

Wellbeing for the Bush

HEALTHY WORKPLACE RELATIONSHIPS

Despite its rewards, remote health practice can pose a number of challenges. Some of these are out of our control, whereas some instances can be mitigated by our actions. Below we discuss factors that might contribute to work stress and what you can do to create healthy workplaces in remote settings.

Stress at work may look like:

- Constantly feeling tired
- Difficulty concentrating
- Becoming easily frustrated
- Arriving late regularly
- Having negative thoughts and losing confidence
- Increased alcohol or other drug use
- Avoiding colleagues

Stress may be caused by:

- Factors specific to the job (e.g. safety issues, unmanageable workloads)
- Factors specific to the individual (e.g. poor time management, confusion about responsibilities)
- Career development issues (e.g. lack of job security, being passed over for promotion)
- Relationship issues (e.g. conflict in the workplace, bullying, discrimination or harassment)
- Issues with organisational structure or climate (e.g. poor culture and work practices, office politics)
- External stressors (e.g. lack of sleep, separation, mental/physical illness)

Strategies

Cognitive approach

Changing the way we think and our attitudes can have a large impact on how we feel.

1. Identify the specific situation causing stress
("This project isn't done and it's due tomorrow")
2. Note the thoughts about the situation
("I'm terrible")
3. Develop objective alternatives to these thoughts
("I've faced this before and it turned out ok")
4. Observe the reduction in stress symptoms from using the more helpful thoughts
5. Develop strategies to notice the warning signs of stress in the future and rehearse

Improve time management

- Begin the day by reviewing the day's events, including breaks
- Keep a 'to do' list and prioritise tasks
- Minimise distractions and interruptions
- Learn to say 'No' to requests outside your immediate work responsibilities

Seek collegial support within the workplace

Ask others in the workplace who feel more confident about their stress-management abilities to support you. This can be:

- Instrumental support (adequate staff, equipment)
- Emotional support (listening, reassuring, sharing humour)
- Informational support (career mentoring, sharing advice)

Tips to manage conflict

- Manage conflict in a timely and positive manner – don't avoid it!
- Adopt an open, good faith approach
- Acknowledge your emotions, and theirs
- Attempt to understand the interests of each party
- Open yourself to the other person's needs and perspectives
- Be prepared to explore your own interests, feelings and actions
- Brainstorm a number of options that address mutual interests of both parties
- Compromise when feasible and appropriate to do so

For more information, refer to our 'Workplace Conflict' resource.

Assertive communication and problem solving

- Stay focused on your own tasks and outcomes
- Express your needs and opinions respectfully and clearly. Use the Assertiveness Statement:
 - "When you...(name the behaviour)"
 - "I feel... (name your feelings)"
 - "What I want/need from you is... (be specific about what you require)"
- Don't gossip or complain about the other person; try to be reasonable and polite
- Appreciate that others have different opinions that are as valid as yours

Change your lifestyle behaviours/undertake self-care strategies

- Practise relaxation/mindfulness/progressive muscle relaxation/guided imagery
- Meditation
- Physical exercise – run, walk, swim, ride a bike
- Spend more time outdoors
- Look at ways to relax – taking baths, cooking, having a massage, listening to music
- Improve your eating habits and nutrition
- Reduce risk behaviours such as smoking or alcohol/other drug use
- Try and get good quality sleep
- Refer to CRANApplus Self-Care Strategies handout to plan these activities

