health.  Section 2 provides a range of tools that help build resilience and act as a buffer in times of stress.		Talk to someone you trust and seek help from a mental health professional.
Maintain positive attitude; Focus on task in hand; Break problems into manageable tasks; Nurture support systems	Recognise limits, take breaks; Get adequate rest, food, and regular physical activity; Identify and resolve problems early	Make self care a priority; Maintain social contacts; don't withdraw; Talk to someone	Follow care recommendations; Know resources and how to access them

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People can have a range of mental health experiences across the continuum that will change over time. This range can include:<sup>2</sup>

- > people who are experiencing optimal mental health (sometimes referred to as positive mental health). This group will be engaged, generally happy, getting enough good quality sleep and eating well, experiencing positive relationships, and have a strong sense of meaning and purpose in life. This group is likely to experience better physical health and higher productivity. Employers should want to do everything they can reasonably do to support employees into this state, for the benefit of their business and their employees
- > people who are mentally unwell and/or have a diagnosed mental illness, who are receiving treatment but still able to work (perhaps with modified duties)
- > people who lack general mental wellbeing and a sense of being reasonably happy with life. They will often show up as disengaged and unmotivated employees who lack meaning and purpose in their daily lives. According to decades of mind/body research this group is likely to have higher rates of physical illness and workplace accidents
- > people who don't meet the criteria for a diagnosable mental illness, but who may be highly stressed or distressed due to their work or home life, or perhaps a traumatic life event.

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2 Mental Health Foundation of New Zealand, Working Well Guide & Resources, [www.mentalhealth.org.nz/home/our-work/category/44/working-well-guide-and-resources](http://www.mentalhealth.org.nz/home/our-work/category/44/working-well-guide-and-resources)

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# THE ROLE OF STRESS ON MENTAL HEALTH AND PERFORMANCE

Stress is one of the key influences on our mental health and can affect where we sit on the mental health continuum at any time. Stress can trigger or exacerbate the development of more serious episodes of mental illness, or reduce our coping and resilience levels.

The most commonly accepted definition of stress is 'a condition or feeling experienced when a person perceives that demands exceed the personal and social resources the individual is able to mobilise'.<sup>3</sup> This can describe a wide variety of situations – from your cell phone ringing while you're talking on another phone, to the feelings associated with intense work overload, being involved in a bad accident, or the death of a loved-one.

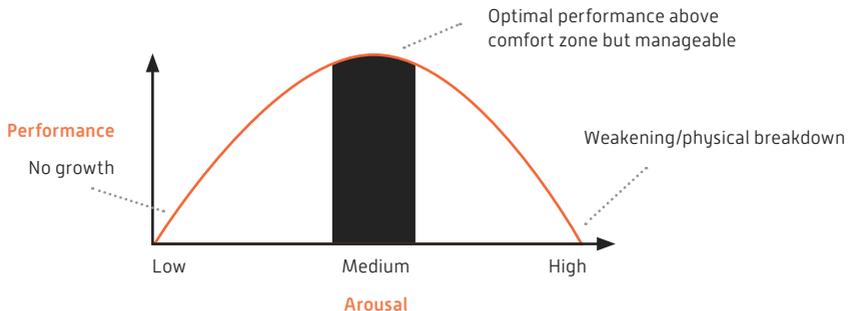
While it is fairly obvious that life events, such as divorce, bankruptcy or the death of a loved one may negatively impact on physical and mental health, daily

stressors can exert an even greater influence in the long term.<sup>4</sup>

Everyone has stress in their lives. Some stress can be helpful, and in some cases necessary for survival. The model below shows how performance increases with physiological or mental arousal, but only up to a certain point.<sup>5</sup>

When arousal levels are too low or too high, performance decreases. Some high-tension worry can provide the impetus and adrenaline needed to focus more clearly and perform at a higher level, helping you to be more creative, solve problems rationally and logically, and feel satisfied. The tipping point starts when our perceived ability to cope is eroded.

The cumulative impact of stress can shift your tipping point. Therefore, you should understand how to identify the unique tipping points of yourself and others.



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3 Lazarus and Folkman, 1984  
4 Holm and Holroyd 1992  
5 Diamond, et al, 2007

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## WHAT HAPPENS WHEN WE ARE UNDER STRESS?

When we encounter a situation, we make two (often subconscious) judgements. First, we decide whether the situation is threatening. This could be a threat to things like our social standing, values, time, reputation, as well as to our survival. Next, we judge whether we have the resources to meet the perceived threat. How stressed we feel depends on how far out of control we feel, and how well we can meet the threat with the resources we have available. This is why starting a new job, moving house, or parachuting is invigorating for some and anxiety producing for others.

Stress and anxiety symptoms can become self-perpetuating as increased pressure hinders our ability to make decisions and take positive actions to resolve problems. As well as affecting individual health, there can also be a number of organisational impacts which may include increased absenteeism and turnover, and reduced productivity. In an operational environment performance and safety may also be compromised.

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## WHAT ARE SOME OF THE SIGNS OF THE NEGATIVE IMPACTS OF PROLONGED STRESS?

Stress has a direct impact on the body.

In the short term, it provides the energy surge and alertness needed to confront a threatening situation. Longer term, stress can lead to a range of health impacts; you are almost guaranteed to catch that bug going around at work, your blood pressure may be raised and you may have worrying thoughts that lead to headaches and migraines.

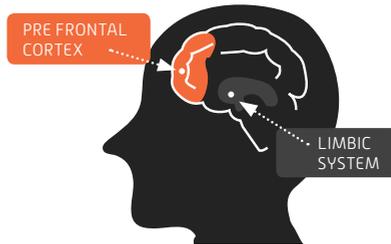
More serious health issues, such as heart disease, stroke, depression, high blood pressure, cancer, diabetes and a weakened immune system can also develop when stress is chronic and prolonged. Poor health can, in turn, create more pressure and further increase stress levels.

# HOW DOES STRESS AFFECT MENTAL AND PHYSICAL HEALTH?

The brain consists of an elaborate system of neural circuitry. When we experience a shock or perceive a threat, the limbic system goes into action and our body quickly releases hormones that help it to survive (commonly known as the fight or flight response). These hormones help keep the body charged up and focused on the threat, to the exclusion of everything else. All of this significantly improves our ability to survive life-threatening events.

Over time however, the constant triggering of the stress response can lead to a range of harmful biochemical and long-term effects. One of the many problems associated with chronic stress is that certain parts of the brain bear the brunt. The amygdala becomes more sensitised, making you more jumpy and anxious. The hippocampus receptors that have your memory capacity also start to

shut down, impairing your ability to provide context and put stressful events into perspective. Thoughts and emotions become more rigid and even simple decisions become less well rounded. Sometimes the shift from the higher thinking parts of the brain to the automatic and reflexive parts of the brain can lead to doing things too quickly, without thinking. This is what happens when people are overwhelmed with stress.



## MORE INFORMATION

The limbic system is primarily responsible for processing emotional response to stress. It is very sensitive to any kind of threat – including threats we just imagine. When some type of stress is detected that triggers the limbic system, our sympathetic nervous system (SNS) initiates a cascade of changes to the body: blood flow in the gut is directed to large muscle groups to prepare them for immediate action, as well as areas in the mid brain. Stress hormones, such as epinephrine (adrenaline) and cortisol, are released into the bloodstream.

These neurochemicals have an immediate impact on blood pressure, heart rate and skin temperature. The release of cortisol in particular, also creates cognitive confusion. The executive functioning part of our brain (pre frontal cortex) is disengaged, which is why people under stress often complain of being confused and having difficulty accurately processing information and making decisions.

Unfortunately, even small daily stresses can stimulate the limbic system and produce powerful stress responses. Chronic SNS arousal is thought to be the underlying cause of most stress-related health illnesses.

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# RECOGNISING STRESS IN SELF AND OTHERS

Everyone reacts to stress differently. Stress can affect you and your body in four areas: physical, emotional, behavioural, and mental.

Some of the signs can include the following.

## PHYSICAL

- > Pounding heart
- > Elevated blood pressure
- > Sweating
- > Headache
- > Sleep disturbances
- > Skin rashes
- > Trembling or tics

## EMOTIONAL

- > Irritability and impatience
- > Depression
- > Fearfulness
- > Low mood/ feeling down
- > Envy
- > Loss of interest in your job

Some signs of stress overload are subtle and difficult to detect, while others are clearly recognisable. The most common indicators are changes in behaviour, such as decreased productivity, creativity, motivation and confidence, increased irritability, fatigue, pessimism, increased use of alcohol or other drugs, and increased physical ailments with no apparent cause. In the Mental Health Continuum [Figure 1 on Page 12] reactions and changes in how we think, feel, and act are reflected in the yellow and orange zones.

## BEHAVIOURAL

- > Changes in eating habits (eating too much or too little)
- > Drinking more alcohol
- > Pacing, restlessness
- > Increased smoking
- > Teeth grinding and/or nail biting
- > Aggressive driving
- > Social withdrawal

## MENTAL

- > A tendency to forget
- > Mind racing or going blank
- > Indecisiveness
- > Resisting change
- > Diminished sense of humour
- > Declining productivity

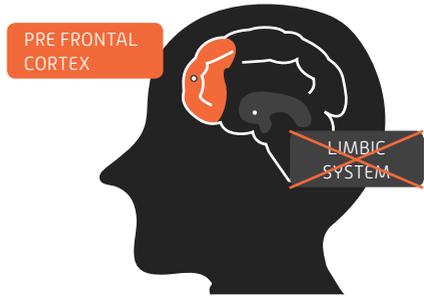
As levels of resilience are expended, the impacts worsen. If left unchecked these signs can develop into more severe problems. Where an individual sits on the continuum can shift to the left or right, depending on life events, resilience and levels of support.

As a leader you need to monitor your own wellbeing for signs of stress overload, and keep an eye out for your team. Stay alert to changes in behaviour and mood which may indicate underlying health, personal or workplace stress.

# MANAGING THE IMPACT OF STRESS ON OUR BODY

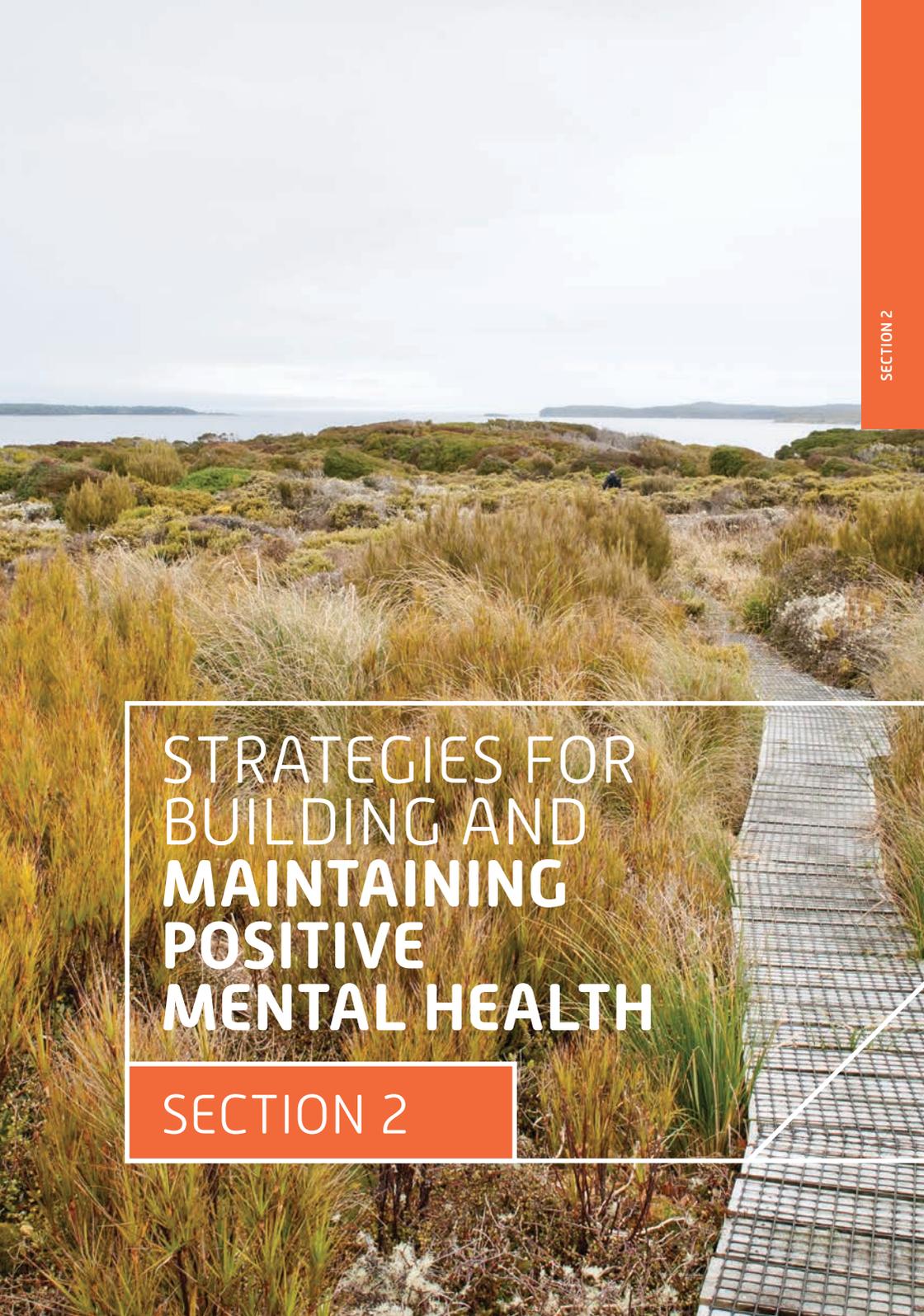
The activation of our limbic system and SNS evolved to help us act quickly and effectively in response to a threat, and then shut down once the danger has passed. The good news is that, although the effects of activation are immediate and can seem overwhelmingly intense, the basic nature of this system is to shut down if it receives any type of signal to do so.

By applying various techniques when you are under stress, you can learn to immediately activate the parasympathetic nervous system (PNS) and help the SNS to shut down. Section 2 summarises some of the many techniques that can be used to prevent, or help counter, immediate stress reactions. These techniques can also produce states of relaxation and thought clarity, uniquely associated with the activation of the PNS.



## MORE INFORMATION

The parasympathetic nervous system puts the brakes on all the physical changes produced by the SNS. It is closely associated with the prefrontal cortex part of the brain responsible for higher-order functions: attention, emotion regulation, planning, abstract reasoning, and complex problem solving. By activating the PNS, breathing is slowed, blood pressure decreases, and blood supply is redirected to your brain.



STRATEGIES FOR  
BUILDING AND  
MAINTAINING  
POSITIVE  
MENTAL HEALTH

SECTION 2



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# STRATEGIES FOR BUILDING AND MAINTAINING POSITIVE MENTAL HEALTH

This section provides a range of tips and tools that can be used to build and maintain positive mental health, and help you perform better in all aspects of your life, no matter where you sit on the Mental Health Continuum. Information is also provided to help you understand how and why these tools work.

The tools summarised in this section are only a few of the many resources available through a range of useful websites, online resources and phone apps (a list of some of these is provided at Appendix 2).

When performance, resilience and mental health are no longer at their optimal levels, it is important to leverage strategies to take control and, if necessary, seek further help. Fortunately there are ways to shut down the stress response (switching off the physiological changes and keeping the higher order thinking part of your brain engaged) before it becomes destructive.

Even when you can't eliminate a stress-causing situation, you can choose to reduce the effect stress

has on your body. Resilience tools can help develop resilience and sustain positive mental health during times of stress. These can be used to buffer and protect against the stress experienced in everyone's life.

'The Big Four' resilience strategies found to be most effective are the importance of practising healthy habits (exercise, diet and sleep), diaphragmatic breathing, practical problem solving strategies to manage life challenges, and having an attitude of positivity; which might include hopefulness that things will improve, being able to find positive experiences even in the face of hardship, or belief in one's own ability to cope or to effect change.

Use the Mental Health Continuum on page 12 and self assessment tools at Appendix 4 to help build awareness about your own mental health, levels of resilience and any areas where you may be at risk. The range of tools and strategies provided can help build resilience and performance, and target aspects of your thinking, emotions and behaviour that may be having a negative impact on your mental health.

Another approach to building and maintaining positive mental health is the Five Ways to Wellbeing:

- > Give
- > Be Active
- > Keep Learning
- > Take Notice
- > Connect

The Five Ways are simple and proven actions that people and workplaces can introduce to help people find balance, build resilience, boost mental health and wellbeing and lower their risk of developing mental health problems. The Five Ways were developed

by the New Economics Foundation (NEF) on behalf of the Foresight Commission in the UK and adapted for New Zealand by the Mental Health Foundation.

According to the Mental Health Foundation of New Zealand, the Five Ways to Wellbeing can also support workplaces to meet their health and safety obligations to manage risks to mental health and wellbeing.

The Mental Health Foundation and Health Promotion Agency co-developed the Five Ways to Wellbeing at Work Toolkit<sup>6</sup>, full of fact sheets, tips, tools and templates, to enable New Zealand workplaces and their people to flourish.

## FIVE WAYS TO WELLBEING



Your time,  
your words,  
your presence



DO WHAT YOU CAN,  
ENJOY WHAT YOU DO,  
MOVE YOUR MOOD



EMBRACE NEW  
EXPERIENCES,  
SEE OPPORTUNITIES,  
SURPRISE YOURSELF



TALK & LISTEN,  
BE THERE,  
FEEL CONNECTED



REMEMBER  
THE SIMPLE  
THINGS THAT  
GIVE YOU JOY

INTRODUCE THESE SIMPLE STRATEGIES INTO YOUR LIFE AND YOU WILL FEEL THE BENEFITS



6 Mental Health Foundation of New Zealand & Health Promotion Agency, Five Ways to Wellbeing at Work Toolkit, [www.mentalhealth.org.nz/fivewaysworktoolkit](http://www.mentalhealth.org.nz/fivewaysworktoolkit)

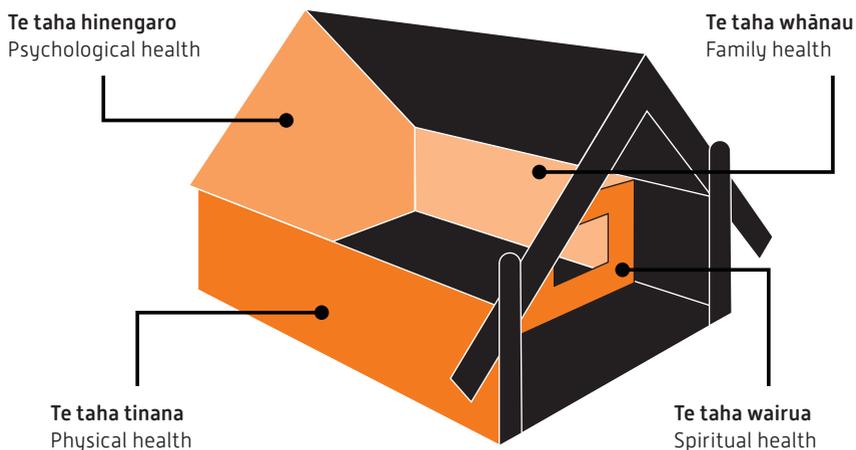
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# MAINTAIN BALANCE IN YOUR LIFE

## TE WHARE TAPA WHĀ

The Te Whare Tapa Whā model of health<sup>7</sup> reinforces the importance of nurturing all four cornerstones of health: Tinana, Hinengaro, Wairua and Whānau to maintain overall wellbeing. Section 1 of this guide reinforced the links between physical and mental health. In addition, social support, family, wellbeing, and the extent to which we are able to live life in a way that feels meaningful and aligned with our values, are also linked to overall resilience and wellbeing. Each cornerstone can enable or drain overall wellbeing, and it is important that we maintain health in all areas.

