

STRESS ADVICE – MANAGING OTHERS

This document provides guidance and information for managers when dealing with their own stress or stressed staff. Stress related absence is common amongst TfL employees. Stress is the physical and emotional response to demands made on us. Common causes of stress at TfL include:

- Abuse and harassment from the public.
- Faulty apparatus, delays (This makes people targets for the above)
- Difficulties with managers and colleagues.
- Unrealistic work load and targets
- Shift work
- Missing meals due to shift work.
- High caffeine intake (Train drivers particularly).
- Boredom
- Job insecurity - redeployment - change in job description
- Lone working, too much time to reflect on negative emotions
- Culture, lack of support from peers or managers and/or poor communication
- Role conflict due to matrix management
- Re-organisation
- Lack of consultation over change
- Role ambiguity due to changes in structure and/or management
- Consider possible causes of stress in your area.

Many situations can result in stress. For example, marital problems, work problems, family problems, the death of someone close, illness, legal procedures and debt are almost certain to be stressful. Some less obvious stressful events include getting married, becoming a parent, going on holiday, retirement, leaving school and Christmas.

Symptoms of Stress

Stress becomes problematic when an individual feels they cannot cope with a situation. This results in unwanted physical, mental and emotional reactions. Stress affects us physically e.g. headaches, stomach problems, tiredness. It can affect how we think. We lose concentration, or worry compulsively or perhaps feel victimised. Emotionally, we can experience mood swings, not wanting to get up in the morning, or feeling anxious about anything and everything. Stress affects how we behave. We might withdraw from everyone. We might be angry or impatient, and unreasonable or we might overeat, or drink or smoke too much. Some people become weepy. Often stress causes sleep problems. Some

people withdraw and do less and less; others become 'hyper-active' and 'workaholic'. Both will feel they have no control over how they react.

Stress produces changes that reduce the body's ability to fight infection. People under stress can feel run-down, catch colds and suffer from various aches and pains. Most people find that physically they have a 'weak link' that gives them trouble when they are under stress – e.g. migraine, asthma, skin disorders, stomach problems.

The way an individual sees themselves in the world can also be linked to stress. An individual may have unreasonable (unachievable) expectations of themselves and others. When these expectations are unfulfilled, they experience stress (or distress). E.g., if an individual consistently sets themselves unrealistic goals, they are unlikely to achieve them, so they become stressed, which appears as anxiety, depression, shame, guilt, etc. Our expectations of others may also be unrealistic. If they are not met, we can respond with anger, violence or passive-aggressive behaviours

Ineffective communication and lack of assertiveness can be a source of great stress. It can lead to loneliness, or distancing from family, friends and colleagues in an individual's personal and professional lives. Getting the support and supervision the individual needs in both these areas can help relieve some of the signs and symptoms of stress. Managing a stressed member of staff can be challenging. In these situations communication is of utmost importance, see the list below for help. You can also read the CTS booklet, 'Riding the wave, Managing stress – manager's guide' (see PDF version on main page).

Ways of supporting a sufferer of stress

- Aim to incorporate this kind of discussion into your Performance and Development sessions with your employees. When you need to discuss someone's problems with stress at other times, remember to follow it up at their next P and D discussion.
- Check your own stress and tension level first. Do not have an important conversation if you are in the stress response yourself. Wait for a more appropriate time. For example, if your own employing manager has put pressure on you about your team's sickness absence level, do not have a discussion with a member of your staff about their problems until you have checked you are calm.
- Show some interest in the person's situation. If you take the time to listen, people will feel supported. Reflect back to the person what you think they