Alleviating Job Burnout: 
*Causes, Symptoms and Coping Strategies*

Presentation by: 
MHN Training & Development

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*Participant Handbook*
Program Objectives

- Discuss the signs, symptoms and consequences
- Take a self-assessment: checking yourself for burnout
- Consider different causes of burnout
- Explore prevention and coping strategies

What is Burnout?

*Job burnout* is…
a special type of job stress — a state of physical, emotional or mental exhaustion combined with doubts about your competence and the value of your work.
### Warning Signs & Symptoms of Burnout

#### Signs and Symptoms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Physical</th>
<th>Emotional</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Feeling tired and drained most of the time</td>
<td>Sense of failure and self-doubt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lowered immunity, feeling sick a lot</td>
<td>Feeling helpless, trapped, and defeated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased headaches, back pain, muscle aches</td>
<td>Detachment, feeling alone in the world</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Behavioral

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Withdrawing from responsibilities</th>
<th>Isolating yourself from others</th>
<th>Procrastinating, taking longer to get things done</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Using food, drugs, or alcohol to cope</td>
<td>Taking out your frustrations on others</td>
<td>Skipping work or coming in late and leaving early</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Consequences of Burnout

Ignored or unaddressed job burnout can have significant consequences, including:

- Excessive stress
- Fatigue
- Insomnia
- A negative spillover into personal relationships or home life
- Depression
- Anxiety
- Alcohol or substance abuse
- Heart disease
- High cholesterol
- Type 2 diabetes, especially in women
- Stroke
- Obesity
- Vulnerability to illnesses like colds and flu
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You May Be On the Road To Burnout If...

- Every day is a bad day
- Caring about your work life seems like a total waste of energy
- You’re stressed or exhausted all the time
- The majority of your day is spent on tasks you find either mind-numbingly dull or overwhelming
- You feel like nothing you do makes a difference or is appreciated

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Causes of Burnout

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Work-related</th>
<th>Lifestyle</th>
<th>Personality</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dull or overworked job</td>
<td>Working too much, without enough time for relaxing and socializing</td>
<td>The need to be in control; reluctance to delegate to others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monotonous or unchallenging</td>
<td>Being expected to be too many things to too many people</td>
<td>Pessimistic view of yourself and the world</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of recognition or rewards for good work</td>
<td>Taking on too many responsibilities, without enough help from others</td>
<td>Perfectionistic tendencies; nothing is ever good enough</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unclear or overly demanding job expectations</td>
<td>Not getting enough sleep</td>
<td>High-achieving, Type A personality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feeling like you have little or no control over your work</td>
<td>Lack of close, supportive relationships</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working in a chaotic or high-pressure environment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mismatch in values</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Poor job fit</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extremes of activity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unfairness</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Breakdown of Community</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dysfunctional workplace dynamics</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Slide 8

Stress vs. Burnout

**Stress**
- Characterized by over-engagement
- Emotions are over-reactive
- Produces urgency and hyperactivity
- Loss of energy
- Leads to anxiety disorders
- Primary damage is physical
- May kill you prematurely

**Burnout**
- Characterized by disengagement
- Emotions are blunted
- Produces helplessness and hopelessness
- Loss of motivation, ideals, and hope
- Leads to detachment and depression
- Primary damage is emotional
- May make life seem not worth living

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Burnout & Depression

Certain symptoms said to be a result of burnout also occur in depression. These include:
- Extreme exhaustion
- Feeling low
- Reduced performance

Some characteristics specific to depression:
- Negative thoughts and feelings are spread to all areas of life
- Low self-esteem
- Hopelessness
- Suicidal tendencies
Burnout Prevention

- Start the day with a relaxing ritual
- Adopt healthy eating, exercising, and sleeping habits
- Prioritize what is most important to you
- Set boundaries
- Take a daily break from technology
- Nourish your creative side
- Learn how to manage stress

Take Action If You Are Experiencing Signs and Symptoms

- Identify what's fueling job burnout
- Actively address problems
- Evaluate your options
- Manage your stress
- Get some exercise
- Get some sleep
- Adjust your attitude
- Assess your interests, skills and passions
Coping Strategies

- Take time off
- Slow down
- Seek support
- Change jobs or careers

Acknowledge Your Losses

Burnout brings with it many losses, which can often go unrecognized. These may include the loss of:

- Idealism or dream with which you entered your career
- The role or identity that originally came with your job
- Physical and emotional energy
- Friends, fun, and sense of community
- Self-esteem and sense of control
- Joy, meaning and purpose that make work—and life—worthwhile

Source: Keeping the Fire: From Burnout to Balance by Ruth Luban (audio cassette)
Resources

Books
• Potter, Beverly A. Overcoming Job Burnout: How to Renew Enthusiasm for Work
• Berglas, Steven. Reclaiming the Fire: How Successful People Overcome Burnout
• Davis, M., McKay, M., Robbins, Eshelman, R. The Relaxation & Stress Reduction Workbook.