**“Build a solid foundation.  
Nurture all aspects of  
your Whare.”**



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7 Mason Durie 1982 [hauora.co.nz/te-whare-tapa-wha-mason-durie](http://hauora.co.nz/te-whare-tapa-wha-mason-durie)

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# MANAGING YOUR WORKLOAD

With heavy workloads, career pressure, and demands for increased productivity in almost all areas of the workplace, stress is a constant factor in our professional lives.

Some stress is good – it gets people going – but too much can have the opposite effect. The brain and body switch into a different operating mode; resulting in black-and-white thinking. Perspective and shades of grey disappear and people have difficulty staying

organised, setting priorities, and managing time.

We can choose to ignore this and work unreasonably long hours to stay on top of our workload. However, working harder and longer is often counterproductive. The alternative is to work more intelligently, by focusing on the things that are important for job success and reducing the time we spend on low priority tasks.

**Over time, daily hassles and work pressures can wear you down. You might start going through each day mindlessly, living on autopilot and doing things by force of habit.**

**Do you...**

- > feel mentally drained by the end of a typical day?
- > feel rushed, even when you are running on time?
- > have trouble doing things at a slower pace, even when you have the time?
- > tend to think about what is coming up in your day rather than being in the here and now?
- > often want to be left alone when you get home?
- > find yourself sighing a lot during the day?
- > forget to take breaks because of pressure you feel under?
- > find it difficult to relax even when you have free time?
- > prefer activities that help you to zone out?
- > have trouble motivating yourself to do things that are healthy for you?
- > feel exhausted by the end of the day much of the time?
- > feel like you are multi-tasking even at home?
- > tend to bring your stress home with you?
- > often wake up at night and think about things that are stressing you out?
- > notice that you get impatient and irritable about little things?
- > often do tasks (like household tasks) without even thinking about them?
- > feel like taking time to relax means you'll fall behind on some duty or responsibility?

If any of these resonate for you, it is likely that daily stresses are building up and impacting how you're functioning. Often this is very subtle, and it's only when you take a minute to review how you are doing that you notice. It's important that you stop this process from escalating to the point where stress damages your physical or mental health.

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## ACCEPT THAT SOME EVENTS ARE BEYOND YOUR CONTROL

Invest time into things you can control, and accept the areas that you can't. Whether managing yourself or leading others, the same concepts apply. Help your team accept the unchangeable elements of the environment and take charge of what can be changed or better managed.

## KEEP A STRESS DIARY

When there is a lot going on in your life, stress diaries are useful for understanding the causes or stressors.

Keeping a stress diary involves keeping a record of when you began to feel stressed, how you felt and what was going on at the time. Example templates can be found on the internet.

Stress diaries can give you important insight into how you react to stress, and help you identify the levels of pressure at which you operate most effectively. This is important because often these stresses flit in and out of our minds without getting the attention and focus that they deserve.

## PRIORITISE

Understand the priorities of your job, what constitutes success within it, and focus on these activities to avoid task overload as much as possible. Some stresses will be unavoidable, especially if you're in a job with lots of responsibility. However, by taking the time to understand and map your boundaries, you will be able to say no to requests that conflict with your needs, better understand how to deal with conflict, and increase your personal sense of empowerment. When you have a clear set of boundaries that are reasonable and appropriate, you empower yourself to get what you need to be satisfied, happier and more productive.

1. Create a 'stop doing' list. We all have 'to-do lists', but what can you eliminate to make room for what energises you and brings you closer to achieving your goals?
2. Focus on your strengths.
3. Avoid fighting battles you don't need to win. In the heat of the moment, stop for a second and think: is this truly worth fighting for? Can you be content to know that you are right without having to prove someone else wrong?
4. Focus on your priorities. Minimising stress also means looking at life through a holistic lens – physical, psychological/emotional, spiritual, and whānau/social. What are some daily practices that you can introduce to create reserves in each of these important areas of your life? [e.g. spending more time with family and friends, focusing on a healthy diet].

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## PROBLEM SOLVING

For people who are stressed it is common to feel threatened and overwhelmed by problems, and the thought of having to deal with them.

Using a stress diary can be useful to identify these, and then applying problem-solving to gain more control of problems. This can reduce the feeling of being threatened or overwhelmed by them.

### Steps in structured problem solving

1. Write down the problem causing you worry or distress.
2. Think about your options for dealing with this problem and write them down (try to think broadly and don't disregard any ideas at this point).
3. Write down the advantages and disadvantages of each option.
4. Identify the best option(s) to deal with the problem.
5. List the steps needed to carry out each option (bear in mind the resources needed and pitfalls to overcome).
6. Review your progress in carrying out your option(s): What have I achieved? What still needs to be done?

## GOAL SETTING

Goal setting has also been proven to reduce arousal levels, help control stress, improve performance and help to manage setbacks and obstacles.

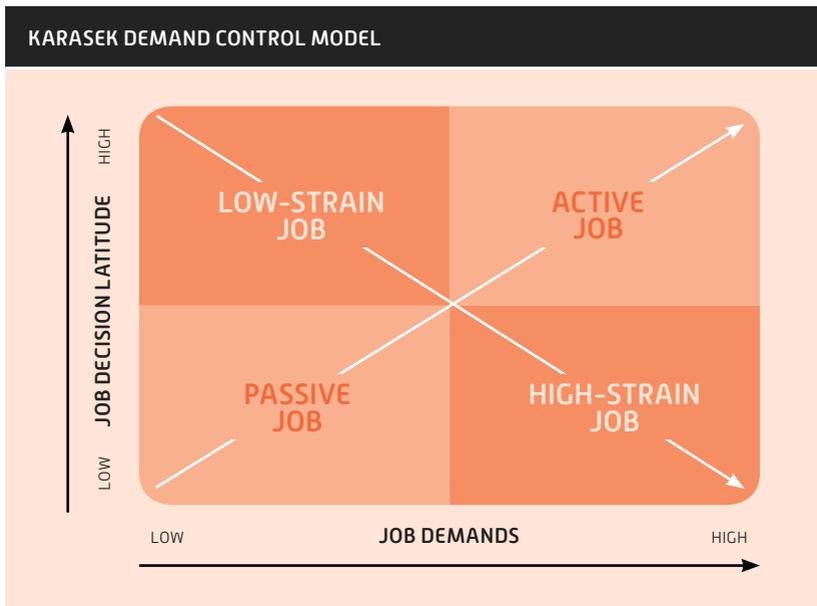
When something seems overwhelming, it is useful to break things down into achievable objectives and develop a plan for achieving these. This will help build resilience and a feeling of control.

Goals need to clearly define what you want to accomplish. Using **SMART** (Specific, Measureable, Attainable, Relevant, Time-bound) criteria ensures that the goals you set will be achievable and improve your performance. Once you have set your goals, work out your plan for achieving these by prioritising and problem solving.

## LOOK FOR OPPORTUNITIES TO INCREASE AUTONOMY AND SENSE OF ACHIEVEMENT

The Demand–Control Model of Job Stress<sup>8</sup> in Figure 2 argues that, when people are in demanding jobs, they experience less stress if they have

control over their own work. Job demands are stressors in the work environment, such as tight deadlines, high targets, regular interruptions, and conflicting pressures. Decision latitude (autonomy) refers to the extent to which people can control their work.



**Figure 2**

People whose jobs rate high in demand but low in decision latitude/autonomy, have been found to feel more tired at the end of the day, have trouble waking in the morning, and experience more depression and anxiety. When workers

in high-demand roles have more decision latitude, they experience less stress and higher job satisfaction. The model can be used to think about job demands and levels of autonomy in your own role and that of your team.

8 Karasek Demand and Control Model 1979.

## Practise healthy habits

Your stress levels will rise if you're interrupted while you're working to meet a deadline. Do your best to manage interruptions. When you need to focus on a particular task, small actions can make a big difference; shut your office door, turn off your cell phone and email alerts, and consider using an automatic email response to let people know that you are currently not available. Also:

- > get enough good quality sleep
- > adopt a good diet and keep your alcohol intake low
- > perform regular physical activity
- > break down large tasks into smaller ones, and keep a section of your workspace clear
- > try keeping a portion of your day free of appointments and email.

## Take a break

Our bodies and minds need breaks from work and stressful activities. When you feel tension rising and energy falling, take a break (go for a walk, make a cuppa, chat with colleagues, climb some stairs). Be sure to schedule longer breaks with an extended weekend or short getaways as well. Make time every few hours for a 'human moment' – a face-to-face exchange with a person you like.

## MORE INFORMATION

Read more tips for keeping you and your team resilient in the following pages and at Appendix 8.

## HEALTHY HABITS

When you have a healthy lifestyle you can cope with challenges better.

- > Identify the healthy behaviour you want to implement
- > Identify the barriers to implementing and continuing this behaviour
- > Make a plan to overcome those barriers.



# BUCKET MODEL OF RESILIENCE

The Bucket Model of Resilience can be a useful way of thinking about resilience.

In this model, your bucket (resilience) is kept full by things that help you cope. These are things that you enjoy and find relaxing. There are also holes in your bucket that drain your resilience; these are stressors.

When doing this exercise think about your life at present. On the diagram below, identify the stressors that drain your bucket. Then, identify the things that increase your resilience, leveraging what you already know can help and drawing on the tools provided in this section.

Write out your plan/list for the things you will do differently to keep your bucket topped up (resilience) and help close the holes in your bucket.

**Identify the things that currently help keep your bucket full. What else can you do to help fill your bucket?**

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**Identify the things that are draining your resilience... work out what you can change and accept the things you have no control over.**

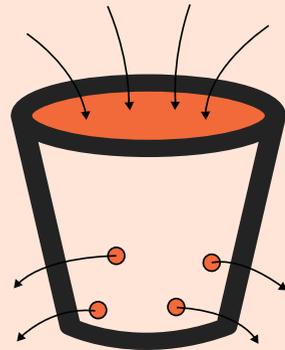
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# PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

The Ministry of Health advises that to live long and healthy lives, New Zealand adults should make regular physical activity part of their lifestyle. You should do a range of activities rather than just one type, as different types of activities are good for health in different ways. For example, aerobic activities are good for the heart and lungs, and reducing the risk of developing various non-communicable diseases. In contrast, resistance activities are good for strengthening muscles, increasing lean body mass and reducing the risk of falls.

Including resistance activities into your physical activities such as lifting weights, using resistance bands, using stairs and riding bikes can also reduce the risk of osteoporosis and osteoarthritis.

With this in mind, five activity statements have been developed by the Ministry of Health.<sup>9</sup>



Sit less, move more! Break up long periods of sitting.



Do at least 2.5 hours of moderate or 1.25 hours of vigorous physical activity spread throughout the week.



For extra health benefits, aim for 5 hours of moderate or 2.5 hours of vigorous physical activity spread throughout the week.



Do muscle strengthening activities on at least two days each week.



Doing some physical activity is better than doing none.



KEISER

BE CONSCIOUS!  
UNLOAD MACHINE  
REMOVE ALL WEIGHTS

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A loss of interest in physical activity is common when mental health is compromised, but evidence suggests that exercise can in fact improve mental health and reduce anxiety and depression. No one knows what kind of exercise regimes are most effective, so the best type of exercise is the type that you will do. If you like walking, walk. If you think you might like a team sport, try a team sport. If you like surfing, surf.

Thirty minutes of moderate intensity exercise, such as brisk walking, three times per week, is sufficient for mental health benefits. You can break the 30 minutes up into three 10 minute blocks if that works better for you. Whatever it is, do it regularly and do it mindfully.

The technique of 'mindfulness' can also be useful in conjunction with exercise to help reduce levels of stress and anxiety.

Mindfulness is a technique used to maintain a moment-by-moment awareness of one's thoughts, feelings, bodily sensations and surrounding environment, and has been shown to have benefits for mental wellbeing.

### **The key is to find something you like and that you can stick with.**

- > Be prepared.
- > Diarise regular physical activity like you would any other important meeting.
- > Walk to see a colleague rather than calling or emailing.
- > Have walking meetings.
- > Make sure you've got comfortable shoes/clothes and shower gear if you need it.
- > Build regular physical activity into your daily life.
- > Plan to do more jobs around the garden and house.
- > Walk/cycle to work or park further away and walk the last bit of your commute.
- > Take the stairs.
- > 'Play' more – with the kids, with the dog, or on your own.
- > Get supported.
- > Create a buddy system with friends, family, or colleagues to encourage you and maybe actually exercise with you.
- > Set a goal – it might be to walk three times next week, or to run a marathon next year!

### What if you haven't got time?

First ask yourself whether you really don't have time, or if something else is getting in the way? If work, a dislike of physical activity, poor organisation, or family commitments are getting in the way, take a step back and look for solutions. Sometimes physical activity itself can improve your efficiency at work or home. Physical activity that clears your head may help you focus so that the time taken to be physically active is actually earned back due to greater productivity.

If time is still an issue, be physically active while you work or are doing other jobs. Do squats while you brush your teeth, calf raises while you wash up, or prone holds while you watch TV. Any physical activity is better than none, so do bite size chunks when you can and they'll soon add up.

Another efficient way to train is high-intensity interval training or HIIT. Alternating intense bursts of activity with low intensity recovery periods can improve cardio-respiratory fitness and help control blood sugar levels and blood pressure. HIIT has also been shown to reduce injury risk and improve mental health. Seek advice from an exercise specialist about whether HIIT is right for you, and to provide you with sessions to suit your fitness and goals.

If none of the above are possible with your current responsibilities, consider walking or cycling to work or other places. Depending on where you're located, this may even a faster means of transport.

**Do not launch into or do strenuous physical activity if you are unwell or out of condition.**

### RESOURCES

Ministry of Health guidance on being active at different life stages with health conditions:

[www.health.govt.nz/your-health/healthy-living/food-activity-and-sleep/physical-activity/being-active-everyone-every-age](http://www.health.govt.nz/your-health/healthy-living/food-activity-and-sleep/physical-activity/being-active-everyone-every-age)

See the Ministry of Health 'Eating and Activity Guidelines for New Zealand Adults' for more information: [www.health.govt.nz/system/files/documents/publications/eating-activity-guidelines-for-new-zealand-adults-oct15\\_0.pdf](http://www.health.govt.nz/system/files/documents/publications/eating-activity-guidelines-for-new-zealand-adults-oct15_0.pdf)

For information and videos on warming up before exercise, see ACC's SportSmart website: [www.accsportsmart.co.nz/warmup](http://www.accsportsmart.co.nz/warmup)

# DIET

Good stress management involves healthy eating habits. Often, when we are under stress, our eating patterns change. We may not feel like eating much or we may eat a lot. We may also crave certain foods, especially those containing sugar, or chocolate.

If you are aware that you are in a stressful environment, monitor your eating patterns, and ensure you have at least three balanced meals per day. Take time to eat, not at your desk and preferably with others.

What you eat is incredibly important. A healthy diet lays the foundation for a healthy mind and body and has a major effect on the biochemistry of your brain functioning. Some foods enhance your brain's ability to thrive, whereas others bog it down. A bad diet can impact on the brain's ability to function properly, making you less able to think clearly, pay attention, and develop neural connections.

To achieve optimum brain performance throughout the day, try to consume a smart balance of foods at each meal.

The Ministry of Health has five eating statements for lowering the risks of negative health conditions. They are as follows.

## MORE INFORMATION

Read more about healthy diets in Appendix 2.

### FIVE HEALTHY EATING STATEMENTS



Enjoy a variety of nutritious foods every day including:

- > plenty of vegetables and fruit
- > grain foods, mostly whole grain and those naturally high in fibre
- > some milk and milk products, mostly low and reduced fat
- > some legumes, nuts, seeds, fish and other seafood, eggs, poultry (e.g. chicken) and/or red meat with the fat removed.



Choose and/or prepare foods and drinks:

- > with unsaturated fats (canola, olive, rice bran or vegetable oil, or margarine) instead of saturated fats (butter, cream, lard, dripping, coconut oil)
- > that are low in salt (sodium); if using salt, choose iodised salt
- > with little or no added sugar
- > that are mostly 'whole' and less processed.



Make plain water your first choice over other drinks.



If you drink alcohol, keep your intake low.



Buy or gather, prepare, cook and store food in ways that keep it safe to eat.

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# SLEEP

Sleep is important for healthy brain function, emotional wellbeing, physical health, energy and appetite regulation, healing and repair, immune system function, productivity, work performance and safety.

Not sleeping enough, or sleeping badly, can affect your reaction times, increasing the risk of accidents around the home, at work, out and about and on the road. Researchers have also linked lack of sleep to depression, suicide and risk-taking behaviour, increased blood sugar levels, obesity, heart disease, kidney disease, high blood pressure, diabetes and stroke.

## How much sleep you need

The National Sleep Foundation recommends seven-nine hours of good quality sleep a night for adults up to the age of 65, and seven-eight hours for those over 65. Some people naturally sleep slightly more or slightly less than these recommended hours.

## Ways to improve your sleep

### Bedtime routine

- > Maintain a regular sleep pattern by going to bed and getting up at around the same time each day, including on the weekends.
- > Relax and unwind before bed. Try to spend the last hour you're awake doing calming activities like reading, having a shower or bath or doing mindfulness activities (page 47).
- > Don't watch the clock or stay in bed when you're wide awake. If you are still awake after 20-30 minutes of trying to get to sleep, try sitting in another room reading for a short time.

- > Avoid sleeping pills unless your doctor or pharmacist recommends them. You should only use sleeping pills in the short term, or occasionally.

### Sleeping environment

- > Keep your bedroom conducive for sleeping. Remove distractions like televisions and portable electronic devices from the room.
- > Keep the bedroom quiet and dark, at a comfortable temperature. This is different for everyone, but generally falls within the range of 15-20°C. Make sure your bedding is comfortable.

### During the day

- > Keep active. Moderate to vigorous intensity physical activity is best, but even light activity during the day can help you sleep better at night. Avoid a lot of activity just before bedtime.
- > Alcohol, caffeine and cigarettes can disrupt your sleep. Try to avoid these, and avoid eating large meals within two-three hours of going to bed.
- > Daytime naps can affect your night-time sleep. Keep your daytime naps short (less than 30 minutes). Napping in front of TV in the evening will make it harder for you to get to sleep.
- > Getting sunlight in the morning and avoiding bright lights in the evening can help your body to get into a better sleep routine.

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## Night shifts

If you regularly work night shifts, you may find it hard to get enough sleep during the day. In this case:

- > try wearing dark sunglasses to reduce sunlight on your commute home
- > keep to the same daily routine if you can
- > use ear plugs and eye masks to reduce noise and light in your bedroom
- > use blackout curtains or put boards over the windows in your bedroom to block out sunlight
- > avoid caffeinated drinks and food, and avoid alcohol close to bedtime
- > having short naps can help.

## When to see a doctor

See your doctor if you:

- > have persistent trouble getting enough good quality sleep and the recommendations set out here aren't helping
- > wake a lot during the night
- > consistently feel very tired during the day
- > have trouble staying awake during the daytime
- > snore severely.

