

What this fact sheet covers:

- What is resilience?
- What is stress?
- Key areas at work that cause the most amount of stress
- Understanding and monitoring your response to stress
- Techniques to deal with stress and build resilience

What is resilience?

Resilience is the ability to “bounce back” from stressful or challenging experiences. Research has shown that resilience is ordinary, not extraordinary. People commonly demonstrate resilience. But our capacity for resilience can only be observed during challenging times like a job loss, end of a relationship or stressful work situation.

It is not a trait that people either have or do not have. It is a process where an individual navigates and negotiates with the resources in their environment, in order to cope and thrive through challenges. It involves behaviours, thoughts and choices that can be learned and developed in anyone at any stage. It is a fluid attribute that changes with changing circumstances.

There is no one set formula to develop resilience. There is a unique pathway to resilience for each individual that can be developed. Each of us can develop a better understanding of the strengths we already have that make us resilient plus the areas we could develop to further enhance resilience.

Developing a greater level of resilience doesn't stop bad or stressful events from happening, but it can reduce the impact of these events on our lives and the time taken to recover from them.

Being resilient does not mean being immune to the emotions associated with a stressful event but instead it means fully experiencing emotions such as grief, sadness, guilt and anger, while maintaining perspective and continuing on with life with a sense of hopefulness. It means effectively dealing with the stressful event and then afterwards using the experience as an opportunity for personal development.

What is stress?

Stress is our body's response to a demand placed on it.

- **Moderate** levels of stress can energise and motivate and in the short term will lead to increased performance both physically (quicker responses and reactions) and mentally (improved concentration, memory and problem solving). This can be referred to as a state of eustress.
- **Excessive** levels of stress can overwhelm and impair performance and can be referred to as a state of distress.
- **Prolonged** or persistent high levels of stress are a risk factor for mental health issues like depression, and have also been shown to cause physical harm such as cardiovascular disease, diabetes, high blood pressure and obesity

Stress itself is not bad for our health so long as it is activated when it needs to be and deactivated when it is no longer required. The ability to re-set after a 'threat' or period of arousal stress is important to reduce the negative impact on our physical and mental health from prolonged periods of high stress.

Key areas at work that cause the most amount of stress

Research indicates three key areas at work that cause the most amount of stress:

1. Relationships — with managers, peers, dealing with conflict
2. Role — clarity, demand, control
3. Change — to job roles, organisational change (growth or downsizing), new ways of working (technology/systems/regulations)

Understanding and monitoring your response to stress

It's important to recognise and monitor our reaction to stress and to respond early.

- Often when we think about stress, we think about deadlines, being super busy, not having enough time to respond to emails and phone calls, but we don't necessarily think about the physical, cognitive, behavioural or emotional signs that we are stressed
- Remember that stress is more than just feeling overworked. We have become accustomed to feeling high levels of stress and hence are often unaware of or may not even know what it feels like to be relaxed
- Knowing when you are experiencing stress and identifying if a particular area of work (role, relationships or change) causes you the most amount of stress, will help build your awareness of your early warning signs and be able to respond early
- It is unlikely that the pace of life will dramatically slow down nor that the 'normal' pressures will reduce so therefore learning skills to enhance your resilience is key to surviving and thriving

Techniques to deal with stress and build resilience

It's not always possible to prevent stressful or adverse situations, but you can strengthen your capacity to better manage work-related stressors and challenges by learning techniques to enhance coping skills and individual resilience to bounce back and proactively deal with the pressures of work.

A simple method for managing stress is practicing mindfulness. Mindfulness refers to awareness and observation of the present moment without reactivity or judgement. With practice, this can promote an increased ability to cope and provide resilience against stress.

Refer to Mindfulness on everyday life fact sheet.

Other strategies for dealing effectively with the stress:

1. **Recharge activities:** when we get stressed, we often stop making time for things that are nourishing, satisfying and refreshing to do
2. **Daily routines:** the human mind likes predictability and certainty. When life gets stressful, we can restore some order to the chaos by ensuring that we continue with simple daily routines
3. **Circles of concern and influence:** the problems, issues and difficulties we face generally fall into two 'circles':
 - a. Circle of concern contains things over which you have little direct control
 - b. Circle of influence contains those concerns that you can actually do something about — focus on making changes in this circle
4. **Reality check:** stress has a large 'thinking' component, and certain types of thinking are likely to trigger stress and/or make your stress worse. Thought challenging is a useful strategy to ensure the way you are thinking about a situation is more balanced, realistic and helpful

Key messages

- You can build your resilience to the adverse effects of stressful events
- Stress is inevitable and is experienced by everyone
- Stress can have positive and negative effects on our wellbeing
- It's important to understand how stress manifests in your body and engage in healthy ways to decrease the impact of distress

Resources

- Factsheet: Mindfulness in everyday life
- Factsheet: Quick Relaxation Techniques
- myCompass www.mycompass.org.au

This resource has been developed for Transport for NSW as at June 2019. Please go to the Black Dog Institute website for the most up to date information: www.blackdoginstitute.org.au