Online
www.members.MHN.com
www.mayoclinic.com
www.stress.about.com
**Handout A: Checking Yourself for Burnout**

**Instructions:** For each question, circle the number of the response that best applies to you. Use the following scale for your responses:

1 = Not at all  
2 = Rarely  
3 = Sometimes  
4 = Often  
5 = Very Often

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Question</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>I feel run down and drained of physical or emotional energy.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>I have negative thoughts about my job.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>I am harder and less sympathetic with people than perhaps they deserve.</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>I am easily irritated by small problems, or by my co-workers and team.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>I feel misunderstood or unappreciated by my co-workers.</td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>I feel that I have no one to talk to.</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>I feel that I am achieving less than I should.</td>
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<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>I feel under an unpleasant level of pressure to succeed.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>I feel that I am not getting what I want out of my job.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>I feel that I am in the wrong organization or the wrong profession.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>I am frustrated with parts of my job.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>I feel that organizational politics or bureaucracy frustrate my ability to do a good job.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>I feel that there is more work to do than I practically have the ability to do.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>I feel that I do not have time to do many of the things that are important to doing a good quality job.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>I find that I do not have time to plan as much as I would like to.</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Check Yourself for Burnout -- Score Interpretation

Add up your score across the 15 items and check your result using this scoring table.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Comment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>15-18</td>
<td>No sign of burnout here.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19-32</td>
<td>Little sign of burnout here, unless some factors contributing to any burnout are particularly severe.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33-49</td>
<td>Be careful – you may be at risk of burnout, particularly if several scores are high.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50-59</td>
<td>You are at severe risk of burnout – do something about this urgently. In the near future, consider taking some time away from the source of burnout in your life, if at all possible.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60-75</td>
<td>You are at very severe risk of burnout – do something about this urgently. Consider taking some time away from the source of burnout in your life as soon as possible.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note:

This tool uses an informal approach to assessing burnout. While it may be intuitively useful, it has not been validated through controlled scientific tests and must therefore not be used as a diagnostic technique. Please, therefore, interpret the results with common sense. Also, make allowances for any recent events that may have a disproportionate influence on your mood at the time you take the quiz!

If you prefer rigorously validated tests, then the Maslach Burnout Inventory may be useful. This was developed by Christina Maslach, one of the leading researchers in the field of burnout. Copies can be purchased at the following site: [https://www.cpp.com/en/detailprod.aspx?pc=35](https://www.cpp.com/en/detailprod.aspx?pc=35).

Handout B: Stress at Work
Tips to Reduce and Manage Job and Workplace Stress

While some workplace stress is normal, excessive stress can interfere with your productivity and impact your physical and emotional health. And your ability to deal with it can mean the difference between success or failure.

You can’t control everything in your work environment, but that doesn’t mean you’re powerless—even when you’re stuck in a difficult situation. Finding ways to manage workplace stress isn’t about making huge changes or rethinking career ambitions, but rather about focusing on the one thing that’s always within your control: you.

Coping with work stress in today’s uncertain climate

For workers everywhere, the economy may feel like an emotional roller coaster. "Layoffs" and "budget cuts" are common in the workplace, and the result is increased fear, uncertainty, and higher levels of stress.

Your emotions are contagious, and stress has an impact on the quality of your interactions with others. The better you are at managing your own stress, the more you'll positively affect those around you, and the less other people's stress will negatively affect you.

You can learn how to manage job stress

There are a variety of steps you can take to reduce both your overall stress levels and the stress you find on the job and in the workplace. These include:

- **Taking responsibility** for improving your physical and emotional well-being.
- **Avoiding pitfalls** by identifying knee jerk habits and negative attitudes that add to the stress you experience at work.
- **Learning better communication skills** to ease and improve your relationships with management and coworkers.