All of the above information was taken from the Ministry of Health.<sup>10</sup>

**"A well spent day  
brings happy sleep."**

LEONARDO DA VINCI

People vary in the amount of sleep they need. Adolescents need more sleep (8.5-9.5 hours of good quality) compared to adults. Your body will tell you what's right for you. Pay attention to how you feel in the morning after more or less sleep, and then make an effort to get the amount of sleep that's right for you. A rough guideline is that when you get into bed at the end of the day it should take you 10-20 minutes to fall asleep. Any shorter may be an indication you are not getting enough sleep. Any longer and you may need to look at changing your sleep habits to help you nod off more quickly.

The effects of fatigue and sleep deprivation on performance are well known. Lowered judgement and initiative, diminished situational awareness and loss of emotional control have been linked to preventable injuries. Sleep deprivation also compromises attention, new learning and memory. When you are deprived of deep sleep your immune system also tends to be suppressed.

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10 [www.health.govt.nz/your-health/healthy-living/food-activity-and-sleep/sleeping/sleep-tips-adults](http://www.health.govt.nz/your-health/healthy-living/food-activity-and-sleep/sleeping/sleep-tips-adults)

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Traditionally we may think of sleep deprivation as the consequence of pulling an all-nighter, but there is a much more common behaviour that results in a very similar impairment on our performance. Sleep restriction occurs when our sleep is limited to less than the recommended seven-nine hours that we require. This may be the result of staying up late to finish some work, or getting woken up early by the kids.

When sleep restriction occurs on an occasional basis (i.e. getting up early to go on a trip), the impairments are not so significant. But if our lifestyle makes sleep restriction a common occurrence, our ability to function will certainly begin to suffer.

After just two nights of only six hours sleep, our performance on cognitive tasks will decline. Interestingly, although this performance decline continues to grow with every extra night, our perception of how impaired we are does not. After the first few days we feel as though we have adjusted to a state of sleep deprivation and believe that each passing night has little effect.

Restricted sleep, and its all too apparent effects on our ability to function, is particularly alarming given the 24-hour society we now live in, and the culture that disparages the need for sleep.

Performance also suffers when we have fragmented sleep. This is the result of frequent waking or reduced quality of sleep that prevents us getting all the benefits out of the time we spend in bed. Sleep fragmentation may be a result of an underlying medical condition, a sleep condition or simply a result of our environment, sleep habits or mental state.

There are many different stages of sleep that each have slightly different functions. During the night we cycle through the stages every 90 minutes. The ratio of time spent in each stage changes between sleep cycles early in the night and those later in the night. This means that if we wake up after only six hours of sleep, we will miss out on time spent in the stages known as NREM2 and REM. It is these stages that are attributed to many of the benefits of sleep on memory.



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# RELAXATION

The relaxation response uses breathing and relaxation to counter the negative effects of stress, switching activation from the sympathetic to the parasympathetic nervous system. This slows down your heart rate and activates neurochemical systems that calm you.

**“You can’t be stressed and relaxed at the same time.”**

## BREATHING

Diaphragmatic breathing is one of the most effective skills to manage stress and keep you in the optimal zone for performance. The key is to breathe abdominally, taking deep slow breaths into the diaphragm. This delivers oxygen to the brain, relaxes the central nervous system, calms you down and improves your performance.

Professional athletes have been using this information to improve their performance for years. This skill is very effective but it needs to be practised. This is particularly important because when we are stressed our natural physiological reaction is to breathe rapidly and shallowly. This actually increases your stress levels and with practice, you will be more successful in quickly calming this natural physiological reaction down.

1. Stand, sit comfortably or lie down.
2. Place one hand on your abdomen and the other on your upper chest. Remember you need to breathe deeply into your diaphragm.
3. Slowly inhale through your nose. The hand on your abdomen should move out with the inhalation and in with the exhalation. The hand on your chest should remain relatively still.
4. Slowly exhale through your mouth.

If you practise this daily for four minutes, for one – two weeks, you will be able to use this skill during stressful situations when your anxiety goes up. You won’t have to sit or lay down, or place your hand on your abdomen. You will simply need to take a few deep tactical breaths, and this will reduce your arousal level. Again, this skill will only be effective at these times if you practise it.

### DIAPHRAGMATIC BREATHING

#### Rule of 4

- > Inhale to count of 4
- > Exhale for count of 4
- > Practise for 4 minutes
- > Breathe gently into your diaphragm.

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## STRETCH AND BREATHE

You can take a moment, even while you are at work, to slow your heart rate by breathing deeply, stretching and focusing your attention on how your muscles feel as they are stretched. Try to visualise your muscles relaxing and your heart revitalising your blood. Imagine how that blood flows to your brain and brings nutrients that make your brain both relaxed and more alert. You can do all this in two – five minutes. When you return to what you have been trying to accomplish, you'll find that you've rid yourself of built-up stress and that you're able to engage in the task at hand with renewed vigour and a calm sense of alertness.

### MORE INFORMATION

Read more about relaxation exercises at Appendix 6.

- > Stand with your feet shoulder width apart. Bend over and stretch your arms towards your toes, taking a good bend in your knees. Feel your muscles stretch and the blood flow downward.
- > Gradually stand up straight and raise your arms outward and upward, making a V and inhaling deeply to fill your lungs to capacity.
- > As you are standing completely straight with your arms extended upward, hold your breath for 10 seconds, and then let your arms slowly drop while continuing to keep them extended.
- > Exhale deeply and let out more air than you think you have to exhale.
- > Once your arms have dropped to an inverted V, repeat the entire process.

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# USING IMAGERY AND VISUALISATION

## VISUALISATION

Visualisation uses your imagination for a specific purpose, focused on a definite outcome. People use visualisation techniques to imagine completing goals or working through a situation with an exact outcome in mind. Some people are sceptical about the effectiveness of using visualisation and imagery; however, research suggests that it can be incredibly effective in lowering your stress levels.

**“Create a vision of who you want to be, and then live into that picture as if it were already true.”**

ARNOLD SCHWARZENEGGER

## GUIDED IMAGERY

This technique uses your imagination to picture a person, place, or time that makes you feel relaxed, peaceful and happy. Imagery is slightly different from other stress management techniques, in that it relies on the use of all of your senses. For instance, in your imagination you hear the sound of birds chirping, you see the drops of dew on the grass, you feel the breeze on your skin, you smell the spring flowers, and you taste the cold drink. With imagery, using all of your senses is what creates such a powerfully

relaxing experience, and this is why it is so useful in managing stress and coping with difficult situations.

There are several other ways that you can use imagery to help you relax. For example, you could create mental pictures of stress flowing out of your body, or of your problems, your distractions, and your everyday concerns being folded away and stashed in a padlocked chest.

### MORE INFORMATION

See Appendix 6 for more ideas.



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## TALKING/SUPPORT

Often, during times of stress, we withdraw socially (not in the mood, tired, too much to do). Activities we previously enjoyed are frequently the first to go during times of stress.

One of the first rules for managing stress is never worry alone. Talk with someone you trust. Talking helps you feel more in control. Talking to your partner or a family member can ease your mind by reassuring yourself that you're okay, or that the problem can be solved. They may also help you reflect on the situation and get the facts straight. When you're stressed, you tend to exaggerate the situation, making it worse in your mind. Your 'talking partner' can offer a different point of view – a different way of seeing the situation. Sometimes just the process of verbalising the situation can help.

**“When people talk,  
listen completely.”**

ERNEST HEMINGWAY

### THE POWER OF A HUG

Positive relationships are good for your health. They have been shown to reduce cardiovascular activity, blood pressure, cortisol level, cholesterol, vulnerability to catching a cold, depression, anxiety, cognitive decline, improve sleep and immunity.

Parts of the brain also thrive on social contact. When activated, these can help you deal with stress more effectively and boost your immune system. Research shows that people who have close personal relationships experience fewer health problems, live longer, and are less depressed and anxious.

Doing things for other people has also been found to have a beneficial effect on your own mental health.

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## ATTITUDE

How we interpret life events (the things that happen to us, challenge us, make demands of us, or that we perceive may have consequences for us) has a huge bearing on how much stress or anxiety we experience.

When we perceive something as dangerous or threatening, our 'fight or flight' response is activated. Because our bodies can't sort out the experiences we have from the events we imagine, if we perceive a bad outcome our body reacts as though it were actually happening. It's our interpretation of situations that drives the level of stress that we feel, rather than the situation itself.

Perception is shaped by what we think, how we think, and what we say to ourselves in our head (our self-talk). We can get into unhelpful patterns of thinking and when we are experiencing stress, these will add to the intensity of the body's negative response to that stress.

Often we can be overly harsh and unjust to ourselves in a way we would never be with friends or team members. While we talk to ourselves constantly, we rarely stop to consider what we are saying or test our own assumptions. When these messages are negative and we don't counter them ("How could I do such a foolish thing!," "I know I won't be able to achieve that", "I'm an idiot!") we start to believe them, lose our self-confidence, and the negative talk can become self-fulfilling.

**"A Man is but the product of his thoughts. What he thinks, he becomes."**

MAHATMA GANDHI

When our perception changes – either because the danger or threat ceases, or because we alter the way we think about or interpret it ("This is not a threat or danger to me", "I can deal with this", "I'm learning from what happened"), the 'fight or flight' response is turned off.

Become more aware of your thoughts and the effect they have on your life. When you're more aware of the way you think, you can take action to use positive situations to your advantage, and re-shape the negative ones.



The goal is to think in a balanced way, regardless of the situation, and make a conscious effort to see opportunities instead of obstacles.

**Rational thinking** helps you challenge these negative thoughts and either learn from them, or refute them as incorrect.

To build your awareness it is helpful to keep a note of stressful situations/ events (e.g. using stress diaries). Censor and modify (or manage) thoughts and self-talk: is this thought/idea helpful? If it isn't, how can you modify or replace it? This is a skill to be practised for a new habit to be formed.

#### **MORE INFORMATION**

For more information refer to Appendix 7.

#### **FLEXIBLE THINKING**

First, identify thoughts that contribute to stress. What are you telling yourself?

Then, challenge these thoughts.

- > Is this thought helping me be resilient?
- > What other ways can I look at this situation?
- > What evidence do I have that this thought is true?
- > What would I say to a friend in this situation?

**THE BIG FOUR**

Emotions, thoughts, feelings and behaviours can all influence each other. That is, we can all think of a time when we have felt really negatively about ourselves, but with the benefit of time and perspective, our views on an issue or event change and our feelings can often become less intense. Balanced thinking reminds us that painful feelings do moderate over time, that more often than not there is a solution, and that most people have times of self doubt.

Balanced thinking also includes developing personal coping strategies that target solving current problems and changing unhelpful patterns in cognitions (e.g. thoughts, beliefs, and attitudes), behaviours, and emotions. This approach draws on cognitive behavioural therapy techniques and is frequently used to treat specific problems related to a diagnosed mental disorder. The role of the therapist is to assist the person in finding and practising effective strategies to address the identified goals and decrease symptoms of the disorder.

The capacity to cope with and manage stressors, big or small, and remain balanced is a key aspect of resiliency. While it is important not to disregard one's feelings or experiences, it is equally important not to be overwhelmed by them. It means maintaining hope in the face of adversity; thinking that things will eventually get better, while doing what it takes to make those things happen.

### **MORE INFORMATION**

Read more about healthy thinking habits at Appendix 7.

## **OPTIMISM**

Good and bad things can occur at the same time – redirect attention to good things that are happening.

- > Identify three good things that occurred recently.
- > Why are they important to you?
- > How can you make things like this happen more often?

**THE BIG FOUR**

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# MINDFULNESS

Mindfulness draws on many of the tools already described, as well as the principle of paying attention.

Practising mindfulness strategies on a regular basis has been found to strengthen neural networks in the brain in areas responsible for attention, emotional control and problem solving.<sup>11</sup> It has been shown to have a positive influence on the immune system, and on the reduction of anxiety and depression. Strategies are designed to help counter immediate stress reactions, and also produce states of relaxation and clarity of thought.

There are seven general principles of mindfulness. These involve observing and accepting your thoughts, your physical sensations and your emotions as they enter and exit your awareness.

1. **Rhythmic breathing** – deep, deliberate and focused breathing allows you to slow your heart rate and to calm you down.
2. **Focused attention** – by widening your attention you can focus on the here and now and engage the pre frontal cortex to inhibit over-reactivity.
3. **Quiet environment** – having an opportunity to focus attention without distraction and help prepare you to avoid distractions later.
4. **Accepting and non-judgemental attitude** – shifting away from narrow and rigid expectations to an accepting attitude helps you appreciate reality as it is rather than what you fear it could be.
5. **Relaxed posture** – sitting or stretching.
6. **Observation** – observing instead of worrying about each detail – you can detach from stress while not denying its existence. As you observe events and situations non-judgementally, you can simply note what is occurring.
7. **Labelling** – label your experiences, activating your left frontal lobe and its positive emotions.

## MORE INFORMATION

See Appendix 7 for a range of mindfulness exercises.

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11 Tang et al 2007

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## HUMOUR

Humour and laughter are natural and healthy ways to release tension and put aside serious thoughts for a while.

Several physiological changes occur in the body with humour; in the cardiovascular system, the immune system, and musculature. Cognitive function is improved, cortisol levels are reduced and the immune system is boosted. The vitality of thoughts and emotions is boosted, enhancing self-esteem and the ability to deal with stress, anxiety and depression.

**“The next best thing  
to solving a problem  
is finding some  
humour in it.”**

FRANK A. CLARK



**LEADING OTHERS –  
MAINTAINING  
MENTAL HEALTH  
IN THE WORKPLACE**

SECTION 3



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## A LEADER'S ROLE

Leadership is the foundation for building and maintaining mental health and wellbeing across organisations. Individual leadership (of self and others) creates an environment that reduces the potential for individual mental health related issues to arise. A mentally healthy workforce will also be more engaged, cohesive, motivated and high performing.

Leaders have a key role to play in shaping the work environment and managing workplace pressures. This includes providing strategic, as well as day-to-day direction, managing workloads and creating a positive work environment. Leaders play an essential role in supporting mental health through:

- > creating a climate of information sharing, trust and understanding around mental health care issues, and the process of recovery for those needing support
- > the promotion of health and physical fitness
- > moderating workplace culture and occupational factors in the environment, which can impact mental health and wellbeing – including the nature and safety of work. It is important that the environment is free from harassment, bullying and discrimination, trust and two-way communication is encouraged, and that leaders are approachable, lead change well and provide development opportunities and meaningful work
- > creating and reinforcing a culture that supports a healthy lifestyle and stigma reduction through their own example, policy, activities and programmes
- > enabling access to mental health and wellbeing promotion programmes
- > working with health professionals to identify and address any mental health issues facing personnel, and making informed decisions about individual recovery, support and team performance.



Most individuals will ask for help with physical injuries, but are far less likely to do so when it comes to mental health and wellbeing. Stigma is one explanation, and it's also possible sometimes people do not relate their symptoms with ill health. As a leader you should foster an environment where people feel safe and supported when seeking help for mental health issues. Reinforce there are support options available, and that you'll work with them to find suitable solutions.

### RESOURCES

The Mental Health Foundation developed the Open Minds resources as part of the Like Minds, Like Mine programme to provide managers with practical tips to help with conversations about mental health in the workplace:

[www.mentalhealth.org.nz/home/our-work/category/40/open-minds](http://www.mentalhealth.org.nz/home/our-work/category/40/open-minds)

Like Minds, Like Mine is a public awareness programme to increase social inclusion and end discrimination towards people with experience of mental illness or distress:

[www.likeminds.org.nz](http://www.likeminds.org.nz)

### Principles for countering stigma

One of the biggest challenges for people experiencing mental distress is stigma and discrimination. It can feel like a constant, heavy weight that makes life more challenging.<sup>12</sup> The Mental Health Foundation notes that:<sup>13</sup>

- > mental distress is neither a defining feature nor necessarily a limiting feature of someone's employment potential
- > all people regardless of their mental health status have a right to personal respect, employment opportunities, participation in and influence over decisions which affect their lives
- > people who are experiencing or have experienced a mental distress are not a homogeneous group, and may have diverse needs
- > organisational policy should enable people recovering from mental distress to enter the workforce; retain people with experience of mental distress within the workforce; provide a supportive workplace environment in which all people are equally valued and their needs equitably catered for; develop a workplace environment in which employees and potential employees feel 'safe' talking about their mental health; and, ensure that at any one time all employees and potential employees are supported to attain optimum mental health.

12 [likeminds.org.nz](http://likeminds.org.nz)

13 Mental Health Foundation of New Zealand, Working Well Guide & Resources, [www.mentalhealth.org.nz/home/our-work/category/44/working-well-guide-and-resources](http://www.mentalhealth.org.nz/home/our-work/category/44/working-well-guide-and-resources)

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# COMMON SOURCES OF STRESS

There are many obvious causes of stress in people's lives, in particular, exposure to a traumatic event, significant physical health issues or the loss of a loved one. Other sources of stress are less extreme but are nevertheless important, and the cumulative effect of these can be significant. It is important to check on how people are going during these times.

It is important that you are aware of factors in the work environment that can impact on wellbeing. As discussed in section 1, levels of perceived stress and the impact of prior life experiences and coping skills will vary from individual to individual. Things to be aware of that may be sources of stress include factors in the work environment (work overload, performance issues, conflict or a lack of a cohesiveness in team relationships, disciplinary actions, career transition, exposure to unpleasant events) and personal lives (issues with family, health, finances, interpersonal relationships or trauma). The impact on people will usually be greater when more than one of these things is happening at once.

Some of the barriers to seeking help can include a lack of understanding about mental health, the stigma associated with mental illness, and concerns about the impact that help-seeking may have on careers. It is important that as leaders, you take active measures to combat stigma, encourage prevention and education programmes, and talk openly about mental health in the workplace. You should seek ways to improve mental health among your team by engaging with family, whānau and support networks in collaboration with your team.

## PERFORMANCE PRESSURES

Fear of failing or the impact of not performing as well as one hoped, can create anxiety and concern. New staff and those who have aspirations for promotion and long term career prospects can be particularly impacted by setbacks. Non-performance can create additional sources of stress. Those under performance review or disciplinary action need to be kept an eye on, and provided additional support if necessary.

People may also feel that the work demands are excessive or there is a lack of control or support in their work.

Often there can be a combination of these stresses.

### What can be done about it?

Provide your people with an opportunity to talk about what's causing them stress.

Consider reviewing the job design and distribution from a job demands perspective.

- > Check whether the workload is distributed in a way that matches the capacity and capability of your team.
- > Consider the distribution of tasks and whether there is enough variation within the team so that individuals do not feel overloaded or become inattentive.
- > Check that you have been clear about what work is required to be done, by when, and who by.

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Consider how employees are involved in decision making from the control perspective.

- > Ensure that there are appropriate avenues for your people to engage and contribute to how the team functions and the work is done.
- > Use performance reviews to identify both strengths, areas for improvement and development opportunities.

## CHANGE AND TRANSITION

Any change can potentially be stressful. The prospect of redundancy or retirement can be particularly difficult for many people, especially those who have been in the organisation for many years, or when this change has been sudden or involuntary.

### What can be done about it?

Plan ahead, so that these changes don't come out of the blue. Consult with your people, so they can provide meaningful input.

It is important that people are supported through any transition in a way that acknowledges both potential opportunities and challenges ahead. It is also important to appropriately recognise contributions, and to ensure that appropriate additional support is available during difficult transitions.

