



# Stress Talking Toolkit

**TO BE USED IN CONJUNCTION WITH THE WORKPLACE STRESS RISK ASSESSMENT WHICH IS COMPLETED WHEN WORKPLACE STRESS HAS BEEN IDENTIFIED AS AN ISSUE.**



This toolkit should only be completed where an employee identifies they are experiencing workplace stress and/or their manager or team identify any workplace stress concerns. The toolkit is to be used with individuals on a one to one basis to support them through their workplace stress or with a small team where stress is affecting the entire team.

**If you are unsure if this is the appropriate next step, please contact your Line Manager or your Sector People Business Partner.**



## Introduction for Employers

### Preventing work-related stress across Great Britain

Work-related stress accounts for over half (57%) of all working days lost to ill health.

In the last 12 months, over 600,000 workers have reported suffering from stress, depression or anxiety, caused or made worse by work. Stress affects us all at different times and in different ways. It can cause people to feel physically unwell, can cause mental health problems and can make any pre-existing problems worse.

It's important to remember that it's not an employer's or a line manager's job to diagnose or treat stress, whatever its cause. If an employee is having problems, it's important that they get help as soon as possible.

Line managers can play an important role in helping to implement these measures and there are many tools, resources and guides available to help employers in deciding what these measures should be ([see page 15](#)).

This toolkit is designed to help line managers hold initial conversations with employees as one part of an employer's journey towards preventing work-related stress. By taking action employers can help create a more engaged, healthy workforce, boost productivity and save money.

Employers have reported improvements in productivity, retention of staff and a reduction in sickness absence when tackling work-related stress.

The case for preventing stress:

- The law requires employers to tackle work-related stress.
- Tackling stress prevents ill health.
- Acting on stress brings business benefits; it reduces sickness absence, boosts morale and helps improve productivity.

## Using Your Talking Toolkit

**Please Note: Some sectors within our business may require specialist information, training and support if you require further guidance please contact your line manager.**

Starting the conversation is an important first step towards preventing work-related stress and developing the actions and stress risk assessment employers need to comply with the law.

The Talking Toolkit should not be used in isolation as an employer's only response if there is an existing problem with work-related stress in the organisation. It can be provided to line managers to help them start to have simple, practical conversations with employees. **Please note:** if you believe that there is risk to life or if the individual is a risk to someone else contact emergency services. This toolkit is not to be used to diagnose stress it is only to be used where stress has been identified.

The toolkit has six templates for six different conversations. Each of these has a different theme designed to get line managers and employees talking about issues which may be causing work-related stress or issues which could have the potential to become future causes if not managed properly.

For each conversation, the first sheet gives the line manager a series of questions to start discussions with an employee about the causes of stress. The second sheet helps the line manager to develop ideas for how to begin tackling causes.

There is no strict format for these conversations, or how line managers should conduct them, and the layout of the toolkit is not prescriptive. An employer could ask a line manager to hold one a week or one a month. The conversations could focus on just one topic or cover all six.

Importantly, employers should make sure that there is time available for line managers and employees to have these conversations. The toolkit also relies on both managers and employees having an open and honest conversation.

Line managers should listen to what is being said rather than trying to offer excuses or explanations. Action points and solutions should be agreed together. The important thing is to start talking and to start planning.

[Conversation 1 – Demands](#)  
[Conversation 3 – Support](#)  
[Conversation 5 – Role](#)

[Conversation 2 – Control](#)  
[Conversation 4 – Relationships](#)  
[Conversation 6 – Change](#)

**Please note: If you believe that the individual requires professional advice or treatment please contact Occupational Health via your Line Manager or sector People Business Partner.**



## Conversation 1 – Demands

Line Manager's Template for Conversation 1

### How your employee should feel:

- They are able to cope with the demands of their job.
- They are provided with achievable demands in relation to the hours they work.
- Their skills and abilities are matched to the demands of their job.
- Concerns about their work environment are addressed.