Tip 1: Recognize warning signs of excessive stress at work

When you feel overwhelmed at work, you lose confidence and may become irritable or withdrawn. This can make you less productive and less effective in your job, and make the 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.**

**Signs and symptoms of excessive job and workplace stress**

- Feeling anxious, irritable, or depressed
- Apathy, loss of interest in work
- Muscle tension or headaches
- Stomach problems
- Problems sleeping
- Fatigue
- Trouble concentrating
- Social withdrawal
- Loss of sex drive
- Using alcohol or drugs to cope

**Common causes of excessive workplace stress**

- Fear of being laid off
- More overtime due to staff cutbacks
- Pressure to perform to meet rising expectations but with no increase in job satisfaction
- Pressure to work at optimum levels—all the time!

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

When stress at work interferes with your ability to perform in your job, manage your personal life, or adversely impacts your health, it’s time to take action. 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 yourself 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 the driver’s seat. Take things one step at a time, and as you make more positive lifestyle choices, you’ll soon notice a reduction in your stress levels, both at home and at work.

**Get moving**

**Regular exercise is a powerful stress reliever**—even though it may be the last thing you feel like doing. Aerobic exercise—activity that raises your heart rate and makes you sweat—is a hugely effective way to lift your mood, increase energy, sharpen focus, and relax both the mind and body. Try walking, dancing, swimming, or playing ping pong with your kids—but as you move, instead of continuing to focus on your thoughts, focus on your body and how it feels as you’re exercising. As well as maximizing stress relief, adding this mindfulness element can help your nervous system become “unstuck” if you’ve experienced trauma.

For best results, try to get at least 30 minutes of activity that elevates your heart rate and makes you break out into a sweat on most days. If it’s easier to fit into your schedule, break up the activity into two or three shorter segments.

**Talk to an attentive listener**

Since the face and heart are wired together in the brain, talking face to face with a relaxed and balanced listener can help calm your nervous system and relieve stress. The other person doesn’t have to “fix” your problems; he or she just has to be a good listener. Simply sharing your feelings with a trusted friend or family member can be very cathartic, even if there’s nothing you can do to alter the stressful situation.
A strong network of supportive friends and family members can be an enormous buffer against stress at work and in other aspects of your life. On the flip side, the more lonely and isolated you are, the greater your vulnerability to stress.

**Make food choices that keep you going**

Low blood sugar can make you feel anxious and irritable, while eating too much can make you lethargic. **Healthy eating can help you get through stressful work days.** By eating small but frequent meals, you can help your body maintain an even level of blood sugar, keep your energy up, stay focused, and avoid mood swings.

**Drink alcohol in moderation and avoid nicotine**

Alcohol temporarily reduces anxiety and worry, but too much can cause anxiety as it wears off. Drinking to relieve job stress may also eventually lead to **alcohol abuse and dependence**. Similarly, smoking when you're feeling stressed and overwhelmed may seem calming, but nicotine is a powerful stimulant – leading to higher, not lower, levels of anxiety.

**Get enough sleep**

Not only can stress and worry can cause insomnia, but a lack of sleep can leave you vulnerable to even more stress. When you're well-rested, it's much easier to keep your emotional balance, a key factor in coping with job and workplace stress. Try to **improve the quality of your sleep** by keeping a sleep schedule and aiming for 8 hours a night.

**Tip 3: Reduce job stress by prioritizing and organizing**

When job and workplace stress threatens to overwhelm you, there are simple steps you can take to regain control over yourself and the situation. Your newfound ability to maintain a sense of self-control in stressful situations will often be well-received by coworkers, managers, and subordinates alike, which can lead to better relationships at work. Here are some suggestions for reducing job stress by prioritizing and organizing your responsibilities.

**Time management tips for reducing job stress**

- **Create a balanced schedule.** Analyze your schedule, responsibilities, and daily tasks. All work and no play is a recipe for burnout. Try to find a balance between work and family life, social activities and solitary pursuits, daily responsibilities and downtime.

- **Don’t over-commit yourself.** Avoid scheduling things back-to-back or trying to fit too much into one day. All too often, we underestimate how long things will take. If you’ve got too much on your plate, distinguish between the "shoulds" and the "musts." Drop tasks that aren't truly necessary to the bottom of the list or eliminate them entirely.

