



STRESS & ANXIETY AT WORK

Chapter 6

Preventing Stress and Anxiety at Work: Building a Healthy and Resilient Workplace

Preventing Stress and Anxiety at Work: Creating a Workplace Where People Can Thrive

**Prevention
starts before
pressure
becomes a
crisis**

Healthy workplaces do not expect people to simply tolerate chronic stress. They identify avoidable pressures early, balance demands with support and make wellbeing part of everyday working practice.

SPACE TO BREATHE THERAPY



Preventing Stress and Anxiety at Work

Stress and anxiety will never be eliminated entirely from the workplace. Deadlines, change, responsibility and periods of increased demand are a normal part of working life. However, chronic stress should not be accepted as "just part of the job." When workplace pressures consistently exceed an employee's ability to cope, the consequences can be significant for both the individual and the organisation.

Prevention is always more effective than intervention. Rather than waiting until employees become overwhelmed, organisations can take proactive steps to reduce unnecessary stress, promote wellbeing and create environments where people feel supported to do their best work.

Preventing stress is not solely the responsibility of employees. While individuals can develop healthy coping strategies, employers have a legal and moral responsibility to identify workplace risks, promote psychological wellbeing and create conditions where people can work safely and sustainably.

A healthy workplace is one where wellbeing is embedded into everyday practice rather than treated as an afterthought. It is a place where employees feel respected, valued and confident that asking for support will be met with understanding rather than judgement.

Why Prevention Matters

Stress-related illness affects individuals, teams and organisations.

Without effective prevention, workplaces may experience:

- Increased sickness absence.
- Higher staff turnover.
- Reduced productivity.
- Poor morale.
- Increased workplace conflict.
- More mistakes and accidents.
- Lower employee engagement.
- Difficulty recruiting and retaining staff.

Investing in prevention supports both employee wellbeing and organisational success.

Understanding Workplace Stress Risks

Employers should regularly consider factors that may contribute to stress.

These include:

- Excessive workloads.
- Unrealistic deadlines.
- Poor communication.
- Lack of role clarity.
- Limited support.
- Workplace conflict.
- Organisational change.
- Inadequate resources.

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- Long working hours.
 - Poor work-life balance.

Identifying risks early allows organisations to act before problems escalate.

Promote a Culture of Psychological Safety

Employees are more likely to speak up about concerns when they feel psychologically safe.

A psychologically safe workplace encourages people to:

- Ask questions.
- Admit mistakes.
- Share ideas.
- Raise concerns.
- Request support.
- Challenge respectfully.

When employees fear criticism or negative consequences, problems often remain hidden until they become much more serious.

Encourage Open Conversations About Mental Health

Reducing stigma begins with normalising conversations about wellbeing.

Managers and leaders can:

- Check in regularly with employees.
- Encourage discussions about workload.
- Promote wellbeing resources.
- Talk openly about mental health.
- Respond compassionately to concerns.

Employees should never feel that discussing stress will damage their reputation or career.

Support Healthy Leadership

Leaders influence workplace culture every day.

Healthy leadership includes:

- Setting realistic expectations.
- Communicating clearly.
- Listening actively.
- Being approachable.
- Treating employees fairly.
- Recognising achievements.
- Providing constructive feedback.

Employees often remember how they were treated during difficult periods more than any workplace policy.

Manage Workloads Effectively

Preventing stress often begins with realistic workload management.



Organisations should:

- Review workloads regularly.
- Prioritise essential work.
- Avoid unnecessary meetings.
- Monitor overtime.
- Ensure adequate staffing levels.
- Plan ahead during busy periods.

Being busy should not become the permanent expectation.

Promote Work-Life Balance

Recovery is essential for long-term wellbeing.

Employers can encourage healthy boundaries by:

- Respecting annual leave.
- Discouraging excessive overtime.
- Supporting flexible working where possible.
- Avoiding a culture of constant availability.
- Encouraging employees to take breaks.

Employees who recover well are generally more productive, creative and engaged.

Invest in Manager Training

Managers often recognise that an employee is struggling but may feel unsure how to respond.

Training should include:

- Recognising signs of stress.
- Having supportive conversations.
- Understanding mental health.
- Promoting psychological safety.
- Managing difficult conversations.
- Knowing where to signpost employees.

Confident managers contribute to healthier teams.

Create an Inclusive Workplace

Different employees experience work differently.

Inclusive workplaces recognise that:

- People have different communication styles.
- Some employees may require reasonable adjustments.
- Neurodivergent employees may experience additional workplace stressors.
- Flexible approaches often benefit everyone.

Inclusion strengthens wellbeing for the whole workforce.

Encourage Healthy Working Habits



Healthy habits should be supported rather than discouraged.

Examples include:

- Taking lunch breaks.
- Using annual leave.
- Working reasonable hours.
- Moving regularly during the day.
- Staying hydrated.
- Accessing wellbeing resources.

Leaders should model these behaviours themselves.

Regular Wellbeing Check-Ins

Routine conversations help identify concerns before they become crises.

Check-ins might include:

- How are you managing your workload?
- Is there anything making work particularly challenging?
- What support would help?
- Are your current priorities realistic?

Wellbeing conversations should become part of everyday management rather than only occurring during periods of difficulty.

Encourage Employee Involvement

Employees often know what improvements would make the greatest difference.

Organisations should seek feedback through:

- Surveys.
- Team meetings.
- Wellbeing groups.
- Suggestion schemes.
- One-to-one conversations.

Involving employees in decision-making increases engagement and ownership.

Provide Access to Support

Support should be easy to access and well publicised.

This may include:

- Employee Assistance Programmes (EAPs).
- Occupational Health.
- Counselling services.
- Mental health first aiders.
- Wellbeing champions.
- External support organisations.

Providing support is only effective if employees know it exists and feel able to use it.



Build a Resilient Workplace Culture

A resilient workplace is not one where employees simply tolerate high levels of stress.

Instead, resilience is built through:

- Strong leadership.
- Supportive relationships.
- Clear communication.
- Fair workloads.
- Psychological safety.
- Continuous learning.
- Shared responsibility for wellbeing.

Healthy workplace cultures adapt to challenges while protecting the wellbeing of their people.

Key Takeaways

- Preventing stress is more effective than responding once employees become overwhelmed.
- Employers have a responsibility to identify and reduce workplace stress risks.
- Psychological safety encourages employees to seek support early.
- Healthy leadership, realistic workloads and open communication all reduce workplace stress.
- Inclusive workplaces recognise that employees have different needs and experiences.
- Regular wellbeing check-ins help identify concerns before they escalate.
- Investing in employee wellbeing benefits individuals, teams and organisations alike.

Final Thoughts

Preventing stress and anxiety at work is not about removing every challenge from the working day, it is about creating environments where demands are balanced with support, communication is open and wellbeing is valued as highly as performance. Organisations that take a proactive approach recognise that healthy employees are the foundation of sustainable success.

A preventative culture is built through everyday actions: realistic workloads, supportive leadership, psychological safety, meaningful wellbeing conversations and a commitment to continuous improvement. These practices not only reduce the likelihood of stress-related illness but also improve engagement, retention and organisational resilience.

Ultimately, workplaces that prioritise prevention send a powerful message to their employees: your wellbeing matters. When people feel safe, respected and supported, they are better able to contribute their skills, develop their potential and build fulfilling, sustainable careers. Prevention is therefore not simply a wellbeing strategy, it is a key ingredient of a healthy, productive and successful workplace.