Go through the following questions with your employee or team.

#### Does your workload feel achievable?

(Think about which tasks take up the most time and how your organisation copes at busy times.)

#### Do you feel the deadlines you are given are realistic? Do you often have conflicting deadlines?

#### Have you had the right training to carry out the core functions of your job?

#### What improvements or support could be put in place to help with any of the issues you have talked about? (Think about you, your line manager, your organisation.)

#### Set a date to revisit these proposed changes



## Conversation 1 – Demands

### Line Manager's Suggestions to Prevent Stress at Work

Did you know that in 2018 the Duke of Cambridge launched [www.mentalhealthatwork.org.uk](http://www.mentalhealthatwork.org.uk) from Heads Together and Mind?

It brings together resources, training and information – providing the tools needed to make workplace wellbeing a priority.

The Chartered Accountants Benevolent Association have produced a toolkit for how people can reduce their workload to reduce stress.

The tips are relevant to most workplaces and can be found by searching for 'workload' on [www.mentalhealthatwork.org.uk](http://www.mentalhealthatwork.org.uk)

#### Working Patterns

- Allow regular breaks, especially when the work is complex or emotionally demanding.
- Consider changes to start and end times to help employees cope with pressures outside work, like childcare or commuting.

#### Workload

- Hold regular meetings, both with individuals and as a team, to discuss anticipated workloads (and to deal with any predicted busy times).
- Provide training to help employees prioritise.
- Develop a system to notify employees of unplanned tight deadlines and any exceptional need to work long hours.
- Identify blocks of time to allow for genuine collaborative planning.
- If you're a team leader or supervisor, learn to say no to work if your team is already at full capacity.

#### Environment

- Assess the risk and impact of other potential hazards and take steps to deal with them by consulting with employees and others. For example, to deal with the potential hazard of violence and aggression, you could seek advice from the police or a specialist charity.
- Provide training to help employees deal with and defuse difficult situations.
- Take steps to reduce unwanted distraction, disturbance and noise levels.

#### Manager's Action Plan

Set a date to revisit these changes



## Conversation 2 – Control

Line Manager's Template for Conversation 2

### How your employee should feel:

- They are consulted over the way their work is organised and undertaken, e.g. through regular meetings, one-to-ones, performance reviews.
- They have regular opportunities for discussion and input at the start of projects or new pieces of work.
- They are encouraged to use their skills and initiative to do their work.
- They are consulted over things affecting their work.
- They are encouraged to develop new skills and undertake new and challenging pieces of work.

Go through the following questions with your employee or team.

**Do you feel involved in how decisions about your job are made? (Think about whether you feel listened to and trusted, how you are consulted and any opportunities for input.)**

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**Do you feel your skills are used to good effect? How could your existing skills be used more effectively?**

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**Do you feel you have a say in how your work is organised and undertaken?**

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**What improvements or support could be put in place to help with any of the issues you have talked about? (Think about you, your line manager, your organisation.)**

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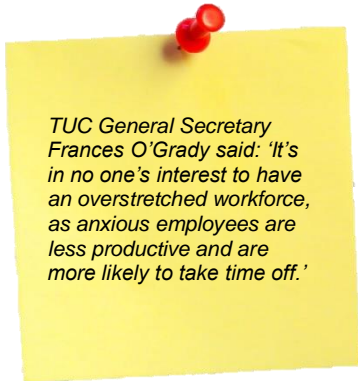
**Set a date to revisit these proposed changes**

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## Conversation 2 – Control

Line Manager's Suggestions to Prevent Stress at Work



### Communication

- Help employees to have a say over the way their work is organised and undertaken through project meetings, one-to-ones and performance reviews
- Hold regular discussion forums during the planning stage of new work to talk about the anticipated methods of working.
- Allocate responsibility to teams rather than individuals to take projects forward.
- Allow employees some control over the pace of their work.
- Where possible make team members aware of potential situations that may cause sudden changes to control at work.

