



# A COMMUNITY SECTOR EMPLOYEE'S GUIDE FOR WORKING TOWARDS A PSYCHOLOGICALLY HEALTHY WORKPLACE

The quality and effectiveness of all Community Sector services depend on having a stable, capable and sustainable workforce. There is increasing recognition that workers in the Community Sector often experience high levels of work-related demands and pressures and are particularly vulnerable to the experience of stress and burnout. This resource aims to provide some practical tips for employees to address their own wellbeing at work.

While some stress is a normal part of the workplace, excessive stress can interfere with your productivity and reduce your physical and emotional health. Finding ways to manage workplace stress is not about making huge changes to every aspect of your work life or rethinking career ambitions. Instead, stress management requires focus on the one thing that's always within your control....YOURSELF.

Employees have a part to play in their own wellbeing at work. They need to comply with organisational policies and procedures and follow the tips below.

## Tip 1: Recognise warning signs of excessive stress at work

When you feel overwhelmed at work, you can become irritable and withdrawn. This can make you less effective in your job and make your work seem less rewarding. If you ignore the warning signs of work stress, they can lead to bigger problems. Beyond interfering with job performance and satisfaction, chronic or intense stress can also lead to physical and emotional health problems.

**Shrug your shoulders and release tension held in your neck and back. Slowly and deliberately raise your shoulders as close to your ears as you can while breathing in deeply; then slowly push them back and down in a rolling motion, breathing out. Repeat five times.**

Symptoms and signs of excessive workplace stress:

- **Physical** - headaches, indigestion, tiredness, slow reactions, shortness of breath;
- **Mental** - difficulty in decision-making, forgetfulness, depression, apathy;
- **Emotional** - irritability, excessive worrying, a feeling of worthlessness, anxiety, defensiveness, anger, mood swings;
- **Behavioural** - diminished performance, withdrawal or impulsive behaviours, increase in alcohol and nicotine consumption.

Common longer-term health issues linked to stress include cardiovascular disease, immune deficiency disorders, gastrointestinal disorders, psychiatric/psychological illness and musculoskeletal disorders.

## Tip 2: Reduce job stress by taking care of yourself

Stress releases the cortisol hormone as an instinctive “fight or flight” response. Constantly raised cortisol levels can, and will, damage your health. The harder you work, the more actively you need to manage stress. Start by paying attention to your physical and emotional health. When your own needs are taken care of, you're stronger and more resilient to stress. The better you feel, the better equipped you'll be to manage work stress without becoming overwhelmed.

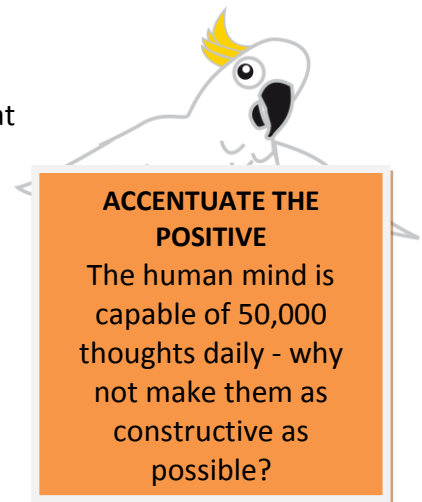
Taking care of you doesn't require a total lifestyle overhaul. Even small things can lift your mood, increase your energy, and make you feel like you're back in control. Here are some suggestions to consider:

- **Set realistic goals and priorities:** be realistic about what you can accomplish;
- **Take more breaks from your work:** even a five-minute break will help;
- **Treat you body right:** eat a balanced diet, lose some weight, get plenty of sleep and exercise;
- **Don't procrastinate:** delay breeds stress! Eliminate items which won't/can't get done and do those that are important first;
- **Learn to say "no" and "not now":** when your schedule is full, say "no" to activities you don't enjoy, to unrealistic demands, to responsibilities that aren't yours;
- **Maintain a sense of humour.** Try to remember what was stressful in your life six months or a year ago. Chances are, you can't, whatever seems traumatic now will fade into oblivion as time passes.

### Tip 3: Bring your life into balance

How people weave together their personal life with their profession varies. What works for one person won't work for another. It boils down to whatever is best for you.

- **Work out what matters** - the first rule of balancing work, family and lifestyle commitments is to be realistic about your needs and goals.
- **Know what you are entitled to** - there's a large volume of information available in the Community Sector on flexible, family-friendly working arrangements, including workplace legislation and policies, so take advantage of it and make sure you know what may make a positive difference for you.
- **Resist the temptation to let work spill over into your personal life** - instead, keep your personal life for family time alone, and make sure you create clearly designated boundaries for work and personal tasks. Consider 'unplugging' regularly from your laptop, email and mobile phone - the minute you leave the workplace is ideal.



### For more information:

**Sane Australia** aims to promote good mental health to people within their work environment by providing advice, information and referrals on mental illness. <http://www.sane.org/>

**Northern Territory Working Women's Centre** provides employee information and support <http://www.ntwwc.com.au>

**Beyondblue National Workplace Program** - beyondblue works to build the capacity of workplaces and individuals to know what to do to reduce the impact of depression and anxiety. [http://www.beyondblue.org.au/index.aspx?link\\_id=4.1028](http://www.beyondblue.org.au/index.aspx?link_id=4.1028)

**Nutrition Australia** offers a variety of educational services that provide valuable, practical health and nutrition information for workplace environments and community settings. <http://www.nutritionaustralia.org/national/resources>

**Mental Health at work** (mh@work) is an international organisation aimed at improving the wellbeing and productivity of people and workplaces. They offer unique workplace mental health and wellness strategies, awareness forums, mental health and wellbeing management workshops plus an e-learning tool. <http://www.mhatwork.com.au/>



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