## RELATIONSHIP ISSUES

When relationships break down, it can be difficult to see a path forward. In longer term relationships where there are shared finances and children involved, the separation process can often be lengthy and emotionally draining.

Poor working relationships can also be a cause of stress. This can lead to problems around discipline, grievances and bullying.

### What can be done about it?

Check your organisation's policies for handling situations like poor performance, non-attendance, grievances, misconduct and bullying.

## DISCRIMINATION, BULLYING OR HARASSMENT

Leaders should be conscious of, and vigilant around, the risk of discrimination, bullying or harassment. Workplace bullying is a significant hazard in New Zealand.<sup>14</sup>

Bullying is defined as deliberate, harmful, and often involving a power imbalance or an element of repetition.<sup>15</sup>

According to WorkSafe New Zealand<sup>16</sup> bullying affects people physically and mentally, leading to increased stress levels, decreased emotional wellbeing, reduced coping strategies, lower work performance, and disruptive workplaces.

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14 WorkSafe New Zealand, 2014

15 Mental Health Foundation of New Zealand Pink Shirt Day Workplace Toolkit, [www.pinkshirtday.org.nz/take-action](http://www.pinkshirtday.org.nz/take-action)

16 WorkSafe New Zealand Good Practice Guidelines: Preventing and Responding to Bullying at Work

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An environment in which bullying behaviours are tolerated harbours fear and anxiety, and diminishes the mental wellbeing of recipients. Other people are impacted by the negatively charged emotions and it can affect the entire organisation.<sup>17</sup>

#### What can be done about it?

See [www.pinkshirtday.org.nz/take-action](http://www.pinkshirtday.org.nz/take-action) for a workplace toolkit celebrating diversity and preventing bullying.

## FINANCIAL PRESSURES CAN AFFECT EVERYONE

Some people over-commit financially by taking on loans or hire purchase agreements without thinking through whether they can afford it, or allowing for unforeseen financial demands. Sometimes it might be an unexpected bill that causes financial pressure, a partner losing a job, dropping to one income to raise a family, or a relationship split.

#### What can be done about it?

As a leader, you don't always have to have the answer to others' personal challenges. Sometimes just listening and knowing where your people can go to for help will provide them with enough support.

[www.sorted.org.nz](http://www.sorted.org.nz) provides resources for financial support. The Citizens Advice Bureau is another avenue for support.

## EXAMPLES OF SOLUTIONS TO COMMON CAUSES OF WORK RELATED STRESS

Adapted from the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS) and the Health and Safety Executive's (HSE) UK, 'Stress at Work' booklet.

### Balancing work demands

Two employees work doing the same job as part of a small team. When a new manager arrives, one of the employees is given more difficult work, while the other is given more routine repetitive tasks.

The employee with the challenging work begins to work longer hours in order to get the work completed on time. After a few weeks they are frequently off sick due to the pressure of work. The other employee does the routine work easily and has time left with nothing to do. They soon feel bored and start to make mistakes and not complete tasks due to lack of motivation.

The manager holds a meeting with the employees to discuss the problems. The manager agrees to look at the job design and reorganise work duties. Training is arranged so that both employees can undertake some of the more challenging work, and the routine work is distributed more fairly.

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17 Mental Health Foundation of New Zealand, Working Well Guide & Resources, [www.mentalhealth.org.nz/home/our-work/category/44/working-well-guide-and-resources](http://www.mentalhealth.org.nz/home/our-work/category/44/working-well-guide-and-resources)

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### **Giving workers control**

A new manager is concerned about one of their teams. The team's level of performance is not as good as other teams, and they seem poorly motivated.

The manager speaks to the team leader, who says the team doesn't really feel as though they are fully included in what is going on. The manager decides to hold a 'clear the air' meeting with the team. They have an ideas session in which they try to identify the strengths, weaknesses, threats and opportunities facing them. It is clear that the team would like to be more involved.

The manager suggests a weekly half hour meeting at which plans and work can be discussed and questions raised. A whiteboard is installed outside the meeting room so that items or problems can be written down by team members as they occur.

The new meetings are not an instant success, but the manager makes sure that useful information is provided and questions are always answered. Gradually team members are more forthcoming, and the meetings become an integral part of the weekly routine. The manager notices an improvement in morale and a number of suggestions made by staff at the meetings are successfully implemented.

### **Providing support**

Managers of a small plastics factory had noticed that incidences of short term absence had risen, and there were more petty disagreements between staff.

An independent survey was carried out, which revealed that staff felt poorly informed about company prospects, and rumours of job cuts were circulating.

Many staff pointed to the fact that the once regular staff meeting had not been held for some months.

Managers acted by holding a company wide meeting where the job cut rumours were dispelled. At the same time, volunteers were called for to help set up a small management/worker group, to look at how communications could be improved.

Following two meetings of the group, regular staff meetings were re-introduced, with an assurance that they wouldn't be cancelled. At the same time, a small, permanent consultative group was set up, at which management plans could be discussed and worker views taken into account. At the first meeting of the group problems of stress were aired, and the company agreed to provide access for employees to a confidential counselling service.

The new communications and consultation arrangements worked well, and helped develop higher levels of trust between managers and employees. Absence levels also fell.

### **Building relationships**

An employee in a shop was frequently late for work. This created more work for others who had to cover for them. The manager spoke to the employee on a number of occasions but things did not improve. The other employees were annoyed and thought the late employee was getting away with blue murder. The manager called the employee to a formal disciplinary meeting and informed the employee of their right to be accompanied. At the meeting, the employee was unable to give a satisfactory reason for lateness, saying they kept forgetting to set an alarm.

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The manager issued a formal written warning, and told the employee that if the late arrivals continued they would be given a final written warning.

The warning demonstrated to the employee the seriousness of the situation and their time keeping improved to a good standard. The other employees were happy that firm action had been taken, and this improved working relationships all round.

### **Making roles and expectations clear**

A new member of staff joined a busy sales team. The staff member received off-the-job training in sales and then joined their new colleagues in the team. There was no formal induction process and they were expected to pick things up as they went along.

The employee soon realised there were a lot of things they didn't know and asked their colleagues, but they were very busy and couldn't spend much time explaining things.

The employee had to make some photocopies, and rather than ask for help again, decided to just go ahead. Half way through the photocopying, a supervisor berated them for using an expensive colour photocopier for standard document copy records. Later the same day the employee discovered that they have used the wrong computer application to save records and the work had to be redone. The new employee became increasingly demoralised as similar mistakes occurred on following days.

At the end of the week, the employee decided the work was not for them and handed in their notice.

The company had wasted expensive sales training and lost a potentially good employee because of the lack of help they provided to settle the employee in.

### **Managing change**

A new computer system was introduced in a firm of insurance brokers. A training programme was developed for staff on all the new software commonly used in the company. Once the software had been in use for a while, a manager noticed that the one of their employees had become quiet and uncommunicative.

The manager spoke to the employee and asked them about possible problems that may be affecting performance. The employee said they hadn't got to grips with the new software. On further discussion, it turned out that they had particular difficulties with special applications that only the employee and a few others were required to use. These applications hadn't been covered in the training. The employee hadn't wished to make a fuss as they felt they were just being a bit slower than the others to pick things up.

Further training was provided for the employee and other employees that used the special applications. This resolved the problem.

#### **RESOURCES**

See the ACAS and HSE UK Stress at work booklet at: [www.acas.org.uk/media/pdf/l/m/B18\\_1.pdf](http://www.acas.org.uk/media/pdf/l/m/B18_1.pdf)

See the Stress Prevention at Work Checkpoints guidance by the International Labour Office: [www.ilo.org/global/publications/books/WCMS\\_168053/lang--en/index.htm](http://www.ilo.org/global/publications/books/WCMS_168053/lang--en/index.htm)

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# LEVERS FOR BUILDING A POSITIVE MENTAL HEALTH CULTURE IN THE WORK ENVIRONMENT

Creating the right conditions for people to thrive will improve employee engagement, wellbeing, and instil trust in leadership. This will encourage people to seek help early and improve overall individual and team performance.

A healthy environment is one where it is clear what is expected, people receive regular (constructive) feedback about how they are going, their contribution is acknowledged and recognised appropriately, and any performance issues are addressed appropriately/in a timely manner. Also, people feel supported, teams work collaboratively towards common goals, and teamwork and maintenance of a healthy lifestyle is encouraged.

## Good leaders:

- > know their people.
- > are visible, accountable and model what is expected.
- > are authentic and present, especially during times of change.
- > set clear goals, understand abilities and guide performance.
- > create a shared sense of purpose and values.
- > engage people who willingly do what needs to be done.
- > build capability and talent.
- > reinforce the importance of teamwork, buddy support and self responsibility.
- > promote a healthy workplace culture.
- > are approachable.

## Positive organisational culture includes:<sup>18</sup>

- > leadership wellbeing commitment and embodiment
- > having a mental health and wellbeing policy and strategy based on best applicable practice
- > clearly communicating policy and practices throughout the organisation
- > a regular evaluation process of mental health in the workplace
- > a regular review process for assessing progress towards meeting wellbeing objectives
- > the inclusion of employees in the development and implementation of principles and practices.

## Essential elements of a mentally healthy organisation:<sup>19</sup>

- > A positive emotional climate.
- > Cultivating and expressing positive emotions.
- > Education and awareness.
- > Educating employees on mental health and wellbeing.
- > Effective communication.
- > Communication based on trust, respect and civility.
- > Not tolerating bullying or harassment.
- > Collaborative teamwork.
- > Working well together to share knowledge and achieve goals.
- > Diversity and inclusion.
- > Engaging the strengths of a diverse workforce.

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18 Mental Health Foundation of New Zealand, Working Well Guide & Resources, [www.mentalhealth.org.nz/home/our-work/category/44/working-well-guide-and-resources](http://www.mentalhealth.org.nz/home/our-work/category/44/working-well-guide-and-resources)  
19 Ibid

## WHAT DO OUR PEOPLE WANT FROM THEIR LEADERS?

Research suggests that there are several things people look for in their leaders. Think about your own leadership style and how well you meet the expectations of your people.

### Where are we going?

- > Our work is meaningful and worth doing.
- > I am proud of what we do.
- > There is a plan.

### Can I do my best work here?

- > Someone cares about me.
- > I can be my real self.
- > I have a voice.
- > I am recognised for what I do.
- > Someone cares enough about me to be honest about feedback.
- > I have what I need to do my work well.

### What work do you want me to do?

- > My job is important and I see how my work fits in.
- > I am clear what work you want me to do.
- > I get feedback that is specific and helps me.
- > I can do what I do best every day.

### Am I treated fairly?

- > Our people policies are clear.
- > I am treated as an individual.
- > Compensation is transparent.

### Is there a future here for me?

- > I can learn and grow.
- > I see myself in other roles.

### Do I have a good manager?

- > I can say what I really think.
- > I am listened to.
- > I am challenged with good questions.
- > My manager inspires me and is worth working for.
- > My manager is authentic and human.
- > Our team is fun and is worth joining.
- > I can count on my colleagues.



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## LEADER ACTIONS

Leaders should establish an environment which creates a positive mental health culture. It is important that leaders understand that staff may at times become overwhelmed with personal and/or work issues they are dealing with, and encourage requests for help. It is important to emphasise that seeking help in times of distress displays courage, strength, responsibility, and good judgement. Because some people may be concerned that disclosing issues or asking for help may negatively impact on their job or career, it is important to reassure individuals that your priority is ensuring that they get the help that they need to enable early resolution and recovery.

Recognising and managing the effects of stress is a leadership responsibility. When you sense negative stress and low energy in the work environment, think about how you can energise your team.

- > Know the members of your team; help them learn the skills they need.
- > Be on the lookout for sudden changes in behaviour and performance; if you see such changes, ask about them.
- > Offer encouragement and recognition.
- > If you are concerned about someone, talk to them about how they are doing.

### PAY SPECIAL ATTENTION WHEN AN INDIVIDUAL IS EXPERIENCING:

- > relationship issues
- > family concerns
- > illness
- > financial problems
- > career setback
- > grief and loss
- > performance action/failure
- > traumatic events
- > other big life changes.

## LOOKING AFTER YOUR PEOPLE

Where you have concerns about someone in your team or a colleague, it is important that you take action. This may start with a conversation with them in the first instance; offer support, ask what would be helpful, and talk, listen and reassure. Where you are still concerned about the wellbeing of the individual or those around them, you should involve a professional for advice and support.

Leader actions can be divided into three categories, which broadly span the mental health continuum: shield, sense, and support.

**Shielding** actions are those that enhance the capacity of team members, both individually and collectively, to cope with stressors in order to maintain, if not improve, individual mental health. Some examples of shielding actions might include: getting to know your people, identifying and resolving issues early, demonstrating genuine concern, and encouraging learning and development.

**Sensing** actions are those that focus on early recognition and assistance for team members in the area of mental health. As a leader, you may not be able to detect all the signs of stress in your people, but can stay alert to the most obvious ones: declining productivity, restlessness, and irritability. Examples of sensing actions include: watching for behaviour changes, adjusting workload as required, knowing resources and how to access them,

reducing barriers to help seeking, and the encouragement of early access to care.

**Support** actions involve leadership actions that directly support those who are seeking mental health care. Examples of support include involving support services, respecting confidentiality, minimising rumours, and the management of unacceptable behaviours.

DO	DON'T
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; get to know your people.</li> <li>&gt; foster a healthy work environment.</li> <li>&gt; set examples of healthy coping behaviours.</li> <li>&gt; watch for significant behaviour/ performance changes.</li> <li>&gt; manage unacceptable behaviour.</li> <li>&gt; provide opportunity to rest.</li> <li>&gt; identify and manage unhealthy situations.</li> <li>&gt; support, intervene, consult.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; diagnose or label.</li> <li>&gt; ignore the situation and hope it will go away.</li> <li>&gt; allow the member to isolate him/herself.</li> <li>&gt; lose touch with members receiving medical care.</li> <li>&gt; try to be their best friend.</li> </ul>

HELPFUL COMMENTS	UNHELPFUL COMMENTS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; 'You're not alone in this'</li> <li>&gt; 'You are an important part of our team'</li> <li>&gt; 'I'm here to help you support you as you deal with this'</li> <li>&gt; 'Tell me a bit more about what is going on for you'</li> <li>&gt; 'Your wellbeing is important. Lets make a time to talk when we won't get interrupted and I can give you my full attention.'</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; 'What about xx, he's worse off than you'</li> <li>&gt; 'No one ever said life was fair'</li> <li>&gt; 'Stop feeling sorry for yourself'</li> <li>&gt; 'Snap out of it'</li> <li>&gt; 'It's all in your head'</li> <li>&gt; 'Take a number in the queue'</li> <li>&gt; 'That stuff is all in the past, get over it'</li> <li>&gt; 'Take a harden-up pill'</li> <li>&gt; 'We're all under the pump'</li> </ul>

HEALTHY	REACTING	INJURED	ILL
Lead by example	Build resilience reserves		Involve mental health resources
Get to know your personnel	Watch for behaviour changes		Demonstrate genuine concern
Foster health climate	Adjust workload as required		Respect confidentiality
Identify and resolve problems early	Know the resources and how to access them		Minimise rumours
Deal with performance issues promptly	Reduce barriers to help-seeking		Respect medical employment limitations
Demonstrate genuine concern	Encourage early access to care		Appropriately employ personnel
Provide opportunities for rest	Consult with health specialists as required		Maintain respectful contact
Provide mental health first aid after adverse situations			Involve members in social support
Provide realistic training opportunities			Seek consultation as needed
			Manage unacceptable behaviours

**SHIELDING**

**SENSING**

**SUPPORT**

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**Remember that when supporting others your role is not to act as a counsellor.**

A range of additional support is available for those who need it. Your role is to:

- > recognise when one of your team (or yourself) is not ok
- > have a conversation with them about it
- > arrange for them to get the support that they need
- > keep connected with the individual and their core support network to support their recovery. This could mean enabling time off to attend appointments, accommodating absences from work, or working with them to ensure that the wider team have the information they need to provide a supportive work environment.



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# RECOGNISING THE ROLE OF MATES AND FAMILY

## BUDDY SUPPORT

Colleagues are in a good position to keep an eye out for each other, and will often be the first to notice changes in behaviour. As a leader, you should encourage individuals to keep an eye out for their colleagues, and expect they will do the same for them.

## FAMILY

It is important to understand the role that family plays in the mental health of employees. What is going on in the home environment will impact on the work environment, and visa versa. The nature of employment can sometimes place additional strain on daily living and relationships. Sometimes people may need leadership or welfare support to manage difficult times [e.g. relationship issues, health problems, financial issues and bereavements]. Access to EAP and community resources should be encouraged.

Family members are likely the first to notice when things are not going well. While people can often 'keep it together' at work, mental health issues often show in the home environment (withdrawal, low mood, aggression, restlessness, alcohol use and difficulty sleeping). Partners and other close family members are in a good position to raise issues and encourage help seeking. Family members are also a significant source of support during the recovery process.

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## THE ROLE OF CULTURE AND COMMUNITY

Organisations comprise a culturally diverse workforce. Family and community provide an especially important role in some cultures, as do spiritual leaders. It is important that cultural needs are recognised, and culturally responsive initiatives and programmes that restore and strengthen whānau and communities are considered.



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# WHAT TO DO WHEN SOMETHING BAD HAPPENS

Sometimes bad events happen. For example, recent natural disasters in NZ have had a major impact on some workplaces. Sometimes staff members are injured or die in the workplace, or in difficult circumstances that will impact on wider team members. It's important to seek professional guidance on managing impacts, but the Ad hoc Incident Review (AIR) is a tool you can use to structure a supportive intervention with your group, and reduce immediate distress. The process can be

implemented either formally or informally, as a small unit or sub-group, or within the more informal buddy system.

This should not replace a critical incident management response (conducted by external professionals involving psycho-education and screening), where the situation involves exposure to trauma, but may be used alongside this process or where operational imperatives do not permit an immediate formal response.

## STEP 1: ACKNOWLEDGE AND LISTEN

### Acknowledge

Leaders have a responsibility to acknowledge the event: "Something bad just happened." "That was a tough one." It is okay to make a global statement about how the group is feeling. Do not ignore the event, or carry on without acknowledging the event. However, do not over-emphasise the event either. Talk about facts only. Approach it the same way you would send a message over the phone, calm, straight forward and clear.

### Listen

Your job is not to fix it (you can't). However, you can help by providing an opportunity for discussion. Expect that some members will not want to talk about the event, or others may only wish to discuss it with their peers. This is okay. Each person will cope with a difficult/stressful event in their own way, and we do not want to interfere with positive coping strategies. What you shouldn't do is force someone to talk to you; this can be detrimental. All discussions should occur voluntarily and naturally.

## STEP 2: INFORM – CHECK IN AND APPLY THE MODEL

Most individuals (80%) will have some short-term reaction to stressful or difficult events.

After acknowledging the event, and providing the opportunity to talk, you should remind your team that it is important for them to take care of themselves. For some they may not be bothered at all, but for others some symptoms of distress may continue over the following days or weeks.

Reinforce that this is normal. However, if these symptoms become too distressing, there are resources available, and inform them that you will help them to access them.

## STEP 3: RESPOND – OBSERVE, FOLLOW UP, MODEL

Observe and follow-up with members regularly to see how they are doing, and ensure that you model healthy coping. People want to hear a leader's negative emotions or thoughts after a distressing event. They don't need you to pretend that everything is okay. However, they also need to see their leader managing their reactions in a healthy manner, including seeking care when/if necessary.