- **Try to leave earlier in the morning.** Even 10-15 minutes can make the difference between frantically rushing to your desk and having time to ease into your day. Don’t add to your stress levels by running late.
- **Plan regular breaks.** Make sure to take short breaks throughout the day to take a walk or sit back and clear your mind. Also try to get away from your desk or work station for lunch. Stepping away from work to briefly relax and recharge will help you be more, not less, productive.

**Task management tips for reducing job stress**

- **Prioritize tasks.** Make a list of tasks you have to do, and tackle them in order of importance. Do the high-priority items first. If you have something particularly unpleasant to do, get it over with early. The rest of your day will be more pleasant as a result.
- **Break projects into small steps.** If a large project seems overwhelming, make a step-by-step plan. Focus on one manageable step at a time, rather than taking on everything at once.
- **Delegate responsibility.** You don’t have to do it all yourself. If other people can take care of the task, why not let them? Let go of the desire to control or oversee every little step. You’ll be letting go of unnecessary stress in the process.
- **Be willing to compromise.** When you ask someone to contribute differently to a task, revise a deadline, or change their behavior at work, be willing to do the same. Sometimes, if you can both bend a little, you’ll be able to find a happy middle ground that reduces the stress levels for everyone.

**Tip 4: Reduce job stress by improving emotional intelligence**

Even if you’re in a job where the environment has grown increasingly stressful, you can retain a large measure of self-control and self-confidence by understanding and practicing emotional intelligence. Emotional intelligence is the ability to manage and use your emotions in positive and constructive ways. When it comes to satisfaction and success at work, emotional intelligence matters just as much as intellectual ability. Emotional intelligence is about communicating with others in ways that draw people to you, overcome differences, repair wounded feelings, and defuse tension and stress.

**Emotional intelligence in the workplace:**

Emotional intelligence in the workplace has four major components:

- **Self-awareness** – The ability to recognize your emotions and their impact while using gut feelings to guide your decisions.
- **Self-management** – The ability to control your emotions and behavior and adapt to changing circumstances.
- **Social awareness** – The ability to sense, understand, and react to other's emotions and feel comfortable socially.
- **Relationship management** – The ability to inspire, influence, and connect to others and manage conflict.

**The five key skills of emotional intelligence**
There are five key skills that you need to master in order to raise your emotional intelligence and manage stress at work.

- **Realize when you’re stressed**, recognize your particular fight-or-flight stress response, and become familiar with techniques that can rapidly calm and energize you. The best way to reduce stress quickly is through the senses—sight, sound, smell, taste, touch—and through movement. Each person responds differently to sensory input, so it’s important to experiment to find the things that work best for you.

- **Stay connected to your internal emotional experience** so you can appropriately manage your own emotions. Your moment-to-moment emotions influence your thoughts and actions, so pay attention to your feelings and factor them into your decision making at work. If you ignore your emotions you won’t be able to fully understand your own motivations and needs, or to communicate effectively with others.

- **Recognize and effectively use nonverbal cues and body language.** In many cases, what we say is less important than how we say it or the other nonverbal signals we send out, such as eye contact, facial expression, tone of voice, posture, gesture and touch. Your nonverbal messages can either produce a sense of interest, trust, and desire for connection—or they can generate confusion, distrust, and stress. You also need to be able to accurately read and respond to the nonverbal cues that other people send you at work.

- **Develop the capacity to meet challenges with humor.** There is no better stress buster than a hearty laugh and nothing reduces stress quicker in the workplace than mutually shared humor. But, if the laugh is at someone else’s expense, you may end up with more rather than less stress.

- **Resolve conflict positively.** Resolving conflict in healthy, constructive ways can strengthen trust between people and relieve workplace stress and tension. When handling emotionally-charged situations, stay focused in the present by disregarding old hurts and resentments, connect with your emotions, and hear both the words and the nonverbal cues being used. If a conflict can’t be resolved, choose to end the argument, even if you still disagree.

**Tip 5: Reduce job stress by breaking bad habits**

Many of us make job stress worse with negative thoughts and behavior. If you can turn around these self-defeating habits, you’ll find employer-imposed stress easier to handle.

- **Resist perfectionism.** No project, situation, or decision is ever perfect, so trying to attain perfection on everything will simply add unnecessary stress to your day. When you set unrealistic goals for yourself or try to do too much, you’re setting yourself up to fall short. Aim to do your best, no one can ask for more than that.