### Decisions

- Talk about the way decisions are made.
- Allow and encourage people to participate in decision making, especially where it affects them.

### Skills and Training

- Talk about the skills people have and if they believe they are able to use these to good effect.
- Talk about how people would like to use their skills.
- Consider personal development/training plans, where you ask employees to think about the skills they would like to develop.

### Manager's Action Plan

Set a date to revisit these changes



## Conversation 3 – Support

Line Manager’s Template for Conversation 3

### How your employee should feel:

- They receive information and support from other employees and their managers.
- The organisation has systems in place to enable and encourage managers to support their employees and for employees to support one another.
- They know what support is available and how to access it.
- They know how to access the resources they need.
- They receive regular and constructive feedback.

Go through the following questions with your employee or team.

**Do you feel that your organisation is a positive place to work and that you are valued? (Think about the working environment, the support available and the opportunities to talk about support you may need.)**

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**Do you know who to talk to and where to go when you need support? (Think about where you would go for help if you were experiencing an issue and whether you would feel comfortable doing so.)**

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**Do you feel there are enough opportunities to discuss any emerging issues or pressures?**

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**What improvements or support could be put in place to help with any of the issues you have talked about? (Think about you, your line manager, your organisation.)**

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<b>Set a date to revisit these proposed changes</b>	
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## Conversation 3 – Support

### Line Manager's Suggestions to Prevent Stress at Work

*Did you know that Mind offer free resources to support you and your employees' mental health at work? Wellness Actions Plans (WAPs) help you to take practical steps to ensure you are supported when you aren't feeling great.*

*Research from Mind shows that 30% of employees disagreed with the statement, 'I would feel able to talk openly with my line manager if I was feeling stressed.' By discussing these issues and building trust, people may feel more confident to talk about their problems – helping the organisation to tackle them early.*

#### Support

- Hold regular one-to-one and team meetings to talk about any emerging issues or pressures.
- Include work-related stress or pressures as a standing item for meetings with employees and/or performance reviews.
- Consider buddying systems or work shadowing to improve understanding of roles across the team.
- Find examples of how people would like, or have received, good support from managers or employees.

#### Resources

- Share information on areas of support available with your employees like employee assistance programmes, charities (some listed on [page 15](#)), occupational health and external organisations.
- Talk about the ways your organisation can provide support if someone is experiencing problems outside work, for example Mental Health First Aiders or the You Matter portal.

#### Training

- Regularly consult with people to ensure training is up to date.
- Offer access to counsellors or training in basic counselling skills.

#### Environment

- Assess the risk of physical violence and verbal abuse by consulting with employees and others, such as the police and charities.
- Provide training to help employees deal with and defuse difficult situations.

#### Manager's Action Plan

Set a date to revisit these changes





## Conversation 4 – Relationships

Line Manager's Template for Conversation 4

### How your employee should feel:

- They are not subjected to unacceptable behaviours such as bullying or harassment at work.
- The organisation promotes positive behaviours at work.
- The organisation has agreed policies and procedures to prevent or resolve unacceptable behaviour.
- The organisation has systems in place to enable and encourage managers to deal with unacceptable behaviour.
- The organisation has systems in place to enable and encourage employees to report unacceptable behaviour.

Go through the following questions with your employee or team.

Have you experienced or witnessed unacceptable behaviour at work? Do you feel satisfied with how this was dealt with?

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Do you feel that honest, open communication is encouraged in your organisation?

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Do you feel that you know where to go and what to do if you experience or witness unacceptable behaviour? Do you feel confident that steps will be taken to stop this behaviour?

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What improvements or support could be put in place to help with any of the issues you have talked about? (Think about you, your line manager, your organisation.)