Adverse events not only provide leaders with a challenge, but also provide them with an opportunity. Effective leaders actively demonstrate concern for individuals, acknowledge loss, and communicate directly. Through good leadership, you can strengthen cohesion and resilience.

**As a leader there are some other things you can do to help.**

- > Reinforce an expectation that a reaction is normal.
- > Reassure people there may be a few 'hiccups', but that things will get easier over time.
- > Acknowledge that not everyone will feel or react the same way.
- > Encourage people to be understanding and supportive of each other.
- > Remind people that support is available if they need it.

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## KEEPING AN EYE OUT

The philosophy behind recognising stress reactions in other people, in some respects, is very simple. Any sort of change in behaviour that can't be explained, is cause for concern. It will likely be reflected in the yellow and orange columns in the Mental Health Continuum (page 12). However, everyone is different, and the impact of events on people and their reactions will be different. Changes in behaviour to watch for include the following.

- > **Temperament:** A usually easy going person may become difficult to be with. Laughing, joking and fun disappear and people can seem lifeless, dull and apathetic.
- > **Standards:** Someone who usually takes pride in their appearance may let things slip. Or someone who usually likes to perform tasks to their best ability may produce sloppy work.
- > **Interests:** Some people who had a range of interests may be completely disinterested in prior interests. In addition, their range of interests may narrow to include only those things that are causing them stress. Often, lack of interest is evident in appearance, health, or diet and can create further problems.
- > **Decision making ability:** Some people may make uncharacteristically rash decisions. Others may be very rigid, in that they stick to a decision even if it needs to be adapted to changing circumstances. Others may vacillate between alternatives and some people may have so much trouble with simple decisions that they want other people to make decisions for them.
- > **Pace:** Some people become extremely active, trying to do lots of things – they become almost “hyper”. Others slow down, and even though they may think they are productive, may achieve very little. There is an obvious slowing down, mentally and physically.
- > **Control:** Some people exhibit less control over their behaviour and emotions when they are under stress. They tend to play hard (perhaps even getting into trouble) and/or be more expressive and emotionally. Others are over controlled, and try to keep their emotions and feelings in check.
- > **Memory:** Some people have problems with their memory when they are under stress. They are often absent-minded and forgetful, especially of those things that are outside their narrowed field of focus.
- > **Susceptibility to illness:** Someone who is usually very healthy may seem to be sick all of the time, or complain of minor illnesses.
- > **Personality:** Some usually sociable people withdraw, and spend less time with other people than they normally do. Other people go the other way and become more socially oriented, wasting no excuse to go out. People who may not usually get angry very easily can become angry for trivial reasons. Others may be irritable much of the time.

## THE FOLLOWING ARE SOME HELPFUL BEHAVIOURS

- > Be visible and available, but don't intrude.
- > Spend time with your people collectively and individually.
- > Accept the response you get and allow people to be upset.
- > Allow people to express concerns if they have any.
- > Show your interest in the person and their family, not just the situation.
- > Listen, rather than talk.
- > Continue normal working routines.
- > Wherever possible keep existing reporting or management arrangements.
- > Encourage people to use support systems established within the organisation.
- > Ensure updates and information are disseminated as regularly as possible.
- > Create/support activities that re-establish a sense of control, such as holding regular structured meetings to share information.
- > Invite ideas for making the workplace better.
- > Encourage peer support.

Remember, you are there to support your people, but you are not expected to take on a counselling role. As a leader, your role is to encourage people to take responsibility for their own recovery within a supportive environment. People want to know that you care about them.

If symptoms are not decreasing, then extra help may be required. If, after providing reassurance, people are not coping, you have concerns about their wellbeing, and/or their behaviour is impacting on the workplace, help them arrange support. If you are concerned about someone you should contact your HR team for advice.

### MORE INFORMATION

See Appendices 1 & 2 for a list of additional help and resources.

### RESOURCES

'When trauma and grief come to work' is a practical handbook developed by Skylight for organisations, employers and managers to support staff, clients and customers after the Canterbury earthquakes: [www.moh.govt.nz/moh.nsf/Files/christchurch-earthquake/\\$file/trauma-and-grief.pdf](http://www.moh.govt.nz/moh.nsf/Files/christchurch-earthquake/$file/trauma-and-grief.pdf)

The Mental Health Foundation developed the Open Minds resources as part of the Like Minds, Like Mine programme to provide managers with practical tips to help with conversations about mental health in the workplace: [www.mentalhealth.org.nz/home/our-work/category/40/open-minds](http://www.mentalhealth.org.nz/home/our-work/category/40/open-minds)

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## UNDERSTANDING SELF-HARM AND SUICIDE

The risk of self-harm, either intentionally or by accident, may be higher for those with a mental health condition. Being severely depressed increases the risk of suicide, however the vast majority of depressed people never attempt suicide, and many of those who do, are not clinically depressed at the time.

Suicide may follow relationship disputes, separation from partners and families, intense anger at a sense of injustice, work problems, debt, legal problems, chronic illness and other life problems, creating a sense of despair, with or without depression.

It is not possible to accurately predict who will attempt suicide, except that past suicide attempts increase the risk for future attempts. Some people with many risk factors will not attempt suicide while other people, who seemed to have few risk-factors, may shock others with their attempted, or actual, suicide. Some of the major risk factors for suicide are:

- > social isolation
- > unresolved interpersonal conflict
- > disciplinary, performance or career issues
- > mental health conditions, especially depression, PTSD and other anxiety conditions
- > alcohol or other drug use problems
- > access to firearms or other lethal means
- > losing a loved one to suicide
- > being from a marginalised community.

Those with these risk factors should be strongly encouraged to seek professional help. Even if you are close to someone, it can sometimes be hard to tell how much emotional pain they are in, and whether they need help. Often, it's something small that can make you think something isn't quite right – and more often than not, that hunch will be right. Contrary to common belief, it is often helpful to ask if the person is having suicidal thoughts. More than likely, if the person is having such thoughts, they will experience some relief in being asked.

### RESOURCES

See Appendices 1, 2 and 3 for a list of additional help and resources as well as the resources below:

Suicide prevention information & resources: [www.mentalhealth.org.nz/home/our-work/category/34/suicide-prevention](http://www.mentalhealth.org.nz/home/our-work/category/34/suicide-prevention)

Suicide bereavement information and resources: [www.afterasuicide.nz](http://www.afterasuicide.nz)  
[www.mentalhealth.org.nz/get-help/suicide-bereavement-3](http://www.mentalhealth.org.nz/get-help/suicide-bereavement-3)

Keep an eye out for changes in the behaviour of those around you, and consider encouraging them to seek extra support, especially if they:

- > don't want to see their friends, or no longer enjoy spending time with their friends and family
- > stop doing things they used to love, or don't seem to be enjoying themselves
- > can't remember things, concentrate, or pay attention
- > feel bad about themselves – guilty, worthless or ashamed
- > have a big change in eating patterns or appetite
- > have extreme mood swings
- > feel hopeless or really sad, or cry a lot
- > feel anxious, stressed, nervous or scared a lot and can't seem to relax
- > are not happy unless they're using drugs or alcohol
- > don't take care of their appearance or personal hygiene
- > have physical signs of injury or of self-harm
- > have panic attacks – rapid heartbeat, unable to breathe, feeling dizzy and extremely scared or anxious all at once
- > talk about wanting to hurt themselves
- > feel like their lives don't matter.

**If you are concerned an individual is at immediate risk call 111. Do not try and manage it alone.**

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# MANAGING BULLYING AT WORK

According to WorkSafe New Zealand, workplace bullying is a significant hazard in New Zealand.<sup>20</sup> According to the Mental Health Foundation, bullying affects people physically and mentally, leading to increased stress levels, decreased emotional wellbeing, reduced coping strategies, lower work performance, and disruptive workplaces.

Bullying prevention strategies can include:

- > input from employees
- > emphasis on the organisation's commitment
- > provision of easy to access reporting processes
- > provision of support for complainants
- > inclusion of an anti-bullying focus in induction content
- > provision of training in expected behaviours.

It is important to ensure that the workplace culture promotes good relationships, effective leadership and management, clear expectations, and good bullying prevention and response processes. Creating an environment that fosters good relationships can prevent bullying. If employees receive clear guidelines for expected behaviour, work culture and values, unreasonable behaviour is less likely to thrive.<sup>21</sup>

## MORE INFORMATION

See [pinkshirtday.org.nz](http://pinkshirtday.org.nz) for more information and a workplace toolkit for workplace bullying

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20 WorkSafe New Zealand, 2014  
21 Mental Health Foundation of New Zealand, Working Well Guide & Resources, [www.mentalhealth.org.nz/home/our-work/category/44/working-well-guide-and-resources](http://www.mentalhealth.org.nz/home/our-work/category/44/working-well-guide-and-resources)

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# DEALING WITH PERFORMANCE ISSUES IN THE WORKPLACE

Dealing with performance issues early is important. People usually come to work to do a good job. Performance issues can also sometimes be an indication of other issues going on in an individual's life. Failing to deal with performance issues will allow them to become more entrenched and more difficult to fix, and will also increase stress for both individuals and their manager. Some simple guidelines can help leaders to achieve positive outcomes from difficult conversations.

- > **Stick to the facts** – State what you believe to be the facts, without any interpretation. For example, instead of suggesting that one of your team isn't motivated and pulling their weight, outline the actions or lack of action which lead you to believe this. If deadlines have not been met or you have seen someone shout at a colleague, or be late to work on several occasions, say what you have seen. Keep your tone neutral.
- > **Don't judge** – Ask the individual, in a non-judgemental way, about what happened. Listen to their answer. When leaders fail to listen, people become defensive. Acknowledge the individual's view of the situation. Better understanding of an event may change how you interpret the facts you have witnessed, and your ideas of how they may be best addressed. This may be the time when an individual shares information about what else is going on in their life that contributes

to their performance (for example, there may be a new baby at home, difficulty in a relationship, financial problems, or feeling tired and disinterested all the time etc.).

- > **Respect confidentiality** – Treat the information an individual gives you as confidential, unless you determine that it needs to be shared for operational effectiveness and/or the safety of the individual or others. It is important that you discuss any requirement to share any information with the individual; in most cases they will understand why this is necessary. It is very easy to lose trust if you pass on information from a conversation with an individual without discussing this with them first.
- > **Allow time out** – When people are given feedback, no matter how constructive the intent, they need time to process it. Constructive feedback suggests that there is some element of their performance which is unsatisfactory. Whether they were previously aware of it or not, they have to process this feedback before they can start thinking rationally about how they might address it.

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- > **Ask the individual what THEY think –** After a break (the next day or even later), ask the individual to summarise the situation, and what options they can think of to address this. Individuals are often more familiar with the detailed processes they follow than their leaders. They can therefore often come up with good ideas for improvement. When leaders regularly listen to their people and take their ideas on board, people are more likely to be engaged. When individuals take ownership of a solution, they are more committed to implementing it than if they are told what to do. Agree what will be done, by when, and what evidence will show that the situation has been resolved or improved.
  - > **Offer support –** This may take the form of training, coaching, time or other resources identified as useful for implementing the option chosen. For example, an individual with a family member at home and no family support, may be able to work under more flexible working arrangements, or take compassionate leave while making care arrangements. It is important for your people to understand what the organisation and you expect of them, and how they can meet these expectations every day. Framing the conversation positively and highlighting the support available, motivates the individual to achieve any agreed improvements.
  - > **Acknowledge improvements –** Follow up and acknowledge improvements. If no improvement is noticeable by the agreed timeline, have another conversation to hold the person to account. Sometimes it can take time to achieve a sustainable change where it becomes part of the individual's natural everyday behaviour, rather than something they have to think about consciously. Also acknowledge when good progress has been made, and recognise that sometimes barriers can get in the way of progress (for example, an illness, competing work demands that have may prevented completing a task or undergoing training). It is important to discuss this with the individual to alleviate anxiety and agree the way forward. Individuals can be motivated by positive feedback from leaders regarding their improved behaviour. They will then be more likely to continue their efforts, until the change becomes an integral part of their work pattern.

While difficult conversations are indeed challenging, just listening to the other person, allowing them time to process discussions, and giving them some autonomy will help to defuse emotional tension. This leads to more positive outcomes for the individual, you as their leader and the organisation.

# REFERENCES & APPENDICES

## SECTION 4



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## APPENDIX 1

# WHERE TO GO FOR HELP

If you are concerned about signs of a mental health issues in yourself or someone else, get it checked out. Resources include colleagues, leaders, EAP and external practitioners.

## PHONE LINES

For any crisis, including medical emergencies, call 111

WHO	NUMBER TO CALL	ABOUT
Need to Talk Helpline	1737	Free call (or free text) to talk to (or text with) a trained counsellor
Lifeline	0800 54 33 54	Confidential counselling service
Healthline	0800 61 11 16	Free health advice from trained registered nurses 24/7
SHINE	0508 74 46 33	Domestic abuse helpline 9am – 11pm, 7 days
Depression helpline	0800 11 17 57	24/7 telephone counselling support for those experiencing depression
Womens Refuge	0800 REFUGE or 0800 73 38 43	24/7 crisis line for women dealing with violence in their lives
Mensline	0800 63 67 54	Helpline for men
Alcohol Drug Helpline	0800 787 797	24/7 confidential non-judgemental help and advice
Youthline	0800 37 66 63 (or text 234)	24/7 helpline
Citizens Advice Bureau	0800 36 72 22	Free independent service to help people understand their rights and obligations and to provide the confidence and support to take action
Parent helpline	0800 56 88 56	Support, practical advice and strategies for all parenting issues

## APPENDIX 2

## USEFUL WEBSITES, TOOLS AND APPS

There are a range of useful websites that have information and tools for managing and building mental health:

### FREE DOWNLOADABLE PHONE APPS:



**Breathe2Relax** – portable stress management tool



**Calm** – tools to meditate, sleep and relax



**CBT-I Coach** – improving sleep habits and dealing with insomnia



**Headspace** – guided meditation



**High Res** – tools for managing daily stress and building resilience



**Living Well** – practical resources and support and suggestions to support living a healthier lifestyle



**Lose It** – weight loss programme and calorie counting



**Mindshift** – aims to help teens and young adults cope with stress and anxiety. Issues: anxiety, depression, general well-being, head injury, post-traumatic stress, and stress



**Mood tracker** – tool for tracking emotional experiences over time



**MYRIVR** – enables the community to connect to and self-refer to services, based on needs



**Nike Plus Run** – running and motivation related tips and tools



**Nike Training** – workouts and fitness plans



**Performance Triad** – information and tips for healthy habits including sleep, nutrition & activity



**Virtual Hopebox** – resilience tools

> **myhealthapps.net** is a UK-based directory of useful health apps

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## USEFUL WEBSITES

### General health information, stories and tools

- > **[www.healthnavigator.org.nz/healthy-living](http://www.healthnavigator.org.nz/healthy-living)**  
Information about health issues and healthy living
- > **[www.menshealthnz.org.nz/health-topics](http://www.menshealthnz.org.nz/health-topics)**  
Information about men's and women's health issues
- > **[www.hpa.org.nz](http://www.hpa.org.nz)**  
Health Promotion Agency – Inspiring New Zealanders to lead healthier lives
- > **[www.livingwell.org.au](http://www.livingwell.org.au)**  
Practical resources and support for men
- > **[www.myrivr.co.nz](http://www.myrivr.co.nz)**  
MYRIVR gives access to over 20,000 helpers from more than 7,000 health and social services across NZ funded to help you
- > **[www.health.govt.nz/your-health/services-and-support/health-care-services](http://www.health.govt.nz/your-health/services-and-support/health-care-services)**  
Information about finding a GP, fees and supporting services
- > **[www.healthpoint.co.nz](http://www.healthpoint.co.nz)**  
Information about healthcare providers, services and common treatments
- > **[www.healthed.govt.nz](http://www.healthed.govt.nz)**  
Public health resources which support healthier New Zealand communities

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## Nutrition

- > **[www.health.govt.nz/our-work/eating-and-activity-guidelines](http://www.health.govt.nz/our-work/eating-and-activity-guidelines)**  
The Ministry of Health's Eating and Activity Guidelines
- > **[www.healthyfood.co.nz](http://www.healthyfood.co.nz)**  
Healthy Food Guide Magazine has a free website that contains hundreds of recipes and an expert advice section with information on a range of health topics
- > **[www.heartfoundation.co.nz](http://www.heartfoundation.co.nz)**  
The Heart Foundation website covers a range of topics, such as healthy living (e.g. healthy eating, healthy recipe ideas), know the facts (e.g. Heart Help Hub, conditions, food and drink), blogs, stories and resources (e.g. cookbooks, healthy eating resources, heart health resources, Pacific health resources, Te Reo Māori resources)
- > **[www.nutritionfoundation.org.nz](http://www.nutritionfoundation.org.nz)**  
The NZ Nutrition Foundation provides information about important issues around food, nutrition and health. Information covers a range of topics including nutrients, vitamins, nutrition A-Z, FAQ, minerals and food groups
- > **[www.health.govt.nz/our-work/preventative-health-wellness/nutrition](http://www.health.govt.nz/our-work/preventative-health-wellness/nutrition)**  
The Ministry of Health's nutrition website provides information on healthy eating, physical activity, Green Prescription, obesity, food safety and includes links to other websites with family recipe ideas
- > **[www.5aday.co.nz](http://www.5aday.co.nz)**  
The 5+ a day website has recipes, fruit and vegetable information and a kid's zone including party food ideas
- > **[www.vegetables.co.nz](http://www.vegetables.co.nz)**  
Vegetables.co.nz website offers an A-Z of vegetables including information on nutrition benefits, availability, buying and storing information. The website also includes recipes, tips on feeding children vegetables and information on herbs
- > **[www.healthykids.org.nz](http://www.healthykids.org.nz)**  
Ideas to get your family eating, moving and sleeping well

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## Sports nutrition

- > **[www.ausport.gov.au/ais/nutrition](http://www.ausport.gov.au/ais/nutrition)**  
The Australian Institute of Sport (AIS) website contains a range of resources, including fact sheets, recipes, research, and a detailed supplement and sports food section. The ABCD classification ranks supplements and sports foods depending on scientific evidence and other practical considerations that determine whether a product is safe, legal and effective in improving sports performance
- > **[www.sportsdietitians.com.au](http://www.sportsdietitians.com.au)**  
The SDA website contains sports nutrition information covering a range of topics including: fuelling and recovery (e.g. sports drinks, recovery nutrition, travelling athlete, bone health, eating and drinking during exercise), food for your sport, supplements (e.g. creatine, BCAA, caffeine, protein, and B-alanine), diets and intolerances and body composition (e.g. making weight, weight loss, increasing muscle mass)
- > **[www.dietitians.org.nz/public-info](http://www.dietitians.org.nz/public-info)**  
Contains info about useful nutrition apps

## Alcohol

- > **[www.alcohol.org.nz](http://www.alcohol.org.nz)**  
Information, advice, research & resources to help prevent & reduce alcohol-related harm

## Tobacco

- > **[www.smokefree.org.nz/help-advice/stopping-smoking](http://www.smokefree.org.nz/help-advice/stopping-smoking)**  
A list of services in New Zealand to help you stop smoking
- > **Text 4006**  
Stop smoking text number