- **Clean up your act.** If you’re always running late, set your clocks and watches fast and give yourself extra time. If your desk is a mess, file and throw away the clutter; just knowing where everything is saves time and cuts stress. Make to-do lists and cross off items as you accomplish them. Plan your day and stick to the schedule—you’ll feel less overwhelmed.

- **Flip your negative thinking.** If you see the downside of every situation and interaction, you’ll find yourself drained of energy and motivation. Try to think positively about your
work, avoid negative-thinking co-workers, and pat yourself on the back about small accomplishments, even if no one else does.

- **Don’t try to control the uncontrollable.** Many things at work are beyond our control—particularly the behavior of other people. Rather than stressing out over them, focus on the things you can control such as the way you choose to react to problems.

### Four ways to dispel stress

- **Take time away.** When stress is mounting at work, try to take a quick break and move away from the stressful situation. Take a stroll outside the workplace if possible, or spend a few minutes meditating in the break room. Physical movement or finding a quiet place to regain your balance can quickly reduce stress.

- **Talk it over with someone.** Simply sharing your thoughts and feelings with someone you trust can help reduce stress. Talking over a problem with someone who is both supportive and empathetic can be a great way to let off steam and help you become calm and focused.

- **Connect with others at work.** Developing friendships with some of your co-workers can help buffer you from the negative effects of stress. Remember to listen to them and offer support when they are in need as well.

- **Look for humor in the situation.** When used appropriately, humor is a great way to relieve stress in the workplace. When you or those around you start taking things too seriously, find a way to lighten the mood by sharing a joke or funny story.

### Tip 6: Learn how managers or employers can reduce job stress

It's in a manager's best interest to keep stress levels in the workplace to a minimum. Managers can act as positive role models, especially in times of high stress. If a respected manager can remain calm in stressful work situations, it is much easier for his or her employees to also remain calm.

Additionally, there are a number of organizational changes that managers and employers can make to reduce workplace stress. These include:

**Improve communication**

**Communicating effectively** at work can help improve teamwork, decision making, and problem solving. One of the best ways to improve communication is by learning to listen attentively to an employee. That means not just understanding the words or the information being communicated, but also understanding the emotions the speaker is trying to communicate. When you’re engaged with what’s being said, you’ll hear the subtle intonations in someone’s voice that tell you how that person is really feeling. You’ll also make that person feel heard. By communicating in this way, you’ll also experience a process that lowers stress for both you and your employee. If the person you’re talking to is agitated, you can help calm them by listening in an attentive way and making the person feel understood.

- Share information with employees to reduce uncertainty about their jobs and futures.
• Clearly define employees’ roles and responsibilities.
• Make communication friendly and efficient, not mean-spirited or petty.

Consult your employees

• Give workers opportunities to participate in decisions that affect their jobs.
• Consult employees about scheduling and work rules.
• Be sure the workload is suitable to employees’ abilities and resources; avoid unrealistic deadlines.
• Show that individual workers are valued.
• Offer rewards and incentives.
• Praise good work performance, both verbally and officially, through schemes such as Employee of the Month.
• Provide opportunities for career development.
• Promote an “entrepreneurial” work climate that gives employees more control over their work.

Cultivate a friendly social climate

• Provide opportunities for social interaction among employees.
• Establish a zero-tolerance policy for harassment.
• Make management actions consistent with organizational values.

Source: http://www.helpguide.org/articles/stress/stress-at-work.htm
Handout C: Signs and Symptoms of Depression

• Persistent sadness or anxiety
• Loss of interest in usual activities
• Changes in appetite causing weight loss or gain
• Insomnia or excessive sleeping
• Loss of energy or increased fatigue
• Restlessness or irritability
• Feelings of worthlessness, hopelessness or inappropriate guilt
• Difficulty thinking, concentrating, or making decisions
• Stomachache or digestive problems
• Sexual problems
• Recurrent aches and pains
• *Thoughts of death or suicide, or attempts at suicide*

**Signs and Symptoms of Depression at Work**

• Decreased or inconsistent productivity
• Absenteeism, tardiness, frequent absence from work station
• Increased errors, diminished work quality
• Procrastination, missed deadlines
• Withdrawal from co-workers
• Overly sensitive and/or emotional reactions
• Decreased interest in work
• Frequent comments about being tired all the time