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Set a date to revisit these proposed changes

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## Conversation 4 – Relationships

### Line Manager's Suggestions to Prevent Stress at Work

The 'Sources of further advice' section (pages 20 and 21) includes links to HSE's free stress risk assessment template, example risk assessments on stress written for small businesses and links to Acas guidance on bullying and Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) guidance on harassment.

In 2016/17, on average, 24 working days were lost for every case of stress, anxiety or depression caused or made worse by work.

- Ensure all employees are aware which behaviours are unacceptable.
- Ensure employees are aware of the Discipline, Dignity at Work and Equal Opportunities Policies which are in place for the business.
- Regularly communicate these policies and procedures to employees and make sure that they are understood.
- Remind employees of [Speak Up](#), the confidential system for people to report unacceptable behaviour.
- Encourage good communication and remind the employee of the training available to them on the My Learning Portal to help with listening skills, confidence building and assertiveness.
- Encourage and provide opportunities for employees to socialise together.
- Make sure that you are providing the same level of support and communications for employees who work in isolation like lone workers or those in separate locations.
- Find ways to celebrate success.

### Manager's Action Plan

Set a date to revisit these changes



## Conversation 5 – Role

Line Manager’s Template for Conversation 5

### How your employee should feel:

- They understand their role and responsibilities.
- The organisation provides information to enable them to understand their role and all of their responsibilities.
- The requirements the organisation places on them are clear.
- They are able to raise concerns about any uncertainties or conflicts they have in their role and responsibilities through the systems that the organisation has in place.

Go through the following questions with your employee or team.

Do you feel clear on what your responsibilities are?

Are you clear on what your performance objectives are and what success looks like for you, your area/department and the organisation? Do you feel that they are achievable?

Do you feel you understand how work is structured in your department and in the wider organisation? Do you know who is doing what and why and how your role fits in?

What improvements or support could be put in place to help with any of the issues you have talked about? (Think about you, your line manager, your organisation.)

Set a date to revisit these proposed changes



## Conversation 5 – Role

### Line Manager's Suggestions to Prevent Stress at Work

*Did you know that stress, anxiety and depression caused or made worse by work account for 37% of all work-related ill health cases in Great Britain?*

*Mind and Time to Change's toolkit, 'Tackling stress in the workplace: what you can do' brings together different organisations' resources on work-related stress. To find out more, select 'Toolkits' at [www.mentalhealthatwork.org.uk](http://www.mentalhealthatwork.org.uk)*

#### New Starters

- Give all new employees a thorough induction into your organisation and its policies and procedures. Include details of where to get support or who to speak to about stress.

#### Communication

- Provide clear work objectives.
- Define work structures clearly so that all team members know who is doing what and why.
- Hold regular one-to-one meetings to ensure people are clear about what is planned for the coming months. This can be done by ensuring PRD's are completed in a timely manner throughout the year.
- Agree specific standards of performance for individual tasks and review regularly. Hold regular team meetings to enable employees to discuss any issues.
- Display departmental/organisational targets and objectives.
- Introduce or revise job descriptions with the involvement of the employee to ensure the core functions and priorities are clear.

#### Role

- Introduce personal work plans which are aligned to the objectives of the team/organisation.
- Introduce or revise job descriptions to ensure the core functions and priorities are clear.
- Review job descriptions regularly, especially following change, and discuss training/retraining regularly too.

#### Manager's Action Plan

Set a date to revisit these changes



## Conversation 6 – Change

Line Manager's Template for Conversation 6

### How your employee should feel:

- The organisation engages with them frequently when undergoing change.
- They are provided with timely information, enabling them to understand the reasons for proposed changes.
- They are consulted on changes and provided with opportunities for them to influence proposals.
- They are aware of the probable impact of any changes to their job and, if necessary, they are given training to support any changes in their job.

Go through the following questions with your employee or team.