## Gambling

- > **[www.choicenotchance.org.nz](http://www.choicenotchance.org.nz)**  
Support for problems with gambling

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## Mental health, resilience and relaxation

- > **[www.mentalhealth.org.nz](http://www.mentalhealth.org.nz)**  
The Mental Health Foundation of New Zealand is a charity that works toward creating a society free from discrimination, where all people enjoy positive mental health and wellbeing
- > **[www.thelowdown.co.nz](http://www.thelowdown.co.nz)**  
Information, stories, and interactive site designed for young people dealing with daily living
- > **[www.beyondblue.org.au](http://www.beyondblue.org.au)**  
Information about recognising and managing anxiety and depression (Australia)
- > **[www.likeminds.org.nz](http://www.likeminds.org.nz)**  
Aims to address stigma and discrimination sometimes associated with mental illness. Contains resources, help options and stories from people with mental illness
- > **[www.leva.co.nz](http://www.leva.co.nz)**  
Support for Pasifika families and communities to build positive health and wellbeing outcomes
- > **[www.thiswayup.org.au](http://www.thiswayup.org.au)**  
Online self-help courses (Australia)
- > **[www.headspace.com](http://www.headspace.com)**  
Meditation and mindfulness made easy
- > **[www.buddify.com](http://www.buddify.com)**  
Mindfulness tools
- > **[www.mentalhealth.org.nz/home/our-work/category/21](http://www.mentalhealth.org.nz/home/our-work/category/21)**  
Mindfulness tools
- > **[www.depression.org.nz](http://www.depression.org.nz)**  
Information, resources and support for people with depression or anxiety
- > **[www.depression.org.nz/get-better/the-journal](http://www.depression.org.nz/get-better/the-journal)**  
The Journal – A self-help tool to support people experiencing depression
- > **[www.calm.auckland.ac.nz](http://www.calm.auckland.ac.nz)**  
Computer Assisted Learning for the Mind (University of Auckland)
- > **[www.moh.govt.nz/moh.nsf/indexmh](http://www.moh.govt.nz/moh.nsf/indexmh)**  
Self-help resources for recognising and managing stress (Ministry of Health)

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- > **[www.mentalhealth.intuto.com/public/course/784686](http://www.mentalhealth.intuto.com/public/course/784686)**  
Mental Health in the Workplace – employee toolkit produced by the Mental Health Foundation and State Services Commission, containing info about mental health problems in the workplace, and about your rights and responsibilities as an employee
  - > **[www.vitalityworks.co.nz/mental-wellbeing-for-new-zealand-workplaces](http://www.vitalityworks.co.nz/mental-wellbeing-for-new-zealand-workplaces)**  
Tips for creating a mentally healthy workforce
  - > **[www.depressiontoolkit.org](http://www.depressiontoolkit.org)**  
Tools to learn how to manage mild to moderate stress and depressive symptoms

### Social support services

- > **[www.cab.org.nz/Pages/home.aspx](http://www.cab.org.nz/Pages/home.aspx)**  
Information and advice, community directory
- > **[www.workandincome.govt.nz/about-work-and-income/contact-us](http://www.workandincome.govt.nz/about-work-and-income/contact-us)**  
Social support services and entitlements

### Finances

- > **[www.sorted.org.nz/Sorted](http://www.sorted.org.nz/Sorted)**  
A free website with a range of information, tools, financial guides, and links to additional resources.
- > **[www.cab.org.nz](http://www.cab.org.nz)**  
Citizens Advice Bureau

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## Families and Relationships

- > **[www.supportingfamilies.org.nz](http://www.supportingfamilies.org.nz)**  
Support, information and resources for those supporting family members with mental illness
- > **[www.govt.nz/browse/family-and-whanau-separating-or-getting-divorced/relationship-counselling](http://www.govt.nz/browse/family-and-whanau-separating-or-getting-divorced/relationship-counselling)**  
List of community organisations and local support
- > **[www.areyouok.org.nz](http://www.areyouok.org.nz)**  
Includes a range of services to help including family violence programmes
- > **[www.barnardos.org.nz](http://www.barnardos.org.nz)**  
0800 BARNARDOS. Barnardos provides support and advice for parents, children and families
- > **[www.familyworks.org.nz](http://www.familyworks.org.nz)**  
Provides counselling for families and parenting programmes
- > **[www.skylight.org.nz](http://www.skylight.org.nz)**  
Offers services to those facing tough times of change, loss, trauma and grief – whatever the cause, and whatever their age (including for children)
- > **[www.govt.nz/browse/family-and-whanau/separating-or-getting-divorced/relationship-counselling](http://www.govt.nz/browse/family-and-whanau/separating-or-getting-divorced/relationship-counselling)**  
Relationship support

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## Parenting

- > **[www.vodafone.com/content/parents.html](http://www.vodafone.com/content/parents.html)**  
Tips for parents to help their children stay safe in the digital world
- > **[www.parenthelp.org.nz](http://www.parenthelp.org.nz)**  
Parent help
- > **[www.skylight.org.nz](http://www.skylight.org.nz)**  
Skylight provides resources for parents such as tips for setting limits or helping children deal with separation
- > **[www.standforchildren.org.nz](http://www.standforchildren.org.nz)**  
Stand delivers family development programmes and home and school based social work services
- > **[www.kiwifamilies.co.nz/articles/relationship-services](http://www.kiwifamilies.co.nz/articles/relationship-services)**  
Information about maintaining healthy relationships
- > **[www.familyservices.govt.nz](http://www.familyservices.govt.nz)**  
You can search for a range of providers and community support groups in your community across all of New Zealand
- > **[www.skip.org.nz](http://www.skip.org.nz)**  
Tips for parents of under five year olds

## Youth and children

- > **[www.sparx.org.nz](http://www.sparx.org.nz)**  
Online tool for young people sponsored by the Ministry of Health
- > **[www.headspace.org.au](http://www.headspace.org.au)**  
Website for young people for when life gets stressful
- > **[www.reachout.com](http://www.reachout.com)**  
Australian youth mental health information service that includes a variety of apps and tools for young people

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## MENTAL HEALTH IN THE WORKPLACE

The Mental Health Foundation of New Zealand has developed a range of resources to support workplaces to enhance and protect their people's mental health and support people who are going through difficult times. Key resources include:

### Working Well Guide & Resources

- > [www.mentalhealth.org.nz/home/our-work/category/44/working-well-guide-and-resources](http://www.mentalhealth.org.nz/home/our-work/category/44/working-well-guide-and-resources)  
These resources, including fact sheets, facilitator guides, slides and worksheets, support workplaces to improve wellbeing at individual, team and organisational levels with a focus on creating psychologically healthy people and environments.

### Open Minds

- > [www.mentalhealth.org.nz/home/our-work/category/40/open-minds](http://www.mentalhealth.org.nz/home/our-work/category/40/open-minds)  
These videos and electronic resources provide managers with practical tips to help with conversations about mental health in the workplace.

### Five Ways to Wellbeing at Work Toolkit

- > [www.mentalhealth.org.nz/fivewaysworktoolkit](http://www.mentalhealth.org.nz/fivewaysworktoolkit)  
Co-developed with the Health Promotion Agency, this toolkit provides a range of fact sheets, tips, tools, templates and team games to introduce five simple and proven actions into your workplace (Give, Be Active, Keep Learning, Take Notice, Connect) to help boost mental health and wellbeing.

### Pink Shirt Day

- > [www.pinkshirtday.org.nz](http://www.pinkshirtday.org.nz)  
A national anti-bullying campaign to celebrate diversity and prevent bullying, with a workplace focus.

### Mental Health Awareness Week

- > <http://mhaw.nz>  
An annual campaign that draws attention to positive mental health, including in the workplace, and provides activities and resources to support engaging staff in wellbeing.

#### RESOURCES

For more workplace resources, visit <https://www.mentalhealth.org.nz/home/our-work/category/27/workplace-wellbeinghealthy-living>

## APPENDIX 3

# RECOGNISING COMMON MENTAL HEALTH DISORDERS

### WHAT IS A MENTAL HEALTH CONDITION?

A mental health condition occurs when a set of distressing symptoms (thoughts, feelings and behaviours) has a severe impact on our psychological, social (including relationships) and vocational functioning.

It is not always easy to recognise or diagnose a mental health condition, because the nature and severity of symptoms can vary from one person to the next. Our personal characteristics, and the environment in which we are living, can influence how we will experience a mental health condition. For example, high-stress environments can trigger symptoms.

### DEPRESSION

Depression is a commonly occurring mental health condition. Over the course of our lifetimes, about one in five New Zealanders will experience a major episode of clinical depression.

What is depression? Depression is a persistent state of low mood and a loss of interest or pleasure in activities that were previously enjoyable. Life becomes flat and grey, and nothing seems fun, exciting, or enjoyable anymore. In more severe cases, the person may believe that life is no longer worth living.

#### Common symptoms of depression include:

- > feeling low, down in the dumps, miserable
- > feelings of worthlessness, helplessness, and hopelessness
- > lack of energy, easily tired
- > lack of enthusiasm, difficulties with motivation
- > loss of interest and pleasure in normal activities
- > lack of appetite and weight loss
- > loss of sexual interest
- > difficulty sleeping, or sleeping too much
- > poor concentration, memory, and decision making
- > thoughts of suicide/death.

Prolonged stress and anxiety, and medical conditions (especially constant pain) are risk factors for depression; it is important that these issues are also addressed.

#### Protective factors

If you are 'socially connected', you are less likely to develop severe depression. The close support of at least one family member or friend is also a protective factor for depression. The stronger and more cohesive your family ties are, the less likely it is that you will become severely depressed, or if you are depressed you will recover well with help. Being able to share your thoughts and feelings with people you trust is important.

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These are resources adapted with permission from the Commonwealth of Australia [www.at-ease.dva.gov.au/veterans](http://www.at-ease.dva.gov.au/veterans)

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Facing up to and attempting to solve problems, rather than trying to avoid them, also helps prevent severe depression. Developing your social and coping skills will help you to overcome challenges. Learning the habit of realistic and hopeful thinking is a helpful strategy to help protect against depression (constant negative thinking is a big risk factor for depression). These protective factors are part of the coping strategies that you can begin to use.

Many men (and some women) find it hard to admit, even to themselves let alone to others, that they are depressed. Indeed, we may continue to function quite well (especially at work), hiding or masking our depression, from others. Unfortunately this 'head-in-the-sand' approach to any mental health condition will not make the problem go away, and may make it worse in the long run.

It is important that, if you are experiencing depression, you seek support and help. This is especially important if you are having frequent thoughts of suicide, and have thought about how you might attempt it.

Most people will respond quite quickly to professional therapy for depression, sometimes in conjunction with anti-depressant medication.

## ANXIETY

Anxiety is best described as a state of apprehension and worry. Some anxiety, from time to time in our lives, is normal and has a protective role in alerting us to potential threats, and putting us in a state of readiness.

Anxiety requires treatment when it is a frequent and dominant feature in your life. Anxiety can also be a problem if it

comes in very intense bursts, panic attacks, in response to specific situations; such as crowded places or public transport. Anxiety can lead to social withdrawal, in order to avoid a wide array of threatening situations, which is also a major risk factor for developing depression. Anxiety responds well to treatment that focuses on thought processes and managing stress responses. If left untreated, chronic anxiety and stress is associated with a wide range of physical illnesses.

Anxiety (especially when experiencing a panic attack) can be very unpleasant, and sometimes frightening. You may believe that you are going to die from a heart attack or go crazy. The symptoms include:

- > apprehension, fearfulness, or terror
- > shortness of breath and tightness in the chest
- > palpitations and increased heart-rate
- > sweating
- > shaking, trembling, or dizziness
- > fear of losing control or going crazy (and fear of the embarrassment this would cause)
- > excessive worry
- > feeling restless and on edge
- > muscle tension
- > physical disorders (e.g. skin complaints, stomach upsets, aches and pains).

Anxiety often readily responds to treatment. The use of calming techniques such as controlled breathing, and planning for stressful situations, can be a great help [see Appendix 6: Learn more about relaxation and visualisation exercises page 102].

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## POST TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER (PTSD)

### What is PTSD?

PTSD is a psychological response to the experience of intense traumatic events, particularly those that threaten life. You may have experienced a threatening event that has caused you to respond with intense fear, helplessness, or horror. Trauma can stem from either man-made events (such as physical assault, sexual assault, accidents, and witnessing the death or injury of others) or natural disasters (such as fires, earthquakes, floods and cyclones).

It is normal to experience distress when confronted with trauma, and most people can recover over the first week or two, particularly with the help of caring family members and friends. However, for some people, the symptoms do not seem to resolve quickly. It is also common for symptoms to vary in intensity over time. Some people go for long periods without any significant problems, only to relapse when they have to deal with other major life stresses. In rare cases, the symptoms may not appear for months, or even years, after the trauma.

### Risk factors

PTSD is not an inevitable consequence of experiencing what, on the face of it, seems to be a traumatic event. It is not fully understood as to why one person exposed to a similar, or even the same event, might go on to develop PTSD, while another person does not. Some risk factors have been identified, including: being exposed to trauma earlier in life, multiple exposures to

traumatic events, an absence of social support after a trauma, and the presence of other major life stressors.

### Signs and symptoms

If you have PTSD, you may often experience feelings of panic or extreme fear, resembling what you felt during the traumatic event. In PTSD there are three main types of difficulties.

1. Re-living the traumatic event – through unwanted and recurring memories and vivid nightmares. It can feel as though the events were happening again; this is referred to as ‘flashbacks’, or ‘reliving’ the event. There may be intense emotional or physical reactions, such as sweating, heart palpitations or panic, when reminded of the event.
2. Being overly alert or wound up – seeing danger everywhere and being ‘tuned in’ to threat. As a consequence, you may become jumpy, on edge, and feel constantly on guard. This can lead to being overly alert or watchful, and to having problems concentrating, sleeping difficulties, irritability, and becoming easily startled, particularly by noises that remind you of the traumatic event.
3. Avoiding reminders of the event and feeling emotionally numb – deliberately avoiding activities, places, people, thoughts or feelings associated with the traumatic event. You may also lose interest in day-to-day activities, feel cut off and detached from friends and family, or feel flat and numb. This can lead to social isolation, which is a major risk factor for depression.

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A health practitioner may diagnose PTSD when a number of symptoms in each of these three areas occur for a month or more, and when the symptoms lead to significant distress or impact on the ability to work and study, and on the quality of relationships and day-to-day life.

## TRAUMATIC GRIEF

The grief associated with trauma may be unresolved over many years, and can lead to social withdrawal. If you have traumatic grief (such as the loss of a friend) you may be unwilling to get emotionally close to someone again. You may have feelings of anger because the death was 'unfair', or feelings of powerlessness or guilt about the circumstances of the death. Sometimes people hold on to, and prolong, their grief because they feel it will be a betrayal of the lost one to move on.

An opportunity to directly focus on the feelings and thoughts associated with the loss will be necessary in order to resolve traumatic grief. Some professional help may be required to take a structured approach to reframing thoughts about the loss, and to explore related feelings.

It is possible to adapt and move on without ever losing a sense of sadness for the loss, and it is normal for waves of grief to peak from time to time, especially at anniversaries.

## SLEEP PROBLEMS

Disturbed sleep is common for a variety of reasons, and can be harmful to your wellbeing. Sometimes it is just a consequence of poor sleep habits (e.g. too much alcohol or caffeine before

sleep, too much physical or mental stimulation before going to bed).

Sleep problems can develop as a consequence of disrupted sleep patterns in operational zones (somewhat like the disrupted sleep patterns of shift workers or parents getting up to settle young children). However, sleep problems can also be a sign of poor mental health. Depression can result in too much or too little sleep. Anxious thoughts replaying over and over can keep people awake. Frequent nightmares will disrupt sleep patterns.

Poor sleep habits can respond to a few simple strategies as found in the 'Strategies' section. Sleep problems associated with mental health conditions often respond well to professional help.

## PAIN AND OTHER PHYSICAL SYMPTOMS

Chronic stress is associated with a wide range of physical symptoms, such as skin complaints and general aches and pains. Pain related to injuries can greatly undermine your sense of wellbeing (e.g. chronic back pain is associated with general disability, emotional distress and depression).

When a mental health condition occurs along with chronic pain, the pain may be felt more intensely and be more distressing.

Untreated pain can impact very negatively on occupational, social and recreational functioning. Not surprisingly, this can induce a sense of hopelessness and worthlessness, and lead to social isolation and severe depression. It is common for people to self-medicate with alcohol or other drugs when struggling with chronic pain.

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Physical problems and mental health conditions are risk factors for each other, e.g. heart disease can lead to depression and anxiety, and depression and anxiety (if left untreated) can lead to heart problems. People with diabetes are twice as likely to develop depression. It is important to get effective treatment for your physical complaints, if you are to minimise your risk of developing, or making worse, any mental health conditions. Treatment of your mental health issues will improve your physical status (e.g. treatment for depression reduces the blood sugar levels of diabetics). Your mind and body are one united system, that cannot be neatly divided for the purposes of physical and psychological treatments.

It is vital that a person suffering from chronic pain receives pain management treatment, along with treatment for mental health conditions, such as depression, PTSD and other anxiety states.

## ADDICTIVE BEHAVIOURS

When a behaviour or activity is very pleasurable (at least initially), and when it also helps to relieve your anxiety, there is the potential to become over-involved in the behaviour. This process is sometimes referred to as 'self-medicating' of low mood, anxiety and life problems.

When you begin to rely on an activity to make you feel better, and when you are struggling to control your involvement, even when it is evident to you that it is harmful, the process can be referred to as an 'addiction'. The best way to avoid developing an addiction is to restrict your involvement in potentially problematic behaviours. Frequent and regular (especially daily) engagement in a behaviour, greatly increases the risk of that behaviour getting out-of-hand.

Addictions can take many forms. Some of the most common ones are summarised below.

### Alcohol and other drug use

In an attempt to cope with unpleasant symptoms of mental health conditions, we may turn to alcohol or other drugs. In New Zealand, the most common drug problem, leaving aside tobacco (which is the biggest killer in the long run), is alcohol, but many people also use other drugs (e.g. cannabis or prescription medications) to excess.

Excessive alcohol and drug use impairs your ability to function effectively, and to relate to other people. It can cause great difficulties in areas such as physical health (liver and brain damage, and increased risk of many types of cancer),

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relationships, work, and finances. Alcohol binges are associated with outbursts of anger, violence and impulsive decisions to attempt suicide.

Excessive alcohol use can contribute to depression, and make anxiety much worse. If you are dependent on alcohol (that is, your nervous system now requires alcohol on a daily basis to feel 'normal', and to avoid withdrawal symptoms), a month of abstaining from alcohol could result in depression and anxiety symptoms being reduced.

Cannabis use is often thought of by many users to be a lower risk option than alcohol. While this is true, in the sense that fewer social problems seem to be associated with cannabis than for alcohol, heavy cannabis use negatively affects concentration, attention and memory.

Brain damage can also result from regular and heavy use of cannabis (especially in the still-developing brains of adolescents and young adults), eventually impairing the user's ability to plan, coordinate and communicate well. Heavy use of cannabis robs users of motivation to get out and do things, which is then a risk factor for depression.

Amphetamine ('speed') or methamphetamine ('meth' or 'ice') use often starts in a party context, but if use escalates and becomes frequent and dependent, then unpredictable, impulsive, aggressive and paranoid behaviour can occur.

