

HIGH STRESS WORK ENVIRONMENTS

How pressure affects people and teams.

Healthier people. Stronger workplaces. A brighter tomorrow.

Healthy
people build
healthy
workplaces.

1 What makes a workplace high stress?

High stress workplaces often include:



High demands

Consistently more to do than time or resources allow.



Uncertainty

Constant change, unclear direction or unpredictable outcomes.



Fast pace

Little time to think, plan or recover.



Low control

Limited input into decisions that affect work.



Conflict

Ongoing tension, difficult relationships or workplace toxicity.



Crisis

Frequent emergencies or high-stakes situations.



Poor recovery time

Not enough time to rest and recharge between periods of high demand.

People
Teams
Workplaces
Thrive



2 How stress shows up in teams

Chronic workplace stress can lead to:



Increased irritability

Shorter tempers, lower patience and more frustration.



More mistakes

Reduced focus, attention and quality of work.



Higher turnover

Valuable people leave, and it's harder to attract new talent.



Increased absenteeism

More sick days, presenteeism and reduced productivity.



Shutdown

Withdrawal, disengagement and reduced creativity.



More conflict

Greater tension within and between teams.



Lower morale

People feel less motivated, connected and positive about the future.

3 What employees can do

While workplace stress can't always be eliminated, you can:



Pause and prioritize

Take short pauses, focus on what matters most, and break tasks into smaller steps.



Set boundaries

Protect your time and energy where possible. It's okay to say no.



Build recovery routines

Make time for rest, movement, good nutrition and things that restore you.



Seek support

Talk to a trusted colleague, leader or professional. You're not alone.



Have realistic expectations

Own your best, not everything. Progress over perfection.

4 What leaders can do

Leaders play a key role in preventing and reducing workplace stress:



Provide role clarity

Ensure people understand their responsibilities, priorities and how their work contributes.



Communicate openly

Share information, even when it's uncertain, and be honest about challenges.



Review workload and staffing

Look for imbalances and make adjustments before people are overwhelmed.



Build psychological safety

Create a culture where people feel safe to speak up, ask for help and share concerns.



Model reasonable expectations

Set a healthy pace and respect boundaries. Your behaviour sets the tone.



Make time for recovery

Encourage breaks, time off and sustainable work practices.

5 When a workplace needs attention

It may be time to take a closer look if you notice:



Recurring burnout

People are consistently exhausted or emotionally depleted.



Increasing conflict

More tension, complaints or breakdowns in teamwork.



More errors or reduced quality

Mistakes are happening more often.



People dreading work

A noticeable drop in motivation, engagement or enthusiasm.

When people struggle,
performance suffers.

6 Building a healthier culture

A healthier, more sustainable workplace is possible. Consider:



Regular check-ins

Create space for honest conversations about workload, wellbeing and support needs.



Debrief and learn

After busy periods or challenging situations, reflect on what went well and what could be improved.



Recognize and appreciate

Acknowledge effort, celebrate progress and value people's contributions.



Invest in sustainable practices

Prioritize wellbeing, build resilience and design work in ways that people can maintain over time.

7 Important to remember

Resilience matters, but systems matter too.

Individuals can build coping skills, but lasting change also requires healthy work design, reasonable demands and supportive leadership.

When we support both people and the systems they work within, everyone has a greater chance to thrive.

People
thrive when
workplaces
care

People
Support
Change
Communities