**Do you feel that your organisation handles change well?**

**Do you feel you are properly consulted when changes are made which affect you and your role? Do you feel the reasons for the change are explained well?**

**Do you feel that you are involved in the planning process when changes are made?**

**What improvements or support could be put in place to help with any of the issues you have talked about? (Think about you, your line manager, your organisation.)**

**Set a date to revisit these proposed changes**



## Conversation 6 – Change

### Line Manager's Suggestions to Prevent Stress at Work

*Never underestimate the effects of 'minor' changes. Seemingly small changes can have a big impact on people's ways of working, their morale and level of work-related stress.*

#### Consultation

- Define and explain key steps of changes being made.
- Consult employees early and throughout the change process.
- Build in consultation and support as key elements of any change process.
- Involve employees in the planning process.
- Provide a system for employees to comment and ask questions before, during and after the change.
- Review how the change will impact on departmental and individual objectives and workloads.
- Include training/retraining needs as part of your change process.

#### Communication

- Start communication early and, as far as possible, make it a two-way conversation.
- Explain what the organisation wants to achieve and why it is essential that the change takes place.
- Explain the timescales of changes and how changes will impact directly on them.
- Have an agreed system for communicating to employees why a change is happening.
- Have agreed methods of communication (such as meetings, notice boards, letters, email and feedback forms) and their frequency.
- Don't rely on a single communication route – most people may have access to a PC in work but what about those who don't, or those who work off-site?
- Make sure that employees are aware of the impact of the change being made on their jobs. Talk about the potential need for (re)training.

#### Manager's Action Plan

Set a date to revisit these changes



## Sources of Further Advice

This Talking Toolkit forms part of our organisation's response to preventing work-related stress.

If people you work with are experiencing stress, they should be encouraged to talk to someone, whether it's a manager, a mental health first aider, the EAP or their GP.

### **Crisis Support**

*If you, or someone you know is in mental health crisis and needs medical help fast:*

- Call 999 for emergency services
- Go to your nearest A&E department

*If it is not a medical emergency but you need urgent help call 111 or visit your GP*

### **Samaritans**

Provide confidential, non judgemental emotional support for people experiencing feelings of distress.

TELEPHONE:  
**116 123** (24 hours a day)

WEBSITE:  
[www.samaritans.org](http://www.samaritans.org)

### **Company Support**

#### **You Matter Portal**

Available through Compass Connect and the My Learning Portal the You Matter section has several resources as well as information on your business Reps and Ambassadors who are available to signpost you to further support.

#### **AXA Be Supported (EAP)**

AXA is our Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) and is available to all Compass employees.  
UK Telephone: 0800 0727072  
ROI Telephone: 1 800 626 037  
Website: [www.axabesupported.co.uk](http://www.axabesupported.co.uk)  
Username – compassgroup  
Password – supported

#### **Compass UK & Ireland Mental Health First Aiders**

Check with your Line Manager or People Business Partner for details of Mental Health First Aiders available in your sector or within the wider organisation.

### **Other Support**

#### **Alcoholics Anonymous**

If you seem to be having trouble with your drinking, or if your drinking has reached the point of where it worries you, you may be interested to know something about Alcoholics Anonymous and the AA programme of recovery from alcoholism.

#### **Aware (Ireland)**

Aware provides support services which are available to individuals managing their own experience of depression or bipolar disorder, as well as to people who are concerned about a loved one.

#### **Bereavement Advice Centre**

Practical help when someone dies. There are many practical matters to attend to when someone dies. Bereavement Advice Centre supports and advises people on what they need to do after a death.

#### **Harmless**

Is a user led organisation that provides a range of services about self-harm, including support, information, training and consultancy to people who self-harm, their friends and professionals.

#### **Heads Together**

Heads Together and Mind's website brings together resources, training, information and tools to make workplace wellbeing a priority.

#### **Hospitality Action**

Specialist support services help hospitality people tackle complex issues like addiction, financial difficulties, relationship breakdown, bereavement or mental health problems.

#### **Mind**

For better mental health. Ask about mental health problems, where to get help near you, treatment options, advocacy services.