It is common for people with mental health conditions to be very heavy tobacco smokers. Nicotine in tobacco is a very seductive drug. It has the unique

properties of being both calming and improving alertness – a powerful addiction combination. The great risk is that, over time, the person's health will severely deteriorate (with a high risk of emphysema or incurable cancer), adding further to their psychological distress.

## Gambling

New Zealanders are amongst the highest gamblers per head of population. That's not necessarily a problem in itself, as gambling can be recreational and enjoyable. The same principle applies with alcohol; it's about keeping the balance right, and fitting gambling around a healthy lifestyle.

Problems arise when losses exceed what can be afforded, and when the over-riding motive is to win money or to escape from boredom and depression. It is then very easy for things to go horribly wrong, with massive repercussions for bank balances, debt and relationships. Fraud is common when problem gamblers desperately 'chase' their losses to try and repair the damage.

Some people with mental health issues develop a problem with gambling, as it is seen as a way of escaping problems in other areas of their lives. Sports betting is the next potential wave of problem gambling, as bets can be placed at home, many types of bets can be laid, and new odds are provided as a game unfolds.

Effective treatments exist for problem gambling, once the person recognises he or she has a problem, and wants to do something about it. Most people with a gambling problem eventually bring it under control.

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## SELF-HARM AND SUICIDE

The risk of self-harm, either intentionally or by accident, is much higher if you have a mental health condition. Accidents are more likely when risks are being taken, such as drink-driving or handling machinery when intoxicated. A fatalistic attitude ('what will be, will be') about life may result from traumatic experiences; a sense that you have little control over outcomes, and feel hopeless and helpless about your future. This attitude may increase risk taking behaviour, and put the individual and other people at risk.

One of the myths about suicide is that you have to be severely depressed to attempt suicide. While being severely depressed certainly increases the risk of suicide many-fold, the vast majority of depressed people never attempt suicide. Many of those who do attempt suicide are not clinically depressed at the time. Suicide may follow domestic disputes, separation from partners and families, intense anger at a sense of injustice, work problems, debt, legal problems, chronic illness and other major life problems, with or without depression.

It is not possible to accurately predict who will attempt suicide, except that past suicide attempts increase the risk for future attempts. Some people with many risk factors will not attempt suicide while other people, who seemed to have few risk-factors, may shock others with their attempted, or successful, suicide.

Some of the major risk factors for suicide are:

- > social isolation
- > unresolved interpersonal conflict
- > severe physical conditions, including chronic pain
- > mental health conditions, especially depression, bi-polar (manic-depression) disorder, PTSD and other anxiety conditions
- > alcohol or other drug use problems
- > access to firearms or other lethal means.

If you have these risk factors, it is strongly recommended that you seek professional help. If someone you care about seems to be at risk, but they do not wish to seek professional help, it may still help if they receive social support, and an opportunity to discuss how they are thinking and feeling.

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This material is also presented earlier on page 70.

## APPENDIX 4

# SELF-ASSESSMENT TOOLS

### RESILIENCE SELF-ASSESSMENT TOOL

Complete and score the assessment below to accurately determine your current resilience levels. This will help you identify possible areas on which you need to focus to help you through change.

Score each resilience statement as follows:

0 = STRONGLY DISAGREE    1 = SOMEWHAT DISAGREE    2 = SOMEWHAT AGREE    3 = STRONGLY AGREE

RESILIENCE STATEMENT	SCORE
I approach new situations with enthusiasm.	
I enjoy achieving the goals I have set.	
I can apply the organisation's values in my work.	
I express my feelings appropriately.	
I enjoy learning new things.	
I take responsibility for my results.	
I ask for support when I need it.	
I recognise when I am stressed.	
I believe I can influence the direction I take in life.	
I actively maintain contact with others.	
I eat a well balanced healthy diet.	
I take time out for myself when needed.	
I think challenges offer me some lessons.	
I know my own strengths & weaknesses.	
I know how to relax under pressure.	
I have a positive view of my future.	
I have a plan for my work tasks.	
I keep myself physically fit.	
I am able to retain a positive outlook during change.	
I know what the purpose of my job is.	
I build strong networks.	
I am realistic about what is possible.	
I show empathy to others' difficulties and concerns.	
I have a strong set of beliefs that I follow.	
I am generally optimistic.	
I bounce back from difficulties.	
I act when opportunities arise.	
I act decisively when things are not working.	
I undertake activities outside work for my own enjoyment.	
I organise my time and prioritise tasks.	
<b>Total Resilience Score:</b>	
<b>Match your score against the table on the next page.</b>	

Match your score against the table below.

SCORE	RESILIENCE ASSESSMENT
0-20	You struggle with change and uncertainty and might find things feel stressful at times. You probably prefer life to be a bit more certain and stable so that you can relax and look forward to things. It is possible you find yourself spending a lot of time feeling as though everything is a struggle. You may feel that things 'happen' to you and around you because you have no control or influence. You can definitely help yourself by identifying areas where you want to make improvements. You may find it helpful to develop a plan of action. It might help to get someone to support you with it, acting as a coach or mentor.
21-45	You have some skills and strategies for handling pressure, tough times and difficulties. However, they probably tend to come and go, especially if you feel as though things are mounting up. When this happens, you find it harder to think and act positively. You may have difficulty coping with the demands you feel are being made of you. Think about where you can take some action to raise your scores and start to increase your personal resilience.
46-70	Many people would probably think that you are quite good at dealing with change, challenge and pressure because you are usually able to use your resources to do so. On balance, you are more positive in the way you view things, and able to handle set-backs without getting too down about life. Being able to do this some of the time does tell you that you could do it more often, and become even more resilient in the face of difficulties. Think about specific elements that might need attention, and plan to start doing something about them.
70-90	You have a number of skills and personal qualities which help you to cope with pressure, from whatever source. In fact, you probably quite enjoy challenge and change and handle yourself confidently. You recognise that you are able to take responsibility for yourself, your thoughts and your feelings. This helps you maintain a resilient attitude and to stay positive and have a strong sense of purpose and direction.

## How well am I doing with my resilience?

The statements below are designed to help you reflect on and plan to build your resilience.<sup>22</sup> Research suggests that focusing on these areas will help build your resilience.

PERSONAL	IN MY TEAM AT WORK	MY WORK PATTERN
I take short breaks regularly to stay fresh.	I take an interest in the experiences and feelings of colleagues.	I am able to prioritise and re-prioritise activities.
I get physical activity or walk during the day.	I welcome new members of staff, inform them of protocol, and check on how they are settling in.	I can say no to taking on more work.
I feel fresh and refreshed.	I participate in social activities associated with the workplace.	I ask for help or support.
I express positive comments about my work, my colleagues and my own value.	I practice active listening skills in discussions.	I am responsive to unexpected requests.
I laugh or smile frequently.	I am reflective (rather than abrupt) in conversations with peers.	I disclose needs and perspectives or opinions in constructive and open ways.
I engage in social and pleasurable activities away from work.	I spend time with colleagues during the day.	I keep lists, update calendars and plan ahead.
I spend enough time away from work to be in regular contact with partner, family and friends.	I recognise when colleagues need time to be alone or not disturbed.	I come to work and leave work within standard working hours.
I reflect on my feelings regularly.	I respect the privacy of team members.	I am able to complete work schedules without needing to work overtime or take work home.
I am planning for a vacation.	I celebrate special events with team members.	I take leave when it is due and disconnect completely from work.
I spend quiet time listening to music, reading, in reflection, meditation or in prayer.	I respect and try to understand differences between team members.	I share with my manager how I prefer to be managed.
	I encourage colleagues to look after themselves.	I reflect on my work practices.
	I consult with colleagues for their opinions on work issues.	I think about future goals or desired vocational pathways.

22 Adapted from Save the Children Fund USA Staff Support Programme Stratos NZ.

## FALLING ASLEEP

Unfortunately getting to sleep is one of those cases where 'the harder you try, the harder it is.' We all know that concentrating on or worrying about falling asleep makes the achievement even more elusive. Checking the clock only to realise you've been in bed for 45 minutes without nodding off can be frustrating and only serves to make you more alert. Similarly, for many, lying in bed is the first time all day that they have time to think. It can be hard to relax with the barrage of important, but non-urgent thoughts competing for your attention. Worries, responsibilities and to-do-lists can all start ruminating in our brain and prevent sleep. It can be hard to stop counterproductive thoughts entering our minds, so instead of simply trying to block them, we can replace them with calming, sleep-inducing alternatives. Thought exercises that occupy sufficient cognitive space to hold off unwanted thoughts may be effective tools. This is where the age-old advice of counting sheep comes in but there are some (arguably more effective) alternatives you can try. Before doing any of these techniques get into the position in which you will fall asleep. Don't worry if your mind wanders, just gently bring it back to the activity and pick up where you left off.

- > **Imagine a place where you feel relaxed.** What does it feel, look, sound and smell like? It could be your favourite beach, a waterfall in the bush or anywhere you feel calm. It can be real or imagined – but try to go into so much detail that you feel as though you really are there.
- > **Imagine a process.** It may be a walk you take regularly, a task you do often that has many small steps or a routine you go through.
  - » Picture the process in detail, paying attention to minute details and imagine that you are actually going through the motions.
- > **Try progressive relaxation.** Imagine your body relaxing one part at a time from your toes to your head. Go slowly and remember to relax even your jaw, eyes and the muscles around your skull. You may find it easiest to contract a muscle as tightly as you can and then let go or simply will the muscle to relax. As you let go of tension you may feel as though your body is becoming heavier, this is a sign that it's working. Imagine yourself slowly sinking deeper into your mattress.
- > **Try counting backwards.** Start at 1,000 and count backwards in 7s. For a slightly easier version try starting at 300 and subtracting in 3s. Along with distracting you, the exercise may give you an outlet for your stress.

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- > **What are you grateful for?** While it may sound like an American holiday tradition, taking the time to consider three things that you are thankful for – be they big or small – can put you into a positive state of mind. If done regularly, this exercise can help you approach sleep with a more positive mindset.

**Focus on your breath – use this technique.**<sup>23</sup>

### Rhythmic Circular Breathing for Sleep

Feel the breath filling up slowly from the diaphragm through your chest, up to your mouth, then, as you breathe out, imagine yourself blowing the breath out of your mouth, round in a circle back and through an imaginary hole in your tummy to the diaphragm. Take the rhythm fairly slowly. Now you understand the principle, try it. Breathe in from the diaphragm slowly through the chest to the mouth, counting to four and blow it back to the diaphragm in another count of four. Pick your most comfortable, fairly slow, rhythm. The most important part of this is the full involvement of the mind in the circular process of breathing. Keep a mental picture of the circle in your mind and follow it round at all times, making sure that the mind concentrates on and thinks only of this circular rhythm. Then, as there is nothing more interesting going on, you will fall asleep.

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23 Livingston-Booth (1985).

## TIPS FOR WAKING UP

- > **Don't hit snooze.** Although it's tempting to stay in bed for as long as possible, sleeping in short intervals until you absolutely have to get up will not do you any favours. Try an alarm app that requires you to solve a problem or take a photo of something before it will turn off. This will force you to wake up fully and give you more time for a low stress morning routine.
- > **Get up when you first wake up.** When you first wake up, your head is free from clutter and distraction – use this to your advantage. Instead of reaching straight for your phone before you get out of bed, get up and think through your day ahead while you get ready.
- > **Make your bed.** This is a simple but effective way to start off a productive and organised day. Getting dressed as soon as you get up has a similar effect.
- > **Open the curtains or turn on the lights.** Darkness causes an increase in the hormone melatonin that helps us fall asleep. Light has the opposite effect. Exposing yourself to bright light early in the morning tells your body it's time to get up.
- > **Talk to someone.** Social contact in the morning can help to break your morning slumber. Alternatively, play some upbeat music.
- > **Wash your face with cold water.**
- > **Physical activity.** It doesn't have to be much but a brief bout of physical activity can speed up the waking process and make you feel more alert.

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## SLEEP & SHIFT WORK<sup>24</sup>

Below are some behavioural strategies for the management of shift work.

- > Maintain healthy sleep habits and keep track of how much sleep you are getting.
- > Try to minimise the frequency of shift changes to less than once per month.
- > On days off keep to a consistent sleep schedule that, if feasible, allows your sleep times to overlap on both workdays and non-workdays.
- > Take a nap before your shift, use bright light at the start of the shift, avoid bright light in the later part of the shift and wear sunglasses if driving home during bright morning hours to trick your body into preparing for sleep.
- > After your shift find a quiet place to sleep or wear earplugs so that you do not get disrupted.
- > Due to the difficulty of sleeping outside of your circadian rhythm it will take longer to get adequate sleep. Allocate nine-ten hours in bed to get the recommended seven-nine hours of sleep.

## THE EFFECT OF SLEEP DEPRIVATION ON EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONS<sup>25</sup>

Sleep deprivation impairs our higher order thinking such as decision making, planning and execution. These functions occur in the brain's pre frontal cortex. Because of its importance in our daily lives and the role of sleep in recovery from, and preparation for, waking, this region is thought to be particularly susceptible to sleep deprivation. Sleep deprivation can lead to:

- > impaired ability to communicate effectively – poor detection of social cues and lower inhibition of inappropriate behaviour
- > lack of innovation
- > inflexibility of thought processes
- > getting side-tracked by distraction
- > over-reliance on previous strategies – sticking with something that has worked before
- > unwillingness to try out novel strategies
- > unreliable memory for when events occurred – better at remembering what happened than when it happened
- > change in mood (loss of empathy with colleagues)
- > inability to deal with surprise
- > poorer appreciation of one's own strengths and weaknesses – may get in over your head
- > impaired risk assessment – underestimation of risk
- > failure to revise strategies following new information – ignoring the significance of new information and sticking with plan A.

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<sup>24</sup> Murphy, P. J. [2002].

<sup>25</sup> Harrison, V., & Horne, J. A. [2000].

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## COUNTERMEASURES TO SLEEP DEPRIVATION<sup>26</sup>

The number one remedy for sleepiness is, without a doubt, sleep. However, this is not always feasible, so it is important to know what you can do to effectively improve your ability to function until you can catch up on sleep. There are a number of commonly accepted countermeasures that, despite what we are led to believe, range from briefly or mildly effective to completely ineffective and even counterproductive. Napping and caffeine intake are effective countermeasures. Napping has been shown to boost alertness, productivity and mood in sleep deprived individuals.

### DID YOU KNOW?

17-19 hours of total sleep deprivation has the same impact on reaction time, coordination, vigilance, memory, divided attention as a Blood Alcohol Content of 0.05% – the legal limit for driving in New Zealand.<sup>27</sup>

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26 Hilditch, C. J., Dorrian, J., & Banks, S. [2016]  
27 Williamson, A. M., & Feyer, A. M. [2000].

## APPENDIX 6

# LEARN MORE ABOUT THE RELAXATION AND VISUALISATION EXERCISES

## PROGRESSIVE MUSCLE RELAXATION

Progressive Muscle Relaxation is a method of relaxation with proven effectiveness. It relieves muscle tension, and can help switch off the 'fight or flight' anxiety response as the nerves in our muscles change the type of signals they transmit to the brain. The brain stops sending panic messages to our nervous system, and a general feeling of physical and mental calmness begins to prevail.

The two main principles of this technique include:

- > tensing muscle groups (one at a time) to become aware of the feeling of tension
- > relaxing the muscles and feeling the tension in them subside – as if flowing out of the body.

## EXERCISE

Allow about 15 minutes for this relaxation exercise. Find a quiet place where you won't be interrupted.

1. Sit in a comfortable straight-backed chair, with your feet flat on the floor.
2. Close your eyes and use the controlled breathing technique for about five minutes.
3. Tense each of the following muscle groups for five seconds, then relax them completely for 15-20 seconds (pay particular attention to the different sensations of tension and relaxation).
  - » Curl both your fists and tighten your biceps and forearms (as if lifting weights). Relax.
  - » Wrinkle up your forehead. Tighten the muscles in your face causing your face to wrinkle; purse your lips and press your tongue against the roof of your mouth; hunch your shoulders. Relax.
  - » Arch your back as you take a deep breath into your chest. Relax.
  - » Taking a deep breath, gently push out your stomach. Relax.
  - » Pull your feet and toes backwards, tightening your shins. Relax.
  - » Curl your toes at the same time as tightening your calves, thighs and buttocks. Relax.
4. Now resume normal activities in a calm and peaceful manner.

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## USING IMAGERY AND VISUALISATION

### STEP 1: FIND A QUIET PLACE

If possible, find a quiet place to sit down. This could be an empty room or even your office.

Close your eyes, and breathe slowly and deeply to calm down.

### STEP 2: CHOOSE YOUR SETTING

Once you feel relaxed, picture yourself in the most peaceful environment that you can imagine. This can be an imaginary place, or a memory of a place or time that has a special meaning to you.

The scene that you imagine is highly personal and should ideally be one that you feel emotionally drawn to. However, if you're having trouble thinking of an image, consider using one of the following.

- > Relaxing on a sunny tropical beach, listening to the waves, and digging your toes into the sand.
- > Curling up in an armchair in a remote cabin, surrounded by mountains and snow, and relaxing in front of a fire with a cup of hot cocoa.
- > Going on a picnic with your family in your secret spot.
- > Sitting by a waterfall deep in the forest, feeling the gentle moisture against your face, and listening to birds.

It's important to remember that imagery's effectiveness relies on using all your senses. For instance, don't just imagine yourself in the remote mountain resort. In your imagination, look around you. Pay attention to the rustic feel of the room. Feel the fire's warmth against your skin, and inhale the musky, earthy scent of the wood's smoke. Touch the cozy blanket, taste the sweet hot chocolate, and look out of the window at the lake outside. Experience the feeling of having nothing else to do but eat, read, and go for a walk.

Your goal is to immerse yourself fully in the scene. This includes what you can see, taste, touch, and smell, as well as how you feel. The more details that you can include in your imagery, the more effective this technique will be.

Keep in mind that when you first begin to use imagery, it might feel strange, and you may have difficulty immersing yourself fully in your imagined scene. With practice, this will get easier; your imagination will get stronger, and you'll be able to enter a relaxed state more quickly.

### STEP 3: RELAX

Stay in your relaxed scene for as long as you feel comfortable, or as long as your schedule allows. Continue breathing deeply, and try not to let any outside thoughts intrude.

When you're ready to leave, sit quietly, and let your mind turn back to the situation at hand.

You'll now feel much more relaxed, in control, and ready to tackle your challenges.

## APPENDIX 7

# LEARN MORE ABOUT HELPFUL THINKING HABITS & MINDFULNESS TOOLS

Become more aware of your thoughts and the effect they have on your life. When you're more aware of the way you think, you can take action to use positive situations to your advantage, and re-shape the negative ones. The goal is to think positively, regardless of the situation, and make a conscious effort to see opportunities instead of obstacles.

### THOUGHT AWARENESS

Thought Awareness is the process by which you observe your thoughts and become aware of what is going through your head. Examples of negative thinking include fearing the future, putting yourself down, criticising yourself for errors, doubting your abilities, or expecting failure. Thought Awareness is the first step in the process of managing negative thoughts, as you can only manage thoughts that you're aware of.

Negative thinking can damage your confidence, harms your performance, and paralyzes your mental skills. Negative thoughts tend to flit into our consciousness, do their damage, and flit back out again, with their significance having barely been noticed. Since we do not challenge them, they can be completely incorrect and wrong. However, this does not diminish their harmful effect.

A general approach to Thought Awareness is logging stress in a stress diary. One of the benefits of using a stress diary is that, for one or two weeks, you log all of the unpleasant things in your life that cause you stress. This

will include negative thoughts and anxieties, and can also include difficult or unpleasant memories and situations that you perceive as negative.

By logging your negative thoughts for a reasonable period of time, you can quickly see patterns in your negative thinking. When you analyse your diary, you should be able to see the most common and most damaging thoughts. Tackle these as a priority.

### RATIONAL THINKING

The next step in dealing with negative thinking is to challenge the negative thoughts that you identified using the Thought Awareness technique. Look at every thought you wrote down and rationally challenge it. Ask yourself whether the thought is reasonable, and does it stand up to fair scrutiny?

#### **Consider the evidence that supports and does not support your thought.**

- > What's the evidence that supports/ does not support my thinking?
- > Am I certain or am I guessing?
- > Have I confused a thought with a fact?
- > Am I letting my emotions guide my thinking?

#### **Next, consider the odds or chances that this thought will actually happen.**

- > Am I 100% sure this will happen?
- > How many times has this happened before?
- > If it did happen, could I cope with it?

**Next, you can also consider what you would say to a friend, or what a friend would say to you. We are often harder on ourselves than we would be on our friends. Ask yourself:**

- > What would I tell a friend in the same situation?
- > What would a friend tell me in this situation?

**Finally, consider the words you are using in your thinking. Overly negative thinking often uses extreme words such as never, always, no one, nothing or everything.**

- > Am I using extreme words in my thinking such as never, always, no one, nothing or everything?

- > The words 'should' or 'must' are also problematic, because they leave no room for mistakes or flexibility in your thinking – setting you up for unrealistic standards. So ask yourself: Am I expecting perfection in myself or others by using the words should or must?

After we have challenged our negative thoughts, we need to replace these thoughts with more positive, helpful and motivating ones. Often just by asking and answering the questions above, you will find a more positive realistic thought. The following table offers possible remedies for common mind traps.

MIND TRAPS	REMEDIES
'Should' statements	Use the verb 'want' instead of 'should'. Give yourself some flexibility in deciding what you want to do
All-or-nothing thinking	Don't make black-or-white judgements. Think of the in-between points or percentages (40% or 75%)
Over-generalisations	Examine the evidence. Is something always true? Or has it happened two times out of the past five?
Mental filtering	Look for the positive side as well as the negative. Focus on solving the problem
Rejecting positive experiences	Acknowledge and accept the reality of positive experiences or events
Jumping to conclusions	Get the facts first. See if the evidence supports your conclusion
Emotional reasoning	Step away from just your emotions, and try to look at yourself as others see you
Labelling	Describe the behaviour, not yourself. If you make a mistake, acknowledge the mistake; don't blame yourself
Personalising	Make yourself prove that you are responsible for the situation. What is the evidence?

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When you challenge negative thoughts rationally, you should be able to see quickly whether the thoughts are wrong, or whether they have some substance to them. Where there is some substance, take appropriate action. In these cases, negative thinking has given you an early warning of action that you need to take.

**To re-programme your self-talk, start slowly. Consider how you can:**

- > reframe the way you perceive events. Reframing is a way of restating negative self-talk into positive affirmation. It puts the picture or experience into a different frame, so that you can look at it in a new way. Consider the worst-case scenario of a given situation. What would happen to you? What new opportunities might emerge from that event? In other words, look at a situation from as many different views as possible. What can you learn about it? A situation that might seem disastrous could offer exciting new opportunities. What seems like a terrible mistake may be a great chance to learn.
- > affirm yourself. Give yourself reassurance and support. Positive and constructive self-talking takes practice; at first it may seem uncomfortable, but keep on using it. Tell yourself that you're fine, that you'll make it, and that you deserve that pay rise, for example. Give yourself credit when it's due. The positive alternatives will gain strength because they actually make more sense.

## POSITIVE THINKING AND OPPORTUNITY SEEKING

Positive thinking should be used with common sense. First, decide rationally what goals you can realistically attain with hard work, and then use balanced thinking to reinforce these.

### Affirmations

Affirmations are positive, specific statements that help you to overcome self-sabotaging, negative thoughts ("I can do this", "I am calm and relaxed"). They help you visualise and believe in, what you're affirming to yourself, helping you to make positive changes to your life and career. By basing your affirmations on the clear, rational assessments of facts that you made using rational thinking, you can undo the damage that negative thinking may have done to your self-confidence.

Some people may view affirmations as 'wishful thinking', or simply looking at the world with an unrealistic perspective. Try looking at positive affirmations this way – many of us do repetitive exercises to improve our body's physical health and condition, so why wouldn't we do this for our mind as well?

Affirmations are like exercises for our mind and outlook; these positive mental repetitions can re-programme our thinking patterns so that over time, we begin to think, and act, in a new way.

The power of affirmations also lies in their repetition. It's useful to recite your affirmations several times a day (have them pop up in your computer diary). You also need to repeat your affirmation as soon as you start to engage in a negative thought or behaviour.

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Affirmations are often more effective when they're paired with other positive thinking and goal-setting techniques. For instance, affirmations work particularly well alongside visualisation; instead of just picturing the change we'd like to see with visualization, we're also saying it aloud using a positive affirmation.

Affirmations are also useful when setting personal goals. Once you've identified the goals you'd like to achieve in the short and long term, you can use positive affirmations to help keep yourself motivated in order to achieve them.

Start by thinking of the areas of your life you'd like to change. For instance, do you wish you had more patience? Or better relationships with your friends or colleagues? Or do you want a more productive workday? Come up with a positive, present-tense statement you can repeat to yourself several times a day.

Keep these realistic; if you can't believe the affirmations you're repeating to yourself, it's highly unlikely that they'll have any impact on your life.

## Overcoming perfectionism

Perfectionism is a set of self-defeating thought patterns that push you to try to achieve unrealistically high goals. While we all need to do high quality work, excessive perfectionism can do more harm than good. For instance, it can be damaging to your self-esteem and to that of the people you work with. It can put a strain on your relationships, and, in some cases, it can lead to health issues.

While a quest for success can be healthy, perfectionists are never satisfied with what they achieve. If something isn't perfect, they dismiss it. They may experience fear of failure, doubt, unhappiness, and other painful emotions. They see mistakes as unacceptable, as they think that these lead others to see them as incompetent. By contrast, people striving for excellence in a healthy way, see mistakes as an opportunity to grow; they understand that mistakes are part of the learning process, and they accept them.

**Affirmations should be formed in the present tense, as if they're already happening. This helps you believe that the statement is true right now. For instance, "I am well-prepared and well-rehearsed, and I can give a great presentation" would be a great affirmation to use if you often feel nervous speaking in front of a group.**

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## Use these strategies to deal with perfectionism.

1. **Set realistic goals** – Perfectionists often set goals so high, there's little hope of achieving them. Come up with several lifetime goals and then break these down into yearly and monthly goals. It can feel great to achieve these smaller goals!
2. **Listen to your emotions** – Whenever you're feeling anxious, unhappy, or scared about a task, ask yourself whether you've set your goal too high.
3. **Don't fear mistakes** – Mistakes are part of life. They can even provide rich learning experiences, if you have the courage to examine them. If you make a real effort to learn from each mistake that you make, you'll grow as a result.
4. **Readjust your personal rules** – Perfectionists often live by a rigid set of rules, such as "I must never make mistakes". Although it's healthy to have high personal standards, they need to be flexible and helpful, not unrelenting and unrealistic.
5. **Focus on the whole** – Perfectionists often exhibit 'tunnel vision'. They focus on one small part of something and ignore the rest. Challenge this by making an effort to look at what you've done right. Don't focus exclusively on the negative.
6. **Watch what you tell yourself** – Be careful using these 'must', 'should', or 'shouldn't' words in your thinking; they can often lead you to create unrealistic expectations.
7. **Relax and be more spontaneous** – Perfectionists often find it difficult to relax and be spontaneous. Relaxation and spontaneity are

not only necessary for a healthy life, but they can also improve your productivity and wellbeing. Take regular breaks when you're at work to stretch, walk around, or do deep breathing exercises.

## Overcoming fear of failure

Most of us will stumble and fall in life. Doors will get slammed in our faces, and we might make some bad decisions. Failure can teach us things about ourselves that we would never have learned otherwise. For instance, failure can help you discover how strong a person you are, help you discover your truest friends, or find unexpected motivation to succeed. Often, valuable insights come only after a failure and help us build our resilience in the face of future challenges. Accepting and learning from those insights is key to succeeding in life.

The fear of failing can be immobilising. It can cause us to do nothing, and therefore resist moving forward. Fear of failure is when we allow that fear to stop us doing the things that can move us forward to achieve our goals. It's almost impossible to go through life without experiencing some kind of failure. The wonderful thing about failure is that it's entirely up to us to decide how to look at it. We can choose to see failure as 'the end of the world', or as proof of just how inadequate we are. Or, we can look at failure as the incredible learning experience that it often is. Every time we fail at something, we can choose to look for the lesson we're meant to learn. These lessons are very important; they're how we grow, and how we keep from making that same mistake again. Failures stop us only if we let them.

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### More about mindfulness

Mindfulness is a state of awareness, or 'presence' of mind. Rather than being led by thoughts and feelings, often influenced by past experiences and fears of future occurrences, mindfulness focuses on living with full attention and purpose in the present moment.

You can train your brain to support you in taking a mindful approach to stress and to perform better in all aspects of your life. How you focus your attention plays a critical role in how you deal with stress. Scattered attention impairs your ability to let go of stress, because even though your attention is scattered, it is narrowly focused - you are only able to fixate on the stressful parts of your experience. When your attentional spotlight is widened, you can more easily let go of stress.

By widening your attentional focus, you become an observer (vs responder), and your brain's electrical activity drops to more relaxed, open frequencies. The sympathetic part of your autonomic nervous system, which engages the fight or flight response, tones down, and the parasympathetic system increases its dominance [rational thinking prevails].

Widening attention involves paying attention to even the most routine of tasks. For example, as you drive to work each day on the same road, you become numb to your surroundings. By activating your perceptual capabilities [a house you have never noticed before], you are activating the executive control centre of your frontal lobes. The more you feed

your brain with this attentional shift, the more it becomes your way of being present in the world. Your prefrontal cortex gives you the ability to maintain sustained attention and make complex decisions. Keeping it activated will continue to strengthen these skills.

## MORE MINDFULNESS EXERCISES<sup>28</sup>

### Being in the moment

Sit back and feel the weight of the book in your hands, feel the texture of the cover. As you breathe in and out deeply, feel the temperature in the room on your skin. Random thoughts might come to mind. Simply observe and accept them as they pass, as if they are cars going slowly by. You don't have to stop any of the 'cars' to examine them, just let them pass by. By practising this type of observing and acceptance, you can detach from your worries and concerns, they can simply drift by, not sticking around long enough to take root. By detaching from your thoughts they become less present in your mind. By being in the moment you can cleanse yourself of the nuisance worries and anxiety about what to do about something in the future that might not even happen.

Being present in the moment allows your brain to experience the vibrancy and richness of the now. Maintaining an observing perspective helps you develop a non-judgemental attitude. You delay reacting to the situation until all of the information is put into perspective.

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28 [www.pocketmindfulness.com/6-mindfulness-exercises-you-can-try-today](http://www.pocketmindfulness.com/6-mindfulness-exercises-you-can-try-today)  
[www.the-guided-meditation-site.com/mindfulness-exercises.html](http://www.the-guided-meditation-site.com/mindfulness-exercises.html)

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### Engaging the half knowing smile

Smile ever so slightly, just enough to lift the outside edges of your lips up. If you like you can think of something mildly funny, or someone or something that makes you feel happy. The simple behaviour of smiling ever so quietly cultivates a quiet mind.

### Power pose

Stand with your feet a little wider than shoulder-width apart, with your hands on your hips. Then inhale slowly and deeply for four to five seconds. Don't rush it. You want to get your lungs full without holding your breath. Then exhale slowly, for about six seconds, emptying your lungs completely. Continue breathing in this way, as you remain in the pose for two minutes (browse the internet for 'power poses', to see other options if this one doesn't work for you).

Doing non-verbal power poses for even just two minutes can result in huge reductions in the stress hormone cortisol, with associated increases in testosterone, a hormone associated with confident, assertive behaviours. People who practised power poses briefly prior to an evaluation interview were rated as more confident and assertive.<sup>29</sup>

The following can be useful during your workday; when you feel stress increasing, lean back in your chair and open your chest, by moving your hands back and rolling your shoulders back.

### One minute breathing

This exercise can be done anywhere at any time, standing up or sitting down. All you have to do is focus on your breath for just one minute. Start by breathing in and out slowly, holding your breath for a count of six seconds once you've inhaled. Then breathe out slowly, letting the breath flow effortlessly out.

Leave your eyes open and breathe normally. Be ready to catch your mind from wandering off (because it will) and return your attention to your breath.

This mindfulness exercise is far more powerful than most people will think. It takes some people many years of practice before they are able to complete a single minute of alert, clear attention. Use this exercise many times throughout the day to restore your mind to the present moment and to restore your mind to clarity and peace. Over time, you can gradually extend the duration of this exercise into longer and longer periods.

### The ten second count

In this exercise, rather than focusing on your breath, you just close your eyes and focus your attention on slowly counting to ten. If your concentration wanders off, start back at number one! For most people, it goes something like this...

*"One...two...three...do I have to buy milk today or did John say he'd do it? Oh, oops, I'm thinking!"*

*"One...two...three...four...this isn't so hard after all... Oh no... that's a thought! Start again."*

*"One...two...three...now I've got it. I'm really concentrating now..."*

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## Touch points

Think of something that happens more than once every day, something you take for granted, like opening a door, for example. At the very moment you touch the door knob to open the door, allow yourself to be completely mindful of where you are, how you feel and what you are doing. Similarly, the moment you open your computer to start work, take a moment to appreciate the hands that let you do this, and the brain that will help you use the computer.

The cues don't have to be physical ones. It could be that every time you have a negative thought, you take a mindful moment to release that thought. Or it could be that, every time you smell food, you take a mindful moment to rest in the appreciation of having food to eat. Choose a touch point that resonates with you daily. Then, instead of going through the motions on auto-pilot, you can stop and stay in the moment, resting in the awareness of this activity.

## Conscious observation

Pick up an object that you have lying around. Any mundane everyday object will do... a coffee cup or a pen for example. Hold it in your hands and allow your attention to be fully absorbed by the object. Observe it. Don't assess it or think about it, or study it intellectually. Just observe it for what it is.

You'll feel a sense of heightened 'nowness' during this exercise. Conscious observation can really give you a feeling of 'being awake'. Notice how your mind quickly releases thoughts of past or future, and how different it feels to be in the moment. Conscious observation is a form of meditation. It's subtle, but powerful.

## Drop anchor

This is a simple exercise to centre yourself and connect with the world around you. Practise it throughout the day, especially any time you find yourself getting caught up in your thoughts and feelings.

- > Plant your feet on the floor.
- > Push them down – notice the floor beneath you, supporting you.
- > Notice the muscle tension in your legs as you push your feet down.
- > Notice your entire body and the feeling of gravity flowing down through your head, spine, and legs into your feet.
- > Now look around and notice what you can see and hear around you. Notice where you are and what you're doing.

## Notice five things

This exercise will help you centre yourself and engage with your environment. Practise it when you find yourself getting caught up in your thoughts and feelings.

- > Pause for a moment.
- > Look around and notice five things that you can see.
- > Listen carefully and notice five things that you can hear.
- > Notice five things that you can feel in contact with your body (for example, your watch against your wrist, your trousers against your legs, the air on your face, your feet upon the floor, your back against the chair).
- > Finally, do all of the above simultaneously.

## FOR THE WORKPLACE

Put in place an approach for dealing with stress as it occurs.

### Step 1: Stop.

As soon as you begin to feel stress coming on, say “Stop!” to yourself. For example, your computer freezes just as you’re trying to finish your presentation, and you feel that rush of anxiety with failure messages flooding into your mind: “The presentation will fail; I’ll fail; I’ll be fired.” Block those messages before they can be heard by saying, “Stop!” Repeat the message two more times: “Stop!” “Stop!”

### Step 2: Breathe.

The next step is to breathe. Take a deep breath, filling your diaphragm with air. Hold that breath for eight seconds, and then slowly let the air out. Just as the word “stop” blocks the negative thoughts from your mind, breathing overcomes the stress tendency to hold your breath when under stress. Focusing on breathing helps you to focus on your stress in a different way.

### Step 3: Reflect.

By interrupting the pattern of stress and giving yourself energy through breathing, you can now focus on the real problem, the cause of the stress. By reflecting on your stress response, you can begin to distinguish the different levels of thought and to sort out rational from irrational stress responses. You can see the practical situation more calmly and realistically, and distinguish it from the distortions of your anxiety-influenced thoughts.

### Step 4: Choose.

Finally, with your attention now on the practical problem itself, you can choose to find real solutions. For example, after rebooting your computer you may discover that very little material was lost, or that even without the lost material, you’ll still be able to get the information across to your audience using the old-fashioned method of talking it through. What might have seemed a disaster becomes a manageable problem. By identifying your options you have the power to solve the problem.

Stress busters can become easy and natural ways to help you endure those anxious moments, and enjoy your life and work.

### Try 'minis'

Minis are shorter versions of the relaxation response technique that you can use quickly, whenever you feel tension beginning to grip you. Taking the following actions will help to reduce stress if you don't have a lot of time.

- > **Take a deep breath and hold it for several seconds.** Then let your breath out very slowly.
- > **Put your right hand just under your navel.** Focus on breathing down to your navel. As you breathe in the first time, say the number ten. Breathe out. Then breathe in and say the number nine. Breathe out. Continue until you reach zero.

- > **Breathe in through your nose and out through your mouth** ten times. Notice how cool the air feels when you inhale and how warm it is when you exhale.
- > **Imagine air as a cloud.** As you breathe, envision that the air comes to you as a cloud, filling you and then leaving you.
- > **Enjoy humour.** Just laughing can transform that rigidly tight facial expression of tension into more relaxed and flexible features. Humour is also a way to reframe negative self-talk into something more positive and fun. Watch a favourite comedy show or seek out people who make you laugh.

DO	DON'T
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>&gt; While you don't want to turn your office into a gym, simple pieces of exercise equipment that can be used for five-ten minute sessions (e.g. an exercise ball or hand weights) may let you work off frustration and build positive energy.</li><li>&gt; Tuning in to your favourite music station for a few minutes at work can give your mind a well-deserved break from your daily activities, and may help to boost your energy level. Additionally, listening to soothing music at a reasonable volume may help ease your stress without taking your focus off your work.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>&gt; Coffee – Many people like to start their day with a cup of coffee. However, coffee is a stimulant, and drinking too much of it when you are already stressed can make you jumpy and nervous. Enjoy it in moderation and avoid using it as an 'energy booster.'</li><li>&gt; Fast food – When work gets really busy, a lot of people fall back on a diet of fast food and comfort snacks. Avoid this. High stress already puts a burden on your digestive and circulatory systems. Adding high fat, high carb or sugar laden foods will only negatively impact your overall health.</li><li>&gt; Information comes from a lot of sources: email, phones, paperwork. Having to juggle all these sources is a major source of stress, especially if many are bringing bad news. Try, if possible, not to give attention to all these sources of input at once. Turn off your phone when and if you can.</li></